

The Truth International

1st - 15th March 2022

No-Confidence
Struggle on to get required number

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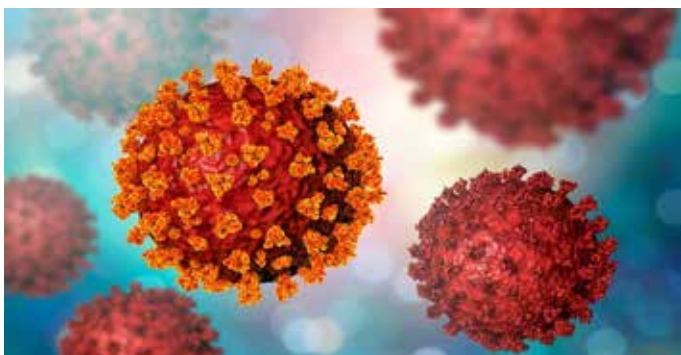
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Adieu Visuals

By Hammad Ghaznavi

With the advent of March, Prime Minister Imran Khan has entered perhaps the toughest month of his political career. The simmer from the political pot is getting louder by the day. Obviously, something is cooking. What? The regime change?

The opposition's effort to oust the government is not being carried out surreptitiously. The PDM has officially committed to tabling a no confidence move against PM Imran Khan in the National Assembly. The PDM leadership and the Zardaris of PPP have met more than once in the last week or so, ironing out the details not only of the get-Imran-operation but of the post-IK setup. Particularly, former president Asif Zardari's two visits to see PML-N chief Shehbaz Sharif are being presented as a proof of the final round of the ongoing political bout, as he is considered too shrewd a politician to leave his couch without any meaningful guarantees from the quarters that matter. Hence, the game is on.

Plethora of evidence, actually, point to the duel around the corner. The government is unmistakably feeling the heat of the move afoot and responding in a fashion it is familiar with – the use of force. The arrest of Mohsin Baig, the owner of Online news agency, appeared a crude move to silence critics. Mr Baig was guilty of not quoting but only referring to the page 273 of Reham Khan's book containing a comment about the top-performing federal minister Murad Saeed. The complaint landed with the FIA Lahore on February 16th at 9 am and the Agency raided Baig's house

in Islamabad at 9.30 am, without warrant, in civvies. More importantly, the same day, a session judge in Islamabad declared the raid and arrest of Baig illegal. There are signs in it? Baig is cozy with the powers that be, insiders argue, hence the prompt reaction of the court.

Moosa Maneka, the son of Khawar Maneka, was nabbed by the police in Lahore last week. His name was included in the FIR for allegedly possessing liquor. It must have hurt the PM more than anything as he has been exhibiting super-sensitivity when it comes to his better half or her relations. The question is how did the police dare to register a case against the Maneka junior? Was it a tit-for-tat, a reaction to Mohsin Baig's arrest, a gentleman considered a long time, sincere buddy of the powerful?

The presidential ordinance amending the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act is yet another, perhaps the most glaring, indicator of the panic-driven decision making of the IK government. The law is draconian, period. All lawyers' bodies, human rights organizations, and journalists' unions, in unison, have rejected PECA as a desperate effort to muzzle freedom of expression in the country. Islamabad High Court has barred the FIA from arresting anyone under the new draconian amendment. Two courts' decisions in two weeks allude to changing environment in the country?

There are signs galore. MQM, a government ally, has categorically opposed PECA amendment ordinance that allows arrest without warrant in the 'national

interest'. MQM is visibly fluttering its wings. A flamboyant PTI MNA from Karachi, Amir Liaqat, has made a tell-all statement last week. "The PTI will wither away like a house of cards by the next polls," he said on camera. He also said that the exiled Altaf Hussain was his leader. PML-Q, another government ally, is in close contact with Mr. Zardari, the man in-charge of the number game in the National Assembly. PML-Q chief Pervez Elahi is reportedly vying for the top slot in Punjab. The BAP party and Jahangir Tareen have already showed displeasure the way the PTI government has treated them.

The wheel seems to have come full circle. All the political players mentioned above have a reputation of being close to the mighty of the land. Have they been nodded to cross over? Pakistani politics has seen it all before.

Last week PML-N information head Maryam Aurangzeb gave a statement against the former chief of a premier intelligence agency, accusing him of contacting PML-N legislators to preempt a vote of no confidence. There is a sub-text to her statement, insiders insist, against the backdrop of a 'clash of titans' behind the scene.

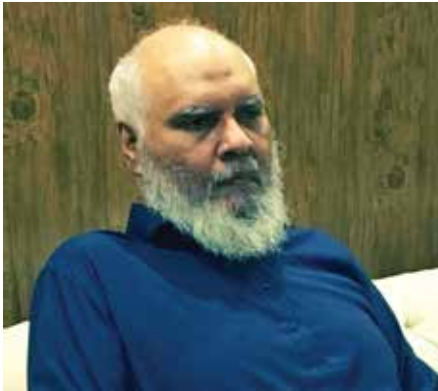
Meanwhile, the PM chose to visit Russia at a most inappropriate time, further annoying the USA and the west. Rawalpindi was reportedly not happy with the visit either.

The month of March has arrived. The political cauldron is raging. The goose is cooked. The wait is over – well, almost.



How not to keep a lid on things

By M A Niazi



There should be a lesson, not just for Imran Khan's media managers, but for media managers everywhere, in the Mohsin Baig case. Communications Minister Murad Saeed filed a complaint against him because of something he had said on a TV talk show. The FIA then raided Mohsin Baig's house, and the rest is history. However, instead of suppressing what he said, instead of the matter being restricted to the arrest, the episode provided an opportunity to repeat Baig's allegations. I won't repeat them here because this is a family newspaper (not to mention that I'm scared of the FIA), but the rumours had been doing the rounds for some time, and now they were finally out in the open. In fact, there're even memes doing the rounds. They probably didn't get into the media because there was no evidence. There still isn't, unless you count the smear campaign against Baig.

It includes accusing him of being linked to a particular organization, which is what is meant when it is said that the PTI is on the

same page. Now either there's an attempt to smear that organization, or that organization is trying to send a message to Imran about the kind of material it has up his sleeve. It's said that there was a second, late-night raid on Baig's house after the first one, but they still haven't found a USB on which he has secured a recording which the PM wanted so very badly.

The problem is that the FIA is still police. Finding a USB, something which can easily be disguised as something else, is not really its forte. Now if it was a murder weapon (preferably an axe with blood and brain matter on the blade, not a firearm), they would feel most comfortable. Of course, the best thing is if they were told to recover stolen property, and that would most preferably be a buffalo. now, why would the CIA get in buffalo theft? Maybe it ate the USB.

It was thus almost as if Religious Affairs Minister Noorul Haq Qadri was trying to direct attention from Mohsin Baig, Imran Khan and Murad Saeed onto himself. He wrote to Imran Khan asking him to declare International Women's Day Hijab Day. If the object was to get women's organizations to jump on him like a ton of bricks, he succeeded. However, I'm not sure if the event in Karnataka would not be demeaned if it is simply used as an opportunity for India-bashing.

I'm not sure how India would react to any India-bashing. It didn't react very well to the Singaporean Prime Minister, Lee Hsien

Loong, quoting India's example in Singaporean Parliament to say that politicians were liable being accused of crimes, when he said that almost half the MPs in the Lok Sabha have criminal cases against them, of rape and murder. Problem is, it happens to be true.

According to research, 43 percent of MPs elected in 2019 had cases registered against them, 29 percent cases of rape or murder. That was just over double (109 percent) the number in 2014. But India tries to keep things under its hat. Take the case of Major J. Suresh, who left the Indian Army and came out as gay in 2020. He wasn't an American, or he would have tried to remain in the Army, get promoted and claim compensation for the homophobia he faced. But he was an Indian, so the gay community there kept quiet.

Anyhow, a filmmaker, Onir, who uses one name only, tried to get the Indian Defense Ministry to give him an NOC for a biopic. The Ministry refused. Does it know that it is letting itself in for a lot of squawks of 'homophobia'? Or perhaps not, for the companies that want to sell arms to India will make sure that nothing is said.

Doesn't India know that you can't cover up anything in this digital world? The Indian Army's atrocities in not just Kashmir, but also the North East ultimately come out. Then the courts got approached over promotions. And Major Suresh came out in a blog post on the Internet. You can't get more public than that.



No-Confidence, No Escape?

The opposition parties' mutual haggling seems to be focused on the shape of the new political dispensation after the government's ouster



By Ahmad Waleed

The word going around in the federal capital is that the Opposition's much vaunted no-confidence motion can drop any moment now.

The buzz started to gain momentum since Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) President Maulana Fazlur Rehman made the big announcement after his meeting with the Opposition Leader in the National Assembly, Shahbaz Sharif, on February 11.

All the major political parties of the opposition have seemingly agreed to launch a decisive political onslaught on the government of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI). Earlier, the opposition had conflicting views on the issue of taking on the government.

The PDM's major parties including PML-N and JUI-F were in favour of en masse resignations from the parliament while the PPP supported the idea of pulling down the government through a more logical way than that of leaving the battle field open for the government.

The PPP claims it has managed to convince the other opposition parties

on the suggestion of no-confidence motion instead of other options being weighed in by its partners on the opposition benches in the National Assembly.

"We are much more encouraged now as we feel our stance of bringing a no-confidence move against the current regime has been accepted by the PDM parties," senior leader of PPP Qamar Zaman Kaira expressed his views in a TV programme the other day.

The entire focus of the opposition has shifted to Lahore which has once again become the hub of political activity as all the political leaders of major opposition parties have engaged in various rounds of consultations to finalise the strategy to overthrow the incumbent government.

Pakistan Muslim League – Q is being wooed to support the opposition in bringing the no-confidence motion. PPP supremo Asif Zardari invited PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif to his Bilawal House to further negotiations.

Afterwards, Asif Zardari met Chaudhry Pervez Elahi and Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain at the latter's Zahoor Elahi

Road residence in Gulberg and invited them for a dinner at Bilawal House.

The opposition has reposed full confidence in Asif Zardari and tasked him to meet leaders of other opposition parties including Jamaat Islami and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). A meeting between JI Chief Sirajul Haq and Asif Zardari took place the next day. JI believes that the opposition should announce next general election right after the no-confidence move.

Reports suggest more than 21 members of the National Assembly have assured the PML-Q leadership of their backing if they decide to support the opposition in its move against the government. It is most likely that the Q League will demand the slot of Chief Minister of Punjab in return besides other key positions in the interim setup if the no-confidence move remains successful.

It has also been revealed that Shahbaz Sharif will be the Prime Minister after the PTI government is sent packing although it requires endorsement from the PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, who is in London for his treatment.



PML-N information secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb told reporters that the “select-ed” prime minister had 20 days left in office. “The numbers game has been completed and the no-confidence motion will succeed,” she declared.

It has been learnt that besides the discussions about what would be the setup after the no-trust move succeeds it has also been under serious consideration they should move a no-trust motion in Punjab first to send shockwaves to the centre or it should take down the prime minister first. All the legal issues have been thrashed out during the ongoing negotiations in Lahore in order to reach a solid outcome.

While Chaudhrys will be playing a key role in the new political scenario emerging out the current parleys, Jahangir Tareen group, Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) and some members from the ruling party are also in contact with the opposition as it claims so. The present political alignments are aimed at strengthening their respective positions for the next general elections.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf leaders say their party has options to counter the opposition move and that their leader Imran Khan will be reaching out to all the allies of the government to resolve the differences if they have any as soon as he returns from Russia.



The party leadership has already conveyed the chief ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhawa to remove the grievances of the allies and the party lawmakers.

This is not the first time in the political history of Pakistan that an opposition alliance is going to table a no-trust motion in the National Assembly. An abortive attempt was made in 1989 against the then prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto while a similar move was made against the former prime minister Shaukat Aziz in 2006. Both the motion failed.

Both sides have directed their members of the National Assembly to not leave the country, asking those abroad to return immediately. The stage is set. Both sides, the government and the opposition, stand eyeball to eyeball. A storm is brewing in the country and Imran Khan is facing the biggest challenge of his political life in the last stretch of his turbulent tenure characterised by bad governance, historic inflation, and political blunders, and economic missteps.





No-Confidence - Lot of Work to be Done

From all appearances, we are in for a cliffhanger going down to the wire



By Sarfraz Raja

No confidence has become a major burning issue of the time, a hot political debate, a concern for ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and a challenge for the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

The opposition alliance headed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the chief of Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) has said PDM it intends to bring a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan although no timeframe has been announced for the move yet. However, it certainly has become a concern and challenge for both sides to complete or keep intact their required strength in the National Assembly.

The rulebook

The Constitution of Pakistan in its article 95 clarifies the process and obligations for a no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister of Pakistan

A no-confidence motion is required to be signed by at least 20 percent members of the total strength of the National Assembly, which for the incumbent house calculates to 69. Such a motion must be put to vote in no less than three and no more than seven days.

If such a resolution passes the house by a simple majority of the total number of house, the prime minister will immediately cease to hold office and National Assembly will have to elect its new leader of the house. The requisite number of votes for the current house calculates to 172.

As per the Constitution, a no-confidence motion may not be moved while Parliament discussing budget.

The numbers

As both the government and opposition are eyeing the magic number of 172, which is essential to achieve for success of no trust

and how to get this figure is important for both sides. Imran Khan led allied government which consists of seven parties including PTI has a slim majority.

Presently, the ruling coalition enjoys support of 179 members. Of these, 155 are from PTI, 7 from MQM, 5 each from PML-Q and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), 3 from Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and one each from Awami Muslim League of Sheikh Rasheed Jamhori Watan Party. Two out of four independent members of the assembly have also supported the government up until now.

On the other hand, the opposition parties have support of around 160 members, 84 of which are from Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), 46 from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), 15 from the MMA (14 JUI + 1 of Jamat-e-Islami), 4 from Balochistan National Party led by Akhtar Mengal which were previously on government benches, 1 member from ANP. Besides,



two of the four independent members are also aligned with the opposition.

So opposition need at least a dozen of extra members' support to reach the magic mark of 172 while government cannot afford to lose support of its allies. So they have to keep them on board to save their government.

PTI's strategy

After no confidence move announcement comes famous Ghabran Nahin Hy (No need to worry) was the first reaction by Imran Khan and their spokespersons they term opposition move as it has no importance for them but their actions suggest otherwise. It certainly seems they are bit panic as Prime Minister Imran Khan chaired more than one meeting in a day to discuss the strategy to counter opposition move.

Prime Minister Imran Khan after no confidence move announced by opposition with consultation of his core circle decided to engage his allies including PMLQ, MQM, GDA, and BAP to visit them as oppositions has already started developing front and backdoor contacts with these parties to get their support.

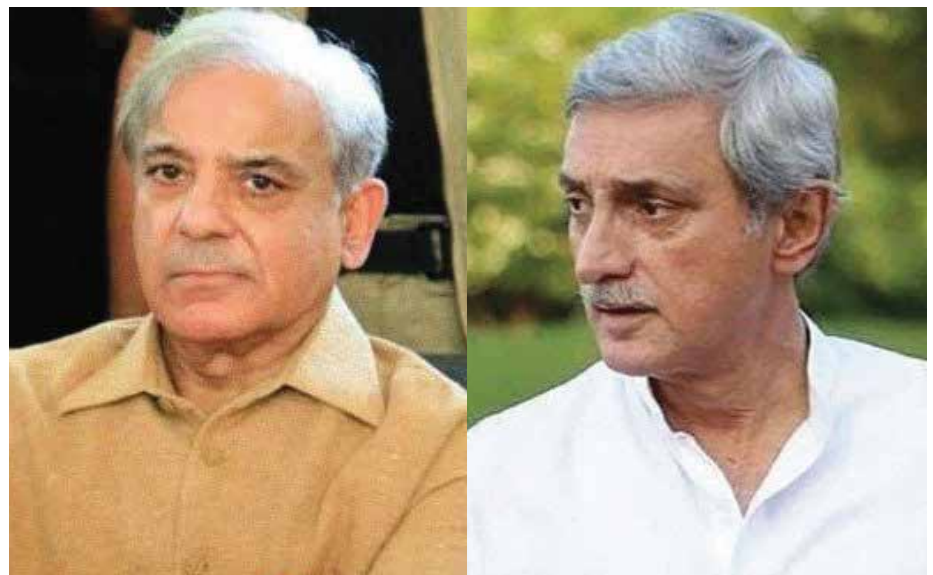
It was also decided to address their reservations and fulfill their demands by giving them some extra share in Federal Cabinet as well. Imran Khan also decided and started to go to public holding political gatherings specially focusing on the regions of Punjab where the PMLN has strong footings. In that campaign Imran Khan has it's first public jalsa in Bahawalpur where he targeted opposition leaders as he does always and why they are trying to remove him from power through no confidence move. Prime minister also has decided to have meetings with his party members who are unhappy with the party to meet their demands. He also directed his spokespersons to build a strong case for public against opposition in media and TV talk shows aggressively.

It is important to know that in a no confidence move opposition has to prove its majority of 171 plus members not the government so when we talked to some PTI leaders they are confident claiming that their allies are with them so no such opposition move could be successful.

They believe that when reservations of allies would be addressed, none of them would decide to part their way as opposition has nothing for them to offer and any of PTI member who vote in favor of opposition would have to lose his seat as the Constitution bars them from voting against the party in a no-confidence move. In a meeting of spokespersons, Imran Khan's message to them was not to worry. Imran Khan also asked his ministers to stay in touch with PTI MNAs and listen to them.

Backdoor contacts

To make the move successful, backdoor politics has started as well. A group emerged within PTI under Jahangir Tareen with around six members of National Assembly and 20 plus from Provincial



assembly of Punjab are also in contact with opposition. Although a spokesman of the Tareen group is emphasizing that they are still part of PTI but reports of a secret meeting between PMLN President Shahbaz Sharif and Jahangir Tareen has not been denied.

Sources say that Tareen group has agreed to support the no-confidence move but they are curious and concerned about their political future as their members may have to face disqualification for supporting the opposition move. On the other hand, the government allied parties have not such bounding and they are independent in their decisions and wouldn't have to face such challenge.

But sources say that allies like PMLQ and MQM are considering all political options within their parties that what they could get if they support no confidence and what if they don't.

But for the opposition the no confidence can be a great gamble. In case of defeat, their political standing would become much weaker while it would strengthened Imran Khan not only for his remaining tenure but with out a psychological upper hand in general elections expected in about one and half years' time.

Defeat in no-trust move against chairman senate and second time in elections for same seats despite majority has also an unforgettable experience for them so opposition sources say they are not in hurry this time. They would complete their

homework first and table the motion only after ensuing they have the numbers required to carry it through the house.

Some political gurus still believe that opposition would not go for a big gamble of no-confidence move considering consequences in case of failure. They say it is a ploy by the opposition parties to put pressure on Imran Khan by getting support of a few of his allies.

If two of the government allies withdraw their support government will lose the majority, which can be a moral no-confidence vote for Imran Khan, who may then feel obliged to quit or take a fresh vote of confidence. So it's all about political pressure and a war of nerves that could go either way over the next few months.



Russia's Gambit: Mirror image of Washington's behaviour

Or was the biggest diplomatic disaster of the country's history something totally unforeseen?



By Umer Farooq

In Pakistan's diplomatic history, there has not been a bigger public relations disaster than Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to Moscow. It was not simply a public relation disaster, it was a disaster with grave foreign policy implications: On the one hand US administration has said publicly that they have taken note of Prime Minister Khan's visit and have conveyed to Pakistani government concerns over Russian moves, on the other hand face to face meeting with Russian President hours after he ordered the invasion raised the prospects of Pakistan getting entangled in a situation with which it didn't have any connection whatsoever.

The situation appeared all the more grave if seen in the light of Foreign Office press note that Prime Minister, Khan quite axiomatically impressed upon Russian President the need to resolve the crisis diplomatically. Even this is not without implication as this raises the prospects of making Pakistan relevant to Ukraine situation and secondly Prime Minister's expression of principled position, during

the meeting, could be perceived as amounting to un-necessarily confronting Russian President. Pakistan's foreign policy interests required as much remoteness from Ukrainian crisis as was possible. The visit went against this requirement.

The situation in which Prime Minister attending to his domestic concerns, sitting in prime minister secretariat back home, while Foreign Office issued a routine statement on Ukrainian crisis appears much better than Pakistani Prime Minister confronting Russian President with his naive lectures on international political norms at Russian Presidential palace.

Prime Minister Imran Khan told Russian President Vladimir Putin disputes should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy as he regretted the latest situation between Russia and Ukraine, said a Foreign Office statement issued here on Thursday after a meeting between the two leaders in Moscow.

Prime Minister Imran, who is on an official visit to Russia, held an over three-hour long

meeting with the Russian president, hours after Moscow ordered a full scale assault on Ukraine that drew strong reaction from the West.

The Pakistani delegation woke up in the morning with the news of Russian attack, something that made the prime minister visit even more daunting given some had already advised him not to go ahead with the trip against the backdrop of brewing tensions.

Khan visited Moscow on the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the dates for the visit were finalized by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

"We could not have told the Russians that we don't want to come at this moment," said Lt General Naeem Khalid Lodhi, former Defense Secretary. "The Ukrainian crisis is beyond our reach and the Prime Minister should focus on bilateral relations in his talks".

The fact that the Prime Minister met the Russian President only a few hours after the latter ordered his troops into the Ukrainian



capital has created an unexpected diplomatic embarrassment for Pakistan. Many in Pakistan are criticizing the move. Perhaps the Pakistani foreign Office anticipated this when it asked the Pakistani ambassador to Ukraine to meet their Deputy foreign Minister and reiterate Pakistan's position with regard to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state.

Despite that, there seems to be a complete unanimity of opinion on the necessity of going ahead with the Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Moscow as planned. Pakistani foreign policy establishment and experts are in consensus that the visit would not negatively affect Pakistan's relations with the Western world.

visit to Moscow, the media also reported that COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa was planning to visit Washington during the same dates. However, his visit has been cancelled because of non-availability of US defense and military officials, as they were preoccupied with the crisis over Ukraine.

Many analysts in Islamabad expressed concerns that Prime Minister Khan's visit would negatively affect Pakistan's relations with the Western world.

On the other hand, the Pakistani foreign policy establishment seems to be rejoicing the growth of its relations with Moscow. Pakistan is a new customer of military hardware produced by Russia's

For his part, General Bajwa wanted his visit to Washington to coincide with the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow—in order to convince US defense officials that the PM's visit is not intended to send signals of an intention to break up with the West or to support Russian involvement in Ukraine,

“Pakistan never wanted its newly developing relations with its new military supplier to cast a dark shadow on its relations with the West” said a senior government official.

But reportedly, the Pakistani side has been told by officials in Washington not to come to the American capital for this kind of diplomacy. A news item in a Pakistani newspaper reported that the US State



A senior government official said that the focus of the Prime Minister's visit was bilateral relations and Afghanistan in the official talks in Moscow.

“We simply could not have cancelled the visit” said former Ambassador Abdul Basit “Everybody knows that the visit was planned months in advance, and it has no connection with the Ukrainian crisis.

“Our position is clear on sovereignty and territorial integrity. It would not negatively affect our relation with the West. The focus should be on bilateral relations and Afghanistan. Ukraine should not be there”.

The government and its apologists, nevertheless, are anticipating an angry response from the West.

Only a week ago when foreign office announced Prime Minister Imran Khan's

military-industrial complex, with a frequency of orders making it one of the top receivers of weapons from Moscow.

At the regional political level, Moscow and Islamabad have recently shown similar inclinations on the Afghan situation and the Taliban's rise to power in Kabul. There seems to be a convergence of opinion as to what role the Taliban should play in future security architecture of the region.

Militarily, the land forces of the two countries are engaging in joint military exercises at several levels. So, is Pakistan about to make re-adjustments in its foreign policy away from the Western countries? This would be the question that many in Western capitals will be attempting to answer when they see the images of Russian President Putin greeting Prime Minister Imran Khan at his presidential palace.

Department conveyed to the Pakistani embassy in Washington that US defense officials are too busy because of the Ukrainian crisis and would not be able to spare time for a meeting.

As the frequency of repeated tense moments between the Western capitals on the one hand and Russia and China on the other are dramatically increasing, weak and relevant countries like Pakistan are finding it increasingly difficult to do a balancing act in such situations.

Officials said that it was true that China was our time-tested ally and that Pakistan was developing new political and military relations with the Russian Federation, “And yet we cannot afford to annoy Western capitals, especially Washington” , said an official.



The popular excitement about Moscow or Beijing replacing the Western world as our new friends has no place in practical diplomacy.

Despite the capacity of Moscow and Beijing to meet Pakistan's military and immediate political demands, the financial resources of the world are still being controlled from Washington and other Western capitals. We are still living in a world which is dominated by the West at the political, economic and financial levels.

Long before this situation, the Pakistani foreign policy establishment was anticipating a new Cold War developing on the horizon and the possibility of Pakistan caught between two poles.

The Quad, officially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a group of four countries: the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. Today these countries work on a broader agenda, which includes tackling security, economic, and health issues.

Indian strategic experts are describing QUAD as a security alliance. On the other hand Russia and China are coming closer on the Ukrainian question. Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, called for talks to resolve the crisis in Europe,

He said Ukraine's sovereignty should be "respected and safeguarded" — but also sided with Russia in saying that NATO enlargement was destabilising the continent.

Iran is an interested party which sees the prospects of a powerful anti-Western block emerging in the region that can back it in its rivalry with Washington. And not surpris-

ingly, news reports in Pakistani newspapers quoted unnamed officials as saying that Washington was annoyed over the visit of the Iranian interior minister to Islamabad where he was greeted by all the power-wielders and this led to cancellation of General Bajwa's Washington visit.

The new Cold War will bring with it a situation for Pakistan where it will see squeezing of its options at the regional and international stage.

"Pakistan's quest for security started when the world was warming up for the first Cold War in 1947. We were faced with a larger military threat on our Eastern border. However, otherwise the region was calm. We still face the larger military threat and the region is not at all calm" said a security expert.

Pakistani experts want Prime Minister Khan to utilize his meeting with President Putin to discuss Afghanistan, "We need Russian and Chinese support in Afghanistan" said former Defense Secretary, Lt General Lodhi, "Ukraine is too big an issue for us to handle, we should not even discuss it in our talks with Russians".

Former Ambassador Abdul Basit said that the bilateral talks should focus on growth of economic relations, "I don't think it will affect our relations with the west, but anyways our relations with Washington are already cold," he said.

The visit itself brought little tangible development in Pak-Russia relations, besides some empty promises from the Russian government. Prime Minister Khan reaffirmed the importance of the Pakistan Stream gas pipeline as a flagship economic

project between the two countries, his office said.

The Kremlin issued a brief statement, saying that the two leaders discussed the main aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on current regional topics, including developments in South Asia.

In a handout, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said that the two leaders held wide-ranging consultations on bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.

"Recalling the telephone conversations during the recent months between the two leaders, the prime minister expressed confidence that the positive trajectory of bilateral relations will continue to move forward in the future," the handout issued late on Thursday said.

Foreign policy oriented towards seeking the involvement of an extra-regional player as a security guarantee against much bigger military power on your Eastern neighbor hardly has ever paid dividends to Pakistani policymakers in the past.

During the initial seventy years of our existence we remained a lackey of American interests in the region. But we haven't learnt anything from our bad experience. Again we are knocking at the doors of a major power by not finding courage to say no to it when it is violating international political norms by invading a much smaller and helpless neighbor.

We might get some goodies in return. But we will be placing ourselves on the wrong side of international public opinion once again.



How Suitable is the Presidential System for Pakistan?

A look at various approaches to political representation and democratic governance

Part 1



By Ashraf Malkham & Shahmir Niazi

Several countries around the world prefer the presidential form of government over the parliamentary system for its effectiveness owing to swift decision-making. It's a system that rests on the complete separation of power, where the president heads the executive organ while the congress holds the legislative power.

On the contrary, in a parliamentary system, the heads of government and state are the prime minister and president respectively. The former is responsible to the parliament and derives legitimacy from the parliamentarians' support or confidence, and is involved in all the legislative functions of the government. The latter is just a ceremonial figurehead without any role in the day-to-day functioning of the government.

The first presidential system was introduced by the United States back in 1787, as an alternative to the snail-paced parliamentary system which struggled to provide stability to the government.

Following in the footsteps of the US, many East African countries, including Burundi, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda adopted the presidential form of government. Similarly, almost all Latin American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela follow this model too.

The US - A Torchbearer of Presidential Government

The founding fathers of the US, given the challenges emanating from governing the 13 American colonies through the Articles of Confederation, proposed the concept of a presidential system to ensure a strong central government for equitable inter-state cooperation.

The horrific experience under the British Constitution served as an eye-opener for Americans who considered it a misfit for their ground realities. What they required was a head of government, or more

precisely a chief executive, that was powerful and independent, but in no way authoritarian.

Initially, it was agreed that the president of the United States would be elected through a direct vote. However, after considering that the smaller states having less population would find themselves at a disadvantage, and will never have representation in Presidency – the Electoral College system was introduced.

The system allocates proportional seats and ensures equal share in the election of presidents for all states. In the process, states with less population are given more seats in Electoral College, and states thickly populated are allocated less number of seats. Soon after the election, these electorates are dissolved.

Citizens cast votes for the members of the Electoral College who then cast electoral votes for president and vice-president. The winning candidate must at least receive 270



out of 538 votes (absolute majority) to qualify for the presidency.

The US serves as a best practice for separation of powers between the executive (President), legislative (Congress with two chambers: House of Representatives and Senate), and judiciary (Supreme Court). Each organ is independent and possesses certain constitutionally bestowed powers to keep a system of checks and balances on the other two branches.

The president, being the chief executive of the government and the head of state, has the power to enforce laws and administer the day-to-day business of the government. The president's cabinet comprises all individuals considered able by the president and approved by the Senate. These cabinet members called secretaries are barred from holding legislative office.

Since the US represents the strongest form of presidentialism, the president can veto any resolution passed by Congress (House of Representatives and Senate) or refer it back to the legislative branch for reconsideration. However, the President cannot make laws, and congress can only overturn a presidential order by a two-thirds majority.

For checks and balances on the president's powers, a budget proposal has to be submitted by the executive to the congress which holds the final say of approval. In a situation where the legislative and executive branches reach a deadlock and are unable to pass a budget, a budget crisis may develop, culminating in the partial shutdown of the government.

The 35-day shutdown of 2018-2019 during the Donald Trump administration over the Mexico wall was the longest in US history. The judiciary sometimes plays the role of arbitrator between Congress and the President in case of differences.

This form of government is more efficient since the president takes decisions swiftly and without any hurdle.

French Semi-Presidential System

In France, which is a semi-presidential form of government, the president is elected

every five years through a direct popular vote. There are two rounds of elections in the case where no candidate can win over 50 percent of the votes cast in the first round. The second round of the election comprises only the top two candidates and eventually, the candidate with the absolute majority of votes is elected.

The executive branch consists of the president while the Prime Minister, appointed by the former, leads the government and is responsible to the parliament (National Assembly and the Senate) since he is elected by the parliamentarians. All national-level decisions on health, education, and law and order are taken by Prime Minister. The President, on the other hand, is empowered to take Foreign Affairs and Defence related decisions independently.

UK's Constitutional Monarchy

The United Kingdom's government is led by the prime minister who is an elected member of parliament (MP). The British monarch is the head of the state and the sovereign who remains a ceremonial source of executive power exercised by the government.

The parliament (House of Lords and House of Commons) is responsible for making new laws and keeping a check on the government's policies such as the imposition of taxes, and foreign relations. Cabinet ministers are appointed by the prime minister for taking all political decisions.

Pakistan's Parliamentary Democracy

In Pakistan, we have a parliamentary form of government where the President acts as the ceremonial figurehead and has no role whatsoever in running the day-to-day affairs of the country. The Prime Minister, being the chief executive, is responsible for running government operations for which a cabinet of ministers is appointed for assistance. The ministers and advisors are picked from amongst the legislators and other individuals.

Since 2016, with Supreme Court's judgment passed in the Mustafa Impex case, the Prime Minister's powers stand

curtailed. The judgement stated that as the chief executive of the country, the Prime Minister "executes policy decisions, but does not take them by himself."

With the judgment, the Prime Minister could no longer move any legislation, finance, or fiscal bill, or approve any budgetary or discretionary expenditure, without consulting and obtaining approval from the Cabinet.

This effectively means that the Prime Minister himself has no authority. All decisions, even posting and transfer of senior bureaucrats has to be approved by the cabinet. The prime minister can propose a name but the final nod has to come from the Cabinet – prolonging the decision-making process. Unluckily size of our cabinet is always too large and in the presence of this huge number decision making is effected negatively.

Originally, there was a Concurrent Legislative List that gave legislative powers to the federal government and the provincial governments. With the 18th Constitutional Amendment, these powers were exclusively devolved to provinces and the federal government can no longer legislate on any matter mentioned in the erstwhile list.

In Pakistan with the passage of time, Judiciary has gained more authority, especially after separation of judiciary and executive. Now the judiciary directs to executive to take some steps or actions, which do not fall within their jurisdiction. Apparently, the executive has been weakened.

If Presidential system is introduced in Pakistan, it may improve working of the executive, but due to demographic situation of Pakistan it is still not applicable. For example Punjab is about 57 percent of total population of Pakistan. This means the president would always be elected from this province.

Then, too, there are ethnic difference among provinces. Different nationalist movements are already functioning and Presidential system will marginalized their share in government. Under the circumstances, equalization or rationalization is in order to ensure equal representation for all provinces and ethnic groups.

[To be continued.]



Murad Ali Shah's Dangerous LG Gambit

The provincial government seems in no mood to constructively engage the opposition over the putative amendment of the law



By Azfar Ashfaq

The amendments the Murad Ali Shah-led cabinet has approved on 21 February to the Sindh Local Government Act 2021 are being seen as an eyewash and an attempt by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government to avoid the implementation of the Supreme Court verdict of 1 February on the pretext of honouring its commitment with the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) after which the two parties ended their separate protest sit-ins.

The JI has only one seat in the 168-strong Sindh Assembly, which it got from the platform of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal. The PSP has no representation in the assembly.

Major opposition parties including Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan in the assembly have not been consulted on these amendments as yet. A house committee was formed having representation from all parties from the both sides of the aisle, but

not a single meeting of the said committee has been held.

In a marathon session held on 21 February, the Sindh cabinet approved certain amendments to the controversial local government law through which the future mayor of Karachi would have a nominal role in the governing bodies of some key organisations responsible for launching housing schemes and their development in the metropolis.

Besides, the cabinet also okayed that the mayor of Karachi would also be the chairman of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board. Currently, local government minister Nasir Shah chairs the KWSB.

As the key point of the PPP's agreement with the JI and PSP was to introduce a local government system with meaningful administrative, financial and political authority as envisaged under Article 140-A of the Constitution, the cabinet also agreed on the formation of the Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) to distribute funds from provincial government to districts.

However, the formula under which their exercise would be undertaken is not made public yet.

While the JI and PSP demanded in their talks with the provincial government that the mayor of Karachi should be the chairman of the governing bodies of the Karachi Development Authority (KDA), Malir Development Authority (MDA) and Lyari Development Authority (LDA), the negotiating team of the PPP rejected these demands and instead agreed on giving a "leading role" to the future elected mayor in the affairs of these organisations.

However, the decision to make the mayor one of the many members of the governing bodies of these organisations is in no way equal to the ruling party's commitment of giving a 'leading role' since the meeting of such bodies would be held once every three months while day-to-day affairs are run by their directors general who would and currently directly report to the provincial government and not the elected mayor.



At present, Sindh LG Minister Nasir Shah is the chairman of the governing bodies of KDA, MDA and LDA and other members include LG secretary, Karachi commissioner and some MPAs.

Likewise, the PPP-led Sindh government agreed to make Karachi mayor chairman of the KWSB but the financial and administrative authority would be exercised by its managing director who would report to the local government secretary for all day-to-day affairs.

While the cabinet approved tabling of an amended local government bill in the Sindh Assembly, there is no official word whether the provincial government is thinking of devolving functions like building control, master plan, solid waste management, etc., to the elected local government of the metropolis i.e., the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling of 1 February.

“The Supreme Court has already decided the responsibilities of the elected local government and what Sindh cabinet and PPP are doing is simply tantamount to contempt of court,” says a senior KMC official asking not to be named.

In the landmark judgement that came on a petition of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, the Supreme Court defined responsibilities of the elected local government as then chief justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed wrote: “Being government at grassroots level, [it] has direct impact on the citizens in their day-to-day living like right to adequate and safe drinking water, right to have neat, clean and healthy environment, free from all sorts of garbage and sewage piling on the roads, streets and open spaces, keeping citizens safe from flood devastation and other natural calamities, fire, making provisions for medical treatment without any discrimination, giving equal opportunity to all citizens without discrimination of employment in service on merit basis, protecting life and liberty of all citizens without any discrimination, making provisions for adequate education in schools and colleges with competent teaching staff, provision of sports, local public transport, playgrounds, parks, mosques, graveyard, libraries, etc.”

The apex court also ruled that several laws

made by the provincial government “purporting to override and conflicting action taken by the elected local government are held to be against the scheme of the constitution and the provincial government is directed to bring all those laws in accord with the mandate of Article 140A of the Constitution”.

Among such laws the court deemed the Sindh Building Control Ordinance 1979, KDA Order No.5 of 1957, Malir Development Authority Act 1993, Lyari Development Authority Act 1993, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board Act 1996, Hyderabad Development Authority Act 1976, Sehwan Development Authority Act 1993, Larkana Development Authority Act 1994, any dispensation pertaining to the Board of Revenue or the Master Plan Department or any other Development Authority in the province of Sindh and the Sindh Mass Transit Authority Act 2014, the Sindh Food Authority Act 2016, and the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency Act 2014.



Due to such clear directives, the PPP government that has been ruling the province of Sindh for the past 14 years had formed a sub-committee of the cabinet to discuss the implementation of the verdict. However, the latest meeting of the cabinet did not discuss its findings.

It is learnt that deliberations had been held on a single-point agenda i.e. how to avoid the implementation of apex court’s judgement and whether to file a review petition against it or not. However, no decision has so far been taken to challenge the verdict because it would provide an opportunity to all opposition parties to make a united front against the PPP.

“We are in favour of an empowered local government system and we had made a law that gives ample powers,” says senior PPP leader and Sindh Information Minister Saeed Ghani.

“We respect the Supreme Court decision, but we are thinking of approaching it to seek clarity of some part of the Feb 1 judgement. It’s not like we are thinking of challenging the whole verdict...just some parts”.

The contentious issue is unlikely to be resolved amicably since the PPP appears to be in no mood in consulting or accommodating proposals of province’s major opposition parties. It was evident from the recent remarks of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah who said that the government would ask Sindh Assembly Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani to form a select-committee comprising members from opposition and treasury benches so that it could decide on amendments to local government

law with a “majority” vote. Observers are making much of the fact that he did not use the word “consensus”.

Leader of the Opposition in the Sindh Assembly Haleem Adil Sheikh rejected the amendments to the LG law saying the Sindh government does not want to hold consultations with the real opposition.

“They are trying to whiten the black law, but we will not allow them to do so. We will take to streets and hold protest in and outside the assembly for a new local government law,” he told a press conference in response to the proposed amendments.

Pak-Russo Cooperation Framework: Next Calculated Step

The change in order makes both states realize each other's importance and evolve their relations accordingly to attain national security interests



By Adeela Ahmed

In 1999, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Russia made an important breakthrough for both countries. On that occasion, he acknowledged Moscow as an 'emerging global power' and stressed the importance of a multipolar world while Russian President Boris Yeltsin termed relations with Pakistan as a start of a new chapter oriented into the 21st century. It was the time when Pakistan's foreign relations with a major regional power, Russia, entered into a new phase of cooperation. Their joint ride from divergence to the convergence of interests is in the evolutionary stage for the last two decades. After a gap of 23 years, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan will visit Russia for two days by the end of February 2022.

The relations between states are greatly determined by their national interests. The current strategic environment of world politics is moving towards multipolarity, although the US sustains the status of a superpower. The US National Security Strategy-2017

pinpoints its threat perception from Iran in the Middle East, China in East Asia, and also from its old rival, Russia. China's economic rise and Russian resurgence propel the US to focus its grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific region to curtail China's and Russia's convergence and rise in the region and thereby sustain its ultimate supremacy. Russia issued 'The Maritime Doctrine-2020' and 'National Security Strategy-2020' to highlight its foreign policy's focus in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region due to the intensification of geopolitical competition between the US and some other countries. Russia is seemingly working on economic revival, regaining its political-diplomatic prominence at the international level. It is expanding its market, especially in the high-tech industry and military enterprises in addition to its traditional market of goods. The shift from the West to the East shows the need to make new alliances and strategic partnerships. In the era of new alliances and strategic partnerships, Pakistan and Russia have realized to redefine their mutual relationship.

In such a scenario, Pakistan has to build its foreign relations in an evolving geostrategic and geopolitical environment, squeezed between the ideological conflicts of not only the US and Russia but also the emerging major powers. Finding the right balance in its foreign relations, particularly within Asia has become paramount for Pakistan. The US, certainly, cannot be ignored, while Russia and China have become a necessary alliance that must be nurtured. In the post-2014 phase, an upward trajectory in relations between the countries was witnessed and both the countries identified various areas of cooperation. The Pak-Russo cooperation frameworks are in the following key area:

1. Both need a reliable partner in the region.
2. Russia wants to counterbalance the US sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
3. To expand economic connectivity.

4. The withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan and resolving the Afghan issue through dialogue.
5. To eliminate the rising threat of Daesh in the region.
6. The transactional nature of Pakistan-US relations and the US tilt towards India
7. Russian desire to develop economically to regain its international status.

Two significant developments in November 2020 were crucial. In a welcome move, Russia has provided Pakistan with a new structure of the North-South Gas Pipeline Project, subsequently called the Stream Gas Pipeline and a team of experts will visit Pakistan for details. The 1,122-km long pipeline will comprise the re-gasified liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline from Karachi (Port Qasim) to Lahore. Another aspect of growing ties is the expansion of their security relationship. A contingent of Russian Special Forces visited Pakistan in November 2020 for a two-week-long military exercise, Druhbaz-V aimed at sharing the experience both armies have of counterterrorism operations. Subsequently, Islamabad and Moscow have accepted the realities of the international situation and learned from their past; their relationship is converging to achieve positive developments and solidify bilateral relations.

In addition to that, Pakistan and Russia are both members of the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO). This is an intergovernmental organization that provides opportunities for interaction regarding security and anti-terrorism matters among the eight-member states (Pakistan, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and India,) and four observer members (Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia, and Belarus). Its objectives include maintaining stability in the Eurasian region, to promoting trade and commerce among member nations. Pakistan and Russia have often had talks and cooperated in matters of bilateral military cooperation and regional security dynamics. They have provided support to SCO, to tackle the menace of terrorism through this collective regional security network. It is inspiring to see how both countries are individually and collectively taking steps to stabilize Afghanistan while also ramping up their mutual engagements under bilateral and multilateral arrangements like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The closeness between Pakistan and Russia's foreign relations comes up with challenges as well as opportunities. It would be wrong to assume that there won't be any challenges. The key challenges that they are facing include: a) Trust Deficit; b) Afghan humanitarian crises; c) India's role to sabotage Russo-Pak relations; d) No media coverage; e) Socio-Cultural; f) Language barrier and g) The COVID-19 Pandemic.

However, intense work remains to be done

to build a firm relationship as well as a genuinely strategic alliance. In fully promoting Pakistan-Russia ties, there seems to be a degree of reluctance on Russia's side due to the sensitivities of its relations with its traditional ally, India. However, it can be argued that the stakes for Russia are greater and it will have to be seen to what extent Moscow will compromise its interests for that of New Delhi's, particularly with the latter's growing relationship with the US. Russian-Pakistani ties are not aimed at any third party.

However, given the Indo-Pakistan rivalry, India will be perturbed if Moscow deepens closer ties with Islamabad beyond a certain level. Russia will have to resist such pressure and assert its objective national interests if Russian-Pakistani ties are to develop further. Thus far, some encouraging signs can be discerned, but they still are not enough to ensure the level of trust required to turn the relationship genuinely robust.

Pakistan-Russia mutual relations in the existing geostrategic milieu are still fragile but the initiative has been taken and the ice has thawed. Countless opportunities are lying ahead for both the states to improve economic collaboration by escalating the joint trade and commencing the gas pipelines scheme. Moscow and Islamabad underwent a transition to say goodbye to the past and develop a strong and stable relationship on mutual benefits.



Did Putin Just Outplay the West in Ukraine?

The Ukraine War of 2022 and prospects for peace in a region relapsing to the Cold War era



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

The Kremlin's acceptance of the independence of separatist states of Donetsk and Luhansk and bombardment of military bases in Kiev, Mariupol and attacks in Odessa underline a fundamental point. Ukraine can easily descend into chaos if any miscalculation takes place especially after President Vladimir Putin ordering a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The situation demands a complete understanding of the players and whether a breakthrough is possible from this seemingly intractable situation. The numerous variables at play, the stance of respective stakeholders and bystanders all require a holistic analysis for prospects of peace to be understood realistically.

If one goes by the United Nations Security Council session there was near unanimity that Russia must be penalized for its military maneuvers through sanctions by most member states with exception to China. P5 member states France and the United Kingdom stood in utter defiance of Russian arguments and chose to bandwag-

on with the American narrative that diplomacy was being compromised due to Vladimir Putin's nefarious designs.

Here lies the catch. Sanctions on Russia were operationalized by both the British parliament and the United States Congress prior to troop movements in separatist territories where Moscow repeatedly asking the West to desist from bellicose rhetoric which present the situation as alarmist.

The invasion mantra for example has been peddled time and time again by the Biden administration as well as Boris Johnson which has contributed to the acrimony surrounding the issue. This neither helps, nor contributes towards peace.

What countries such as France and the United Kingdom have not factored in are repeated requests by the Kremlin to swiftly complete Russian proposals which have been ignored by the United States and the NATO coalition as non-starters. Furthermore, the West's insistence on including Ukraine to the fold of NATO as a member

state has also been ill received which has resulted in trust deficits festering in the absence of a diplomatic solution.

The visit by British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to Moscow for example, further widened the divide with even French President Emmanuel Macron's conciliatory tone falling on deaf ears. Boris Johnson also told the British Parliament that those who massacre Ukrainians will face war trials.

The inability of Washington DC and Brussels or London for that matter to come up with a comprehensive case and treat Russia as a legitimate stakeholder of peace has resulted in a situation marked by increased hostilities, high risks and militarization. This again, is not conducive to peace.

The Russian decision to escalate hinges on two main principles. First the West needs to stop arming Ukraine which even Germany itself has considered to be unconducive to resolving the quagmire. Secondly, alleged shelling from Ukrainian forces on Russian



troops has prompted Putin to act out of defiance and challenge the notion that NATO allies and the United States are desirous of peace and wish to diffuse this crisis through diplomacy.

Russia's adamancy resulted in a debate between Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Vladimir Putin where the decision to continue diplomacy the unfolding crisis that the world witnesses and is finding hard to deal with.

This becomes ironic as the truth is that neither side wants war nor contrary to the popularly promoted notion in the West, Russia does not want to escalate the situation beyond control. The issues with differing narratives and lack of trust, which harks back to the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Moscow and lingering suspicions of the Kremlin's intentions in Eastern Europe which includes Georgia as well.

While few would doubt that Russia's recognition of separatist states is a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity questions must be directed at why this situation has actually transpired. US ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas Greenfield considered the consequences of Russian unilateral actions to be dire which includes compromising on the Minsk protocol which regulated fighting in the Donbass region after the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Examined closely, the American narrative

does not account for Russian grievances over pushing Ukraine into an armed confrontation, a fact mentioned by Russian UN ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia.

A thoroughly nuanced stance came from China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun who said that all parties must exercise restraint and avoid any action which may fuel tensions with Beijing welcoming any diplomatic solution to the crisis.

By simply denouncing Russia or criticizing Western maneuvers, most peaceniks lose sight of what is to be achieved out of a crisis, which has its roots in the Cold War era and has only exaggerated due to unresolved colonial legacies.

Instead of unpacking the apparent difficulties, the United States, NATO and Russia have chosen to push back which got us where we are. Nuanced stances are important for dialogue to be facilitated at all levels. So far, that has been missing and is a key variable which will define the future course of this conflict. Otherwise, Ukraine would be bombarded into oblivion with no hope for salvation.

So far, the situation is worsening with no end in sight. Germany has halted the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which is compromising on Berlin's energy supplies while earning the ire of the Kremlin. Calls to avoid confrontation are falling on deaf ears on all sides. This is where the conflict becomes difficult to manage.

The historical differences, which have defined Russia's proclivity towards supporting separatism on ethnic lines, may not be a valid justification for aggression but Western diplomacy has contributed to Moscow adopting a more assertive stance.

The Russian decision to recognize separatist territories for example is anchored in a preconceived notion that Western ascendancy has resulted in separatists becoming victimized and hence the Security Council of the Kremlin was quick to operationalize and sanction the use of force. Concerted efforts at pushing back against Russia must be cognizant of Moscow's *raison d'être* to adopt a credible minimum deterrence.

As the United Nations Chief condemns Russia and the United States and its allies employ the full range of coercive tactics, the Ukraine crisis is headed for an impasse with no side willing to budge for its lopsided foreign policy. There is a grave danger that persistence with such strategies can result in a dark future for the Ukrainian people, including the ethnic Russians.

While it is to be hoped diplomacy can unlock this crisis into more manageable proportions, the situation looks bleak. The ironic part of this entire imbroglio is that those championing peace are flaming tensions while those depicted as rogues are vouching for conditional peace. This makes the 2021-2022 Ukraine crisis one of the most diabolical imbroglios of the century. There is simply no end in sight.

There is Anger in Afghanistan Over Biden Decree on Frozen Funds

In a symbolic move towards inclusiveness, the Taliban seem ready to embrace senior figures of the Ashraf Ghani government



By Haq Nawaz Khan

It would be an understatement to say the people of Afghanistan are angry over United States President Joe Biden's decision to divert part of the frozen Afghan assets to the families of 9/11 victims.

Everyone in Afghanistan from the Taliban top leadership to common Afghans to former regime officials was taken aback on the news of Biden executive order.

According to the order, half of the unfrozen funds of USD 7 billion, held by the Federal Reserves of New York, will be released to Afghanistan as humanitarian aid, and the remaining USD 3.5 billion will be distributed among the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The Afghan Taliban questioned the US as what the Afghans have to do with the 9/11 bombings as none of the convicted was Afghan national. Why is the US holding the money of poor Afghans as compensation?

The Afghan Taliban has issued a formal statement in response to the decision of the US President Joe Biden about the spending of the Afghanistan reserved funds.

"The US President has first frozen our funds, which were deposited in their banks. This was against international norms. And now the US wants to spend it by itself, which is an unjustified act."

"The Islamic Emirate considers this decision of Biden as usurping the Afghans rights and rejects this."

"Afghans have nothing to do with the September 11 incident. On this plea, the spending of the Afghans reserves is unacceptable and unjust. This act is a clear cut violation of the peace deal."

"Such acts attempt to cover its 20 years of war crimes in Afghanistan. To avoid international embarrassment and not deteriorate relations with the Afghans, the

decision should be reversed."

"The funds of the Afghans should immediately be unfrozen without attaching any conditions. And it should avoid such steps that may create mistrust."

"If the US did not review its decision in this respect, the Islamic Emirate will be compelled to review its policy towards the US." Statement shared by Bilal Karimi in a WhatsApp media group.

The US decision was not only criticized by the Taliban, every Afghan termed it as 'stealing' the money of Afghans. Acting defence minister Muhammad Yaqoob Mujahid has criticized the unilateral decision of the US President Joe Biden. "Who had carried out the attacks? Who were convicted? And whose money has been taken?" he told Afghan official TV – RTA.

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai

has strongly reacted to the White House order, terming it 'atrocities against the Afghan people'. "The US president should reconsider his decision. Afghans have role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They are the victims of the war on terror," he told a media conference.

Meanwhile, the international community is still following the policy of 'wait and see' for Afghanistan under the Taliban led government. No country has so far hinted to accept the Taliban self-proclaimed government –Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, but many countries including the US have been helping Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds.

The leadership of Taliban has been repeatedly asking the international community to press the US to unfreeze all of its frozen funds.

A high level Afghan Taliban delegation led by acting foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi has visited Doha, Qatar to hold meetings with the representatives of the Gulf States and diplomats of the Western nations to discuss the latest situation in Afghanistan and also the US president's decision on the frozen funds.

Afghanistan has been running on foreign assistance in the last four decades. It has nearly collapsed after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan last year. It was like a bubble burst, reflecting poor governance in the last two decades under the direct influence of the US led 48 nations. Now it is very hard for the Taliban to deliver and revive the economy of the war-ravaged country.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in his recent interview has asked the world leaders to come forward and help Afghanistan to avert the worst humanitarian crisis. There is no alternative to the Taliban in Afghanistan, the world should engage the Taliban. "Afghanistan is on the verge of experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis," Mr Khan told CNN in an interview.

The people of Afghanistan have been facing a humanitarian crisis since Kabul fell to the Taliban. There is no trade and economic activities as the country has been facing economic sanctions. The only way out is the flow of humanitarian aid, but that is nothing for a country of 40 million popula-

tion. Rights activists have been criticizing the world for their pledges of providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

"No, it will not be. It is like trying to stop bleeding from a gushing wound with a bandage," Mahboub Seraj, a right activist, told a virtual international conference when asked if humanitarian aid alone will be enough.

The leadership of Afghan Taliban are pledging to take the country forward and make it independent and self-reliant. However, it is a gigantic task for the resource-starved country without strong political backup and with security challenges.



Some efforts have been made to create an environment for the senior leaders of the previous government to return to Afghanistan. Abdus Salam Rahimi, a former advisor of President Ashraf Ghani on peace and security, has returned to Kabul. He was warmly received by the senior leaders of the Taliban.

Reports from Afghanistan revealed some more senior leaders of the previous government have also been in contact to return to Afghanistan. The Taliban wants to send some positive signals to the world that they are one and united. There were reports in the Afghan media that the former Afghan President Ashraf could return, but his close circles denied the reports.

Some unwanted people have entered into the ranks of Taliban at the beginning of the rule, but the Taliban formed a Clearance Commission of Ranks to identify and expel those elements from their ranks.

"We have concluded our work and sent our recommendations to the acting prime minister. Some 4,350 unwanted elements were expelled from the ranks of military, police and intelligence in the last 5 months," Mufti Lutfullah Hakimi, head of CCR told a news conference. This was also considered as a challenge to check certain people misusing the name of the Taliban.

Some of the Afghans approached for comments told The Truth International

(TTI) that life was returning to normal, and Taliban officials were busy delivering some of the work. "I see a change that the dollar that once crossed 100 Afghanis is now at around 87-88. This is a good sign for inflation," a resident of Kabul stated. "We have issues, but some relief is being witnessed. The prices, once shot up, have now been under control."

"One issue that is encouraging for the people is that the Taliban officials are acting on what they are saying. The beautification of Kabul is an example, as the municipality workers are active," another resident told TTI, requesting not to be named. He said Taliban officials could easily be approached for official work.

India's Dangerous Drift into Extremism



By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

The world's largest democracy was put under another test when a ban on wearing Hijab in the educational institutions of the Indian state of Karnataka took an ugly turn exposing the rising tide of Hindu nationalism. On February 10, when a Muslim girl, Muskan Khan wearing hijab entering college in Udupi district of Karnataka was heckled, harassed and ridiculed by a mob of Hindu fanatics to the extent that she was forced to give an aggressive response to such provocative acts by raising the slogan 'Allah O Akbar.' The video of Muslim girl challenging hurls and abuses from Hindu fanatic mob got viral and led to an instant response from those who lamented and deplored abusive culture in India against religious minorities propagated by the ruling BJP and its ally Shiv Sena.

It is not only the issue of Hijab which has challenged article 15 of Indian constitution which guarantees religious freedom but blatant violation of human rights in occupied Jammu & Kashmir makes a mockery of Indian democracy along with the rising tide of fascism promoted by the Modi regime against religious minorities. Such a trend is augmenting threat to the future of India as a unified state. Does it mean that with each passing day, the identity of India as a democratic and

secular state is eroding? Why the Indian civil society and political parties are unable to prevent the rising tide of Hindu nationalism of Modi regime from implementing its agenda to transform India as a Hindu state?

India's road to religious extremism is manifested from the fact that in December 1984 general elections which were held after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh body guards on October 31, BJP got only 4 seats. Systematically, BJP along with other Hindu nationalism groups like Shiv Sena, RSS and Bajrang Dal initiated hate campaign and movement particularly against the Indian Muslims which reached its peak when Babri mosque was demolished in December 1992 by thousands of Hindu nationalists led by BJP and its allies. Communal riots in the Indian state of Gujarat in February 2002 when Narendra Modi was Chief Minister of that state further generated insecurity among Indian Muslims. After gaining two-third majority in May 2019 general elections, BJP and Shiv Sena moved to implement their dangerous agenda i.e. to transform India as a Hindu state.

As a first step to accomplish their objective of converting India as a Hindu state, the

Modi regime passed 'Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act' on August 5, 2019 from the Indian parliament which ended special status given to J&K by revoking article 370 and 36-A of the Indian constitution and then embarked on promulgating domicile act allowing non-locals to get jobs and permanently settle particularly in the Muslim majority Valley of Kashmir. The imposition of curfew, lock down, launching of siege and surge operations and conducting extra-judicial killings to prevent popular protests against August 5, 2019 act reflected blatant human rights violations by the Indian state. Policies to change the demographic complexion of the Muslim majority Valley of Kashmir by settling non-Muslims particularly Hindus following the revocation of special status of J&K is alarming because the model followed by the Modi regime is similar to what Israel has been pursuing in its occupied West Bank by settling millions of Jews thus threatening Palestinian majority.

Dangerous situation emanating in India because of surge of religious militancy against religious minorities particularly Muslims and endless persecution of Kashmiri Muslims in the Valley tend to raise a question mark about the integrity of the Indian state which was well narrated by

a famous India writer Arundhati Roy in her recent interview to a renowned TV anchor Karan Thapar. She predicted disintegration of India similar to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. One can figure out two major possibilities if human rights violations in the Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir and persecution of religious minorities continues unabated. First, Hindu fascism under the patronage of BJP and its allies is not only targeting Muslims, but also Christians and Dalits. As Arundhati Roy has warned that if Indian state institutions like bureaucracy, judiciary, police and military remain partisan instead of being neutral on communal matters, there is no way India can remain as a united country.

Arundhati Roy in her interview with Karan Thapar however expressed her optimism that the people of India will rise against the tide of Hindu nationalism and fascism and save their country from possible disintegration. Unfortunately, Indian judiciary is looking the other way whether it is Supreme Court of India or Karnataka High Court because of their partisan and biased position. Unfortunately, the Modi regime and its philosophy of 'Hindutva' has permeated deep inside the Indian state organs and society to the extent that not only common people are submissive and passive while observing persecution of religious minorities but the state institutions have also been influenced by Hindu nationalist fanatic ideology. Lack of challenge and retaliation from so-called democratic, liberal and secular forces of India against the deepen-

ing of fascism means that in 2024 general elections also, BJP and its ally Shiv Sena may win and complete the agenda of transforming India as a Hindu state.

Second, the situation in the Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir is worse because of lack of practical support to the Kashmiri resistance movement from Pakistan and elsewhere. The Indian state is now confident that it can fully absorb the Muslim dominated Valley and bury the notion that before August 5, J&K was the only state in India with a Muslim majority. Despite opposition from "Gupkar alliance" composed of opposition J&K political parties and groups, the Modi regime is adamant and is implementing its agenda to 'Indianize' J&K. The idea is to settle substantial non-Muslim population in the Valley and then to call state assembly elections so that BJP and its allies can get majority of seats on communal basis.

Furthermore, Gregory Stanton, who established Genocide Watch Group has many times warned of genocide in the Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir and also against Indian Muslims in other Indian states. His warnings must be taken seriously by the world as the level of tolerance in India today against religious minorities particularly Muslims has drastically gone down. In the last eight years, the Modi regime has patronized Hindu nationalists to seek training, both ideological and physical in order to eliminate religious minorities. The model followed by BJP, Shiv Sena and other Hindu nationalist parties and groups

is Nazi Germany where during the inter-war period, SA and SS storm paratroopers unleashed a reign of terror against Jews and other minorities. But, this is 2022 and not the decade of 1930s and the world will strongly react if genocide type activity takes place in India. Even then, the Modi regime is confident that with the collaboration of state organs particularly judiciary, bureaucracy, police and security agencies, and the silence of people, Muslim minority in India will be a soft target and will be compelled either to convert as Hindus; migrate to Pakistan and Bangladesh or be ready to be physically eliminated.

Be as it may, the year 2022 is crucial in India as far as religious tolerance and freedom is concerned. Likewise, despite serious human rights violations in its occupied territory of Jammu & Kashmir, the Modi regime will not be able to carry out genocide of Kashmiri Muslims because of serious ramifications. Yet, the international community must take notice of evil designs of BJP and other Hindu nationalist forces to implement their agenda to convert India as a Hindu majoritarian state. In this scenario, Pakistan must also note that fact that if religious fanaticism can culminate into the break-up of India, such a monster can also cause irreparable damage to its integrity.

The writer is Meritorious Professor of International Relations and former Dean Faculty of Social Science University of Karachi



Pak-German Cooperation for Climate Action and Renewable Energy in Focus

German State Secretary's recent visit was an opportunity to explore the possibilities of furthering bilateral cooperation



By Adeena Tahir

In the 2021 German Federal Election, climate change was one of the most popular topics of political discussions, partly due to a rise in social awareness and also due to the country witnessing an unprecedented incidence of devastating floods and record heatwaves.

Research conducted by the World Weather Attribution Group found that deadly flooding across Germany and Belgium in July 2021 was made up to nine times more likely due to climate change.

Thus, climate change remains one of the top priorities of the German ruling coalition comprising Social Democrats Party (SPD), and the Greens and Free Democratic Party (FDP), with Olaf Schulz leading as the German Chancellor.

When it comes to climate action ambitions, SPD wants Germany to generate all of its electricity from renewable energy resources no later than 2040. For this transition, it wishes to promote renewable technologies like solar panels, hydrogen cells, etc.

SPD also wants to change transportation trends, promoting railways over flying and providing sufficient supporting infrastructure to promote the use of electric vehicles. Finally, when it comes to coal-powered energy generation, SPD wants to stick to 2038 as the phase-out date.

The other member of the coalition, The Greens, are in fact the most climate-centric of all German parties, and in the period leading up to the German elections, they had expressed the ambition to reduce 70 percent of Germany's current greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and had investment plans to promote short-haul flights, improve railways network, and transition towards renewable energy.

Finally, analyzing FDP, the party advocates for a free market instrument for the trading of carbon emissions, similar to the EU Emissions Trading system but spreading the system to other sectors as well.

Thus, on the whole, the German govern-

ment has a serious interest in climate change mitigation and adaptation, with a particular focus on renewable energy. This is reflected in the country's bilateral and multilateral partnerships and assistance programs run worldwide, including in Pakistan.

The state-owned German Development Bank (KfW) and the government's development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, often referred to as GIZ, are the two main German development entities working in Pakistan to provide technical and financial assistance for priority areas.

GIZ has been operational in Pakistan since 1961, offering development cooperation to Pakistan's public, private, and civil sectors. GIZ works in Pakistan on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its priority focus is on training and sustainable growth for decent jobs; peaceful and inclusive societies; and climate and energy.

From vocational training, education, capacity building of labour to holding stakeholder engagements and other measures for promoting inclusion, efficiency, and transparency in governance, GIZ works across multiple verticals in Pakistan.

For renewable energies and energy efficiency, GIZ offers support in the planning and development of resources, advising on technical implementation, and offering financing options.



Some of GIZ's active projects in the area of sustainable infrastructure are:

Promoting Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in Pakistan: REEE II project revolves around designing interventions to advise on grid management and upgrading to a technologically advanced and digital state, distributed generation using on-grid solar power generation plants, rural electrification through off-grid solutions, and providing the Pakistan German Renewable Energy Forum as a platform for dialogue.

Energy Solutions Made in Germany: The project offers support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to assist them in market exploration, penetration, and development through the means of market research, monitoring and evaluation, business networking, etc.

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (REEE) Project: The project running since 2015 has mainly focused on the use of climate financing to integrate financing schemes for renewable energy into local commercial banks. This involved developing Green Banking Guidelines, disbursement of financial resources for renewable energy projects, incentivized liquidity schemes for investors, and capacity development of banks to manage such schemes.

With this in view, when the high-level delegation led by the newly appointed State Secretary for Economic Cooperation and Development Jochen Falsbarth decided to visit Pakistan between 14 and 16 February 2022 for a three-day visit, it was highly celebrated and looked forward to by the climate enthusiasts community in the country.

During this visit, the State Secretary was accompanied by Managing Director of GIZ

Bernhard Schlagheck and Head of Division Afghanistan and Pakistan Helmut Fischer.

The State Secretary Jochen Falsbarth and the delegation participated in several high-profile meetings with various Pakistani counterparts. One of these was the meeting with the Minister for Economic Affairs Omar Ayub Khan, where the two countries' long-standing bilateral economic cooperation was appreciated and evaluated for future prospects.

Pakistan's minister briefed on how renewable energy, climate change, smart agriculture, and regional connectivity are the priority areas for Pakistan and highlighted the need for capacity-building efforts like technical and vocational education and training TVET programs.

In response to this, the German State Secretary voiced his satisfaction over the cooperation between the countries and shared Germany's plans to provide further assistance for areas of green energy, education and health, infrastructure, digital governance, and start-ups.

The German delegation received a briefing from Energy Minister Hammad Azhar on Pakistan's current ambitions for green energy, including an overview of pilot

projects launched across the country that promote biofuels and other renewable energy resources.

Hammad Azhar applauded the cooperation provided by GIZ in establishing a state of the art Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) System in Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) and Multan Electric Power Company (MEPC) which enhanced energy efficiency and management.

The Minister encouraged GIZ to participate in pilot scaled projects across all provinces of Pakistan and expressed his hope that the German Pakistan Renewable Energy Forum GPREF will continue to serve as a platform that fosters partnerships and exchange of expertise.

The Minister also announced the government's plan to introduce a policy framework for bringing foreign and local investments into renewable energy projects through concession agreements, especially for microgrids.

The German Delegation appreciated Pakistan's current efforts for renewable energy and climate change, and thanked the Pakistani government for assisting evacuation of German nationals from Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover of the country.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious engagements by the State Secretary and his delegation was arranging a round-table discussion with selected youth representatives from different regions of Pakistan, to have a consultation on how Germany can enhance its role in promoting youth empowerment, climate action, and renewable energy as a triple-helical approach in Pakistan.

This consultation was moderated by Hartmut Behrend, the Coordinator Pakistan-German Climate and Energy Initiative run by GIZ. The group of youth representatives were led by Syeda Hadika Jamshed, the Climate Change Policy Specialist at Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change, and coordinated by Mehak Masood. The youth delegation included:

Muhammad Mustafa Amjad, a renewable energy expert and energy consultant for notable organizations such as World Wind Energy Association;

Adeena Tahir, a social sector development researcher, youth trainer, and environmental engineer;

Marzia Batool, a student activist for climate change and environmental sciences researcher; and

Abdul Wahab and Hassam Uddin, the co-founders of GeoAirCon, a start-up that won its pitch at the ClimateLaunchpad.

One of the key topics of discussion was the recent initiative of GIZ Pakistan titled as Youth4Climate Pakistan: Driving Ambition, where students from universities across the country were invited to brainstorm and submit their ideas for Pakistan's adaptation and mitigation measures.

By focusing especially on university students and without placing any limitations on ideas, this has become a highly exciting challenge for many young people, who are innovative, possess leadership skills and are looking forward to taking action on their climate ambitions. The pool of ideas is still expanding, with students sending in their submissions, and so far the initiative has proven to be highly interesting due to the diverse ideas submitted.

For the next few phases of this initiative, GIZ Pakistan intends on conducting provincial and federal level conclaves, workshops, and so on, to refine youth's ideas and equip them with the necessary skills to implement their climate actions with success.

The project outcomes would also be useful in analysing the role, scope, and future of youth participation in the climate change movement.

During the meeting, youths shared their views on how to enhance GIZ Pakistan's role in supporting Pakistan's youth for climate action and transitioning towards renewable energy. Muhammad Mustafa highlighted how Pakistan is one of the youngest countries in the world, with 64 percent of its total population below the age of 30 and 29 percent between 15 to 29 years of age.

He stressed that youth participation would be key in carrying out any socio-economic development plan in the country.

Adeena Tahir shared views on how to make policymaking more inclusive, suggesting enhancing the capacity of youth-centred community social organizations and establishing youth advisory groups.

On the technical side, she suggested that by looking at successful off-grid solar and micro-hydro projects across all provinces of Pakistan, but especially in the remote areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit Baltistan, it could be a highly feasible area for further assistance from GIZ Pakistan.

Mehak Masood shared the importance of incorporating climate change concepts in the curriculum and shared the importance of changing social perceptions and behaviours towards climate issues.

Abdul Wahab and Hassam Uddin shared the technical difficulties faced so far in the implementation of renewable energy, such as the lack of financial support, high initial costs of running a renewable energy enterprise, and lack of social awareness or acceptability for the installation of renewable energy in comparison to the conventional grid-based energy systems with a large carbon footprint.

The German dignitaries were impressed with the youth's commitment towards climate action and applauded the diversity in ideas and views expressed during the discussion.

The three-day visit by the delegation led by German State Secretary Jochen Falsbarth can be hailed as a welcome new chapter for Germany and Pakistan's collaboration in meeting global and national commitments for climate action.

Since GIZ already has numerous projects for sustainable infrastructure, either in pipeline or active, such engagements with Pakistan's stakeholders from the public, private, and civic society are indeed promising hallmarks of truly inclusive, participative and feasible renewable energy transition planning, development, assistance, and implementation.

It is hoped that in future, the two countries can further strengthen this bilateral cooperation for the betterment of the people, planet, and economy to achieve the globally envisioned state of sustainable development.



Shockwaves from Russia's Ukraine Invasion are Set to Pummel Pak Economy

Soaring energy import bill will break the budget for both the consumers and managers of the country's economy

By Khalique Ahmad

Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine has opened the prospect of a new squeeze for oil dependent economies of the world – including Pakistan. As international oil prices increase, so do the worries of common Pakistanis braving double-digit inflation and the concerns of the country's fiscal and monetary authorities over surging current account deficit and declining foreign exchange reserves.

Pakistan's oil consumption is almost back to pre-Covid levels as economic activity has regained momentum despite international prices rising to record highs on the back of supply limits maintained by oil-exporting countries and other supply chain problems ahead of the Russia-Ukraine conflict hotting up.

Since May, global prices of Brent have surged by almost two-third (70 percent) to USD 95 per barrel before falling to USD 92 per barrel. This despite forecasts by the US Energy Information Administration average USD 62 per barrel in 2021 and USD 60 in 2022 against the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) projections of about USD 60 per barrel in 2021 and slightly above USD 56 in 2022.

While record-high prices of petroleum products have started to pinch the common citizen hard, the incumbent political government is no less perturbed. At the outset of the fiscal year, the hefty PKR 610 billion revenue target through petroleum levy (PL) is no more in sight, and hence a risk to the budget.

The IMF and the authorities have now revised the PL target to PKR 356 billion as the government tried unsuccessfully to pass on minimum inflationary pressures to masses. Inflation, nevertheless, soared to the double digits.

The (PL) loss is, however, partially compensated by higher sales volumes



and higher customs duty yields on products at the import stage, thanks to the oil rally.

This is on top of the supplementary finance budget introduced in November with additional revenue adjustments of about PKR 550 billion through additional taxes to fully make up for the petroleum levy loss. The overall revenue target was thus revised to PKR 6.1 trillion instead of PKR 5.8 trillion in the original budget.

On the other hand, the oil import bill has more than doubled (up 107 percent) to almost USD 11.7 billion in July 2021-January 2022 against USD 5.6 billion in the comparable period last year. Petroleum products have consumed a larger chunk of over USD 5.734 billion of foreign exchange, up 125 percent from USD 2.55 billion as quantities went up by 25 percent in the first seven months.

Crude quantities though slightly dropped 0.18 percent but its import value went up by 81 percent to USD 2.8 billion in seven months instead of USD 1.54 billion in the same period last year. The value of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports also surged by 117 percent and 45 percent respectively.

These are the highest numbers since the last quarter of 2018 but then it must be kept in mind that the last two years were historically bad in terms of macroeconomic performance on the back of unique stabilisation policies necessitated by Covid-19 restrictions. With a growth rate respectively of about 15 percent and over 25 percent, petrol and diesel consumption has now rebounded to almost 800,000 tonnes and 700,000 tonnes per month.

In contrast, overall consumption of oil products in the first six months (July-December 2021) did not show a proportionate increase. Total consumption of petroleum products in the first half of the year stood at 11.35 million tonnes this year against 10 million tonnes in the comparable period last year, showing a normal growth of about 13.5 percent despite revival of furnace oil utilization in the power sector in the wake of short LNG supplies.

This apparently showed a clear fault line in our energy imports as the country relied more on imported products while domestic refineries struggled to operate even at break-even because the authorities and oil companies resorted to ill planned, costlier

imports. Higher reliance on furnace oil for power generation after a few years of decline and a negligible price differential between petrol and CNG also played a role.

The government's team propagated higher prices of petrol and diesel in India. What they never talked about was the per capita purchasing power parity that stood at about USD 4900 in Pakistan against USD 6500 in India.

What impact the fuel prices are having on inflation can be gauged just from a single fact that power companies are charging PKR 5 and PKR 6 per unit in additional fuel cost adjustment on electricity consumers, thus taking the average per unit cost of electricity well above PKR 25-26.

For example, the HSD based fuel component alone of electricity cost at PKR 26 per unit in January 2022 was 37 percent higher than PKR 19 per unit in January 2021 and 85 percent higher than PKR 14 per unit in December 2021. The furnace oil based fuel cost at PKR 23 per unit in January 2022 was almost 85 percent higher than PKR 12.35 in January 2021.

Similarly, RLNG based fuel cost of electricity at PKR 17 per unit in January 2022 was also 100 percent higher than PKR 8.32 per unit in January 2021. Also, the per unit coal cost has also increased by almost 120 percent in January this year to PKR 14 when compared to PKR 6.45 per unit of the same month last year.

As international prices shot up, the government had to bring down the petroleum levy on consumer oil products to a minimal level and also had to slightly reduce general sales tax (GST) on almost all products to minimize the inflationary pressures that remained in double digits.

Yet, the government collected more than PKR 287 billion in indirect taxes from petroleum products in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, showing an increase of 72 percent. This meant the oil sector remained the top revenue spinner for the government.

The major collections were on account of customs duty and GST as the government used customs duty as the tax of choice after it was set at 10 percent in the budget on import of all products including furnace oil

and crude oil imports. The data suggested that the taxation on petroleum products along with the increase in their prices in the international market remained key factors behind record per litre price hike in petrol and high-speed diesel.

Another reason for the higher tax yield was the imposition of 17 percent sales tax on crude oil at the import stage. The seven-month customs duty collection on the import of major petroleum products amounted to PKR 85 billion which was almost 135 percent higher than last year.

But then the government embarked on an ill-advised publicity drive when some special assistants to the prime minister claimed petroleum prices at the lowest level in the region and the world through the use of selective data. For example, the government's media campaigners repeatedly propagated prices of petrol and diesel in India in Pak-Rupee but never talked about the per capita purchasing power parity (PPP) that stood at about USD 4,900 in Pakistan when compared to USD 6,500 in India.



Interestingly, the petroleum prices in India are totally deregulated, varied in various states and changed on a daily basis. Also, GST (called value-added tax in India) is also fixed by states at different rates unlike Pakistan with a highly regulated oil sector along with a federal and uniform tax regime and partly shared with the provinces.

The per capita PPP in Sri Lanka is estimated significantly higher at USD 13,230. Nepal is perhaps the only exception in the region with a per capita PPP of USD 4,010 and its petrol and diesel in equivalent PKR are slightly higher than Pakistan. Bangladesh has a per capita PPP higher than Pakistan at USD 5,100.

At present, the government is charging PKR 25-30 per litre on three major petroleum products in the form of three major taxes — customs duty, GST, and PL. The import parity price currently works out at PKR 117-119 per litre excluding taxes but their sale prices are well above PKR 155 to PKR 161 per litre.

Interestingly, the petrol and diesel prices in Pakistan peaked at PKR 87 and PKR 65 per litre during the historically highest ever international crude price of USD 147.27 per barrel in July 2008. In contrast, with the global crude prices almost 55 percent lower, the retail product prices today are double the then rates.

That explains the impact of the devastation caused by the currency devaluation since then, particularly over the past four years. The government says the prices of petroleum products are being increased due to higher international market prices and losses in the exchange rate.

The government can provide relief to the

consumers and the economy by abolishing customs duty or reducing and fluctuating it on a fortnightly basis given the fact that rising volumes are driving revenues through GST and levy to the higher side.

At about PKR 161 per litre, the retail petrol rate is currently highest in the country's history and directly impacts the middle class the most as it is mostly used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers. Likewise, diesel at about PKR 155 per litre is also at the most expensive mark. High-speed diesel price is considered highly inflationary as it is mostly used in heavy transport vehicles, trains and agricultural engines like trucks, buses, tractors, tube-wells and threshers.

Bracing for Impact of a New Flood of Inflation

In a world where everything is connected with everything else, war in Ukraine will have consequences for Pakistan's economy



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan and many countries are the world are experiencing inflation in the backdrop of increase in the cost of fuel and other essential commodities. Some countries, including the United States and Britain are facing the super inflation.

Pakistan is also going through a high inflation which is hovering in double-digit with no immediate relief in sight for the consumers as prices of fuel oil, gas, electricity, and other essential consumer items like edible oil are growing constantly in 2022.

In January 2022, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reported 13 percent inflation. According to PBS data, the consumer price index (CPI) surged 13 percent in January this year in comparison with January 2021. On 22 February 2022, the international crude oil price surged close to USD 100/barrel when the Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized two regions in Ukraine being controlled by Russia-based separatists and also sent troops to maintain peace in those regions. This phenomenon is expected to further trigger prices of fuel and other essential commodities in the international markets.

A couple of weeks ago, the State Bank of Pakistan has paused monetary tightening with a view that inflation had slowed and further fiscal tightening would have

negative impact on rising prices. Since September 2021, the SBP has raised the discount rate by 275 basis points amid widening inflation. The central bank said that it would not further increase discount rate. The State Bank of Pakistan is set to announce a new monetary policy in March this year.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reported that increase in CPI in January 2022, compared to January 2021 was led by electricity costs, which has inflated by 56.20 percent year-on-year basis. According to PBS, the cooking oils value has also increased by 50.33 percent in comparison with Dec 2021.

Rising fuel and electricity costs have put extra financial burden on the consumers and this factor is putting pressure on the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan. In January 2021, the PTI government had passed a mini-budget thereby enhancing taxes in a bid to control the fiscal deficit and eliminating subsidies. This strategy of the government was aimed at qualifying for resumption of IMF USD 6 billion bail-out programme and get USD 1 billion tranche. Pakistan entered the three-year USD 6 billion IMF programme in 2019. A successful review would release USD 1 billion to the country.

For the urban population, the CPI inflation surged by 13 percent on a year-on-year (YoY) in January 2022 as against an increase of 12.7 percent in December 2021 and 5 percent in January 2021. Also, the rural population experienced the CPI inflation by 12.9 percent on a year-on-year basis in January 2022 in comparison with 11.6 percent increase in Dec-2021 and 6.6 percent in January 2021. On a month-on-month basis, it increased by 0.9 percent in January 2022 as compared to a decrease of -0.5 percent in the previous month and a decrease of -0.3 percent in January 2021.

The PBS said the sensitive price indicator (SPI) inflation on a YoY basis increased by 20.9 percent in January 2022 as compared to an increase of 20.9 percent a month earlier and an increase of 7.7 percent in January 2021. It decreased by -0.8 percent MoM in January 2022 as compared to a decrease of -0.4 percent a month earlier and a decrease of -0.8 percent in January 2021.

The wholesale price index (WPI) inflation on a YoY basis increased by 24 percent in January 2022 as compared to an increase of 26.2 percent a month earlier and an increase of 6.4 percent in January 2021. MoM WPI inflation basis increased by 0.6 percent in January 2022 as compared to a

decrease of -0.2 percent a month earlier and an increase of 2.5 percent in corresponding month i.e., January 2021.

Core inflation measured by non-food non-energy (urban) increased by 8.2 percent on a YoY basis in January 2022 as compared to 8.3 percent increase in the previous month and 5.4 percent in January 2021.

Widening current account deficit

The current account deficit has crossed 9 billion dollars in first six months of the ongoing fiscal year against a surplus 1.27 billion dollars during the corresponding period last fiscal, raising alarm in the economic circles in Pakistan over massive gap in balance of payment position of the country.

According to State Bank of Pakistan's latest balance of payment position, the current account deficit of Pakistan mounted to 9.25 billion dollars during July-Dec period of the fiscal year 2021-22, whereas, during the same period in 2020-21 the current account was surplus by 1.27 billion dollars. In first six months of this fiscal, Pakistan has sustained 25.52 billion dollars trade deficit, 10.5 billion dollars over and above the trade deficit recorded in the corresponding period of 2020-21.

In first half of this fiscal, imports have widened to 36.4 billion dollars, from 23.2 billion dollars in the comparative period of the previous fiscal. Nonetheless, exports in first six months of the ongoing fiscal year amounted to 15.23 billion while imports ballooned to over 36 billion dollars. This massive gap in the current account position and trade deficit indicate that the government's interventions have not yielded the desired results, so far.

Earlier, Pakistan's current account deficit (CAD) has exceeded USD 7 billion in first five months of the ongoing financial year, 2021-22. From July-Nov 2021, the CAD amounted to USD 7.21 billion in comparison with a surplus of USD 1.76 billion. This huge current account deficit is an outcome of the USD 18.89 billion trade deficit in five months of this fiscal.

Exports during July-Nov 2021 stood at USD 15.05 billion while imports widened

to USD 34.94 billion. The State Bank of Pakistan has reported this negative development in its latest update about the balance of payment position of Pakistan in first five months of fiscal year 2021-22.

Despite various measures put in place to make a dent into imports and the current account deficit, the five-month data of BoP indicates that the government's strategy did not yield the desired results in November which was evident from the current account deficit. In November 2021 alone, the import bill has crossed the record USD 7 billion level against USD 4.5 billion in the same month in 2020.

Earlier, Pakistan's CAD had increased four-fold in first four months of the ongoing financial year which has further enlarged in the month of Nov-2021. During July-Oct FY22, the State Bank of Pakistan reported USD 5.18 billion current account deficit in comparison with just USD 1.21 billion in the corresponding period of last fiscal year.

According to State Bank of Pakistan, the trade deficit of Pakistan widened to USD 14.84 billion during July-Oct 2021 period of this fiscal, whereas in the corresponding period of last fiscal the trade deficit stood at USD 7.56 billion.

In other words, the trade deficit has expanded by almost 100 percent, surging to USD 14.84 billion from USD 7.54 billion in July-Oct period in 2020.

Remittances to the rescue

In the first seven months of the ongoing fiscal year (July 2021 to January 2022), Pakistan received USD 1.60 billion dollars more in remittances from overseas Pakistani in comparison with the corresponding period of 2020-21.

In percentage, the workers' remittances posted 9.1 percent growth during July-Jan of FY22. From July 201 to Jan-2022. Pakistanis working abroad have sent 18 billion dollars record remittances during the first seven months of this fiscal year (FY2021-22).

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, home remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis rose to a record USD 18 billion in July-Jan of FY22 compared to USD 16.4

billion in the same period of last fiscal year (FY21), depicting an increase of USD 1.6 billion. Covid-related air travel restrictions and the market-based exchange rate have encouraged the use of informal to formal channels for sending remittances which led to a significant growth of USD 1.60 billion in just seven months of this fiscal.

According to SBP, the surge in workers' remittances, which began in June 2020, continued during the current fiscal year and with USD 2.14 billion inflows in January 2022, workers' remittances remained above USD 2 billion for the 20th consecutive month.

However, remittances moderated in January compared to the previous month due to seasonality. Home remittances fell by 15 percent to USD 2.14 billion in January 2022 compared to USD 2.52 billion in the previous month (December 2021) due to seasonality.

Partly reflecting an easing of travel restrictions, inflows of workers' remittances also declined by 5 percent in January 2022 compared to January 2021, in which home remittances inflows of USD 2.25 billion were arrived.

Remittance inflows during the first seven months of FY22 have mainly been sourced from Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and USA. With 1.5 percent growth, the highest inflows of USD 4.574 billion arrived from Saudi Arabia during July-Jan of this fiscal year. Saudi Arabia's share in overall inflows is about 25 percent.

Inflows from the UK rose by 13 percent to USD 2.467 billion in the first seven months of FY22 compared to USD 2.178 billion in the same period of last fiscal year. Inflows from the US posted 21 percent growth to stand at USD 1.7 billion during July-Jan of FY22.

During the period under review, home remittances from UAE slightly declined 1.5 percent to USD 3.38 billion. Remittance inflows during January 2022 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia to the amount of USD 540 million, from United Arab Emirates worth USD 374 million, from United Kingdom worth USD 320 million, and from the United States worth USD 208 million.

Here's Why Pakistanis Seem to Do Better Abroad

Q&A with Tanweer Ahmed, entrepreneur, businessman, and cricket enthusiast



By Pavan Manzoor

It was the late 80's when a bright eyed-boy left the streets of his beloved Sialkot and stepped into a world that was foreign to him. Little did he know, he was about to take over this world by storm, leaving the flag of his beloved country flying high as he blazed a trail.

We are talking about none other than Mr. Tanweer Ahmed, an entrepreneur, a businessman and a cricket enthusiast of Pakistani origin who has done well in the United States and who sat down with The Truth International (TTI) for a brief Q&A.

TTI: You came to the US in 1988, and you joined KFC in 1992. What challenges did you have to overcome at the beginning of your journey?

TA: So the first challenge basically is when you arrive over there, your accent, the language barrier, once you overcome those then... When you leave your country, you are not leaving country just because you want to leave, you have some good and bad circumstances, that's the reason you want to leave your country.

Otherwise why would you leave? So in my situation, my circumstances were that I needed to go and build my future over there. Going to a different country to a different culture is always a very difficult challenge especially when you are a teenager. You want to do really good for your country. As you grow, you are really passionate. You want to do something for the country but unfortunately when you go to a different country, different culture, and things really go different way, so these were the challenges that I faced.

TTI: You went into transportation business in 1988. What strategy did you use to market your business?

TA: The transportation industry was already there. My strategy basically was how I really interact with the banks. What I noticed over there was banks were taking almost 5-7 days to process one transaction and the consumers were taking a lot of advantages even though if you look that in Pakistan right now, that's exactly what we had back in 1998 over there.

So I ended up meeting basically there with Federal Reserve Bank chairman and I presented him an idea about how can we really move this 5-7 days business, processing of the cheques to 24 hours. The idea was bought and after a little bit of work, we implemented that and the processes that used to take 5-7 working days was reduced to 24 hours.

TTI: You established a successful restaurant business in 2000. How do you define success in any business?

TA: You need to have a good solid infrastructure, you need to have a good vision, what has happened in the past, just leave it. Move forward, have a bright vision, have a good strategy, work on your plan and that's what it takes you to the next level.

TTI: By 2009, you are part of the energy industry. How have your priorities changed from when you started?

TA: It's all about diversification, early part of my career I was just focused on one

industry, and because of [this narrow focus I had to take some losses]. However, this is how you learn, so my learning on that was, how do I really go about it and diversify myself.

Coming from California, entering into Texas market, one of the first thing that I learned there was a deregulated market, where you could have your own company so this was an opportunity for me, that if other people are doing it, why can't I do it. So this is always a challenge that I put to myself. I always like to challenge myself – this is how I move forward.

TTI: In 2010, you added pizza hut in your portfolio, in 2011 it was KFC, in 2014 again it was pizza hut, coming over to 2016, here you took over the Houston Market with pizza hut, what advice would you like to give to someone or youth who is trying to become an entrepreneur.

TA: Loyalty, integrity, and honesty. If you keep these three things in your mind, no one can stop your success.

TTI: There is a diversity in your business, food business, transportation business, energy business. How to you manage this

diversity, did you hire any consultants or it was your own idea?

TA: In order to be very successful in the business, you have to be a very hands-on person. And if you are a very hands on-person, the first thing that comes to your mind is, how do you really analyze and dissect your profit and loss and balance sheet?

This is how the new idea generated when it comes to the energy side of it. One day, I was looking at my profit and loss statement, and one of the major expense on the profit and loss statement was the energy side of it. After digging through, after researching a little bit, I decided to open up my own energy company.

Of course I did hire some consultants, all the key success on that one is how do you really engage those people, how to you really earn their loyalty, integrity, and how honest they can be. I have picked very different industries but again having the right people at the right time and right place, makes you very successful. An idea starts for you and then you start looking for the right people.

TTI: Why do Pakistani's not excel in Pakistan?

TA: What I have observed is when we go abroad, there is a system in place. We become part of the system, unfortunately the system we have in place [in Pakistan] is doesn't really suit to the new generation, to the people who want to excel. So what happens is, we do have this passion, we do have the drive, and we arrive in a country where a system is in place, everything starts falling into place very quickly.

TTI: I would like you to mention about largest cricket stadium in USA?

TA: I was born and raised in Sialkot, we are passionate about cricket, well I used to play cricket here, everyone used to come and watch. We had only one ground in our village and once it was taken, a lot of kids actually lost their way, going into drugs, etc.

But once I settled down stateside, all of a sudden and I woke up and I said you know what this is what I really used to love. The next question was what can I do to bring the kids to the field. The idea was that if I can bring kids to the field and they start playing, they can stay away from the drugs, then I think I have accomplished my mission.

Thus began the story of the largest cricket stadium in the United States.



Are Bots Ready to Edge Humans Out of Networked Trading?

There are reasons why bots will outperform humans in trading crypto, stocks, etc.



The role of robots is rapidly growing in online trading of cryptocurrency, gold, major international currencies, and commodities. Many investors are purchasing robots and assign them tasks to carry out trading of whatever trade they chose. For example, at one time, a robot can be involved in trading of Bitcoin on a full-time basis. The robot, supported by a software makes decisions to buy and sell selected cryptocurrency on a daily basis amid price fluctuations in the market and generates profit for the owner.

An entrepreneur in Bali, Indonesia purchased two trading robots two months ago, one for cryptocurrency and the other for gold. He bought these at USD 200 each and earning more or less USD 500 to USD 600 in a month in profit with one-time USD 5000 investment. Those who have invested more are earning more, which is guaranteed by the companies selling robots.

Before venturing into this technology-oriented trade of cryptocurrencies, gold, and major currencies and commodities, for

investors it is important to be familiar with the markets trends and have a good investment plan. An android may be a useful tool, nonetheless, it is not feasible for every trader/investor. Here are a few pros and cons of buying a bitcoin robot.

First, investors must keep in their mind that bitcoin robot is not a good option to earn money. Some of the companies only allow investors to place trading and never facilitate them to withdraw their capital. Secondly, trading is only online and if investors wish to take away their cash, they can lose their capital. Many scams have indicated that at the time when investors request for a withdrawal, they were not able to receive money back. This is happening because the customer care of the robot will not consider investors' withdrawal requests and instead mail them a form with apology and investors' accounts can be clogged by the bitcoin bot.

Furthermore, investors must get know how of the digital currency market functions

before buying a Bitcoin robot. This is a good way for carrying out a smooth trade with robots.

Meanwhile, investors should also keep in mind that some robotic software are somewhat misleading and don't offer accurate information for buying coins which can be more profitable. Thus, traders need to choose a robot that has a proven trading and expenditure plan.

How to Select a Suitable Robot

A bitcoin bot can help investors to trade in the easiest way and to make a quick profit. The most useful trading method is the selection of 24 hours a day trading mode and make money amid fluctuations in prices. Several technology companies are not offering 24 hours daily trading pattern and they are restricting investors to standard market trend with limited orders and in this scenario Bitcoin bot can be a godsend for new investors in the market.

A main advantage of a Bitcoin robot is that investors trading with robot at any time in a day and in 24 hours the robot automatically crafts the ideal price when prices are moving up and down. For the investors who are not familiar with the markets, for them a bitcoin android will be useful to identify trading opportunities.

Trading Cryptocurrency a Fashion Now

Globally, trading cryptocurrency has emerged as a fashion. Since 2009, people are investing and earning money from cryptocurrency. The availability of wallets has solved the problem of keeping safe cryptocurrency.

The main challenge for trading of cryptocurrency is to select the right tool and it requires a good exposure of investors in the market. There are some tools available in the market with facilitate new investors to make profits with automated robotic technology.

The software tool is controlled by a licensed broker and it ensure security and credibility of the tool and trading patterns. In the crypto market, a group of traders have developed this software and connected it with the cryptocurrency market statistics with an inbuilt robotic technology that is capable of trading on behalf of the investors.

Essentially, in the present world of internet and android mobile phones, every person is keen to make money in as much little time

as is possible. Trading with robots is the easiest way to learn basic functioning and capacity of the robot to perform deliver in live trading sessions.

Crypto Trade in Comeback Pro

Step1: Interested investors would have to visit the website and create a free trading account. They would have to provide some details like email-id, user identification, and payment methods.

Step2: For the benefit of the investors, a basic tutorial is given to them after sign-up and they are trained well before undertaking online trading with robots.

Step3: This coaching session make investors mature to conduct trading through a web-based trading network. Additionally, trading alerts will continue to direct the investors about the trading scenario in the market.

Exclusive Features of the Tool

Some well-known and reputed brokers have issued step-by-step guidelines for newcomers in this field. Below are the key points of online trading with robots.

Provision of security: With rapid expansion of internet, the culture of hacking and fraud too has become its integral part. However, the robots and trading tools ensure safety and security of the investors' money and digital currency.

Trusted brokers: Meanwhile, many brokers offering trading robots have maintained their reputation in the market and they are making every possible effort for the security of the money of investors.

Easy withdrawal: Investors can withdraw money 24/7 by filling a request form and within 24 hours the money is transferred back into their bank account.

Sell/buy alerts: The newcomers in the market can learn through trading alerts. These trading alerts work on the advanced algorithm and provide an easy overview of the market to beginners.

The transactions of trade can take place rapidly in comparison with other tools. When a trading session completes, investors can withdraw their money without paying any fee or charges.

A 24/7 customer support system is ready to facilitate traders pertaining to their trading and payment matters. Newcomers are given demonstrations of trading through robots before their practical entry in the market.

Importantly, registration of investors is free of cost, but when they make profit, brokers charge minimum fee for their teams which are working behind the robots and managing live trading sessions.

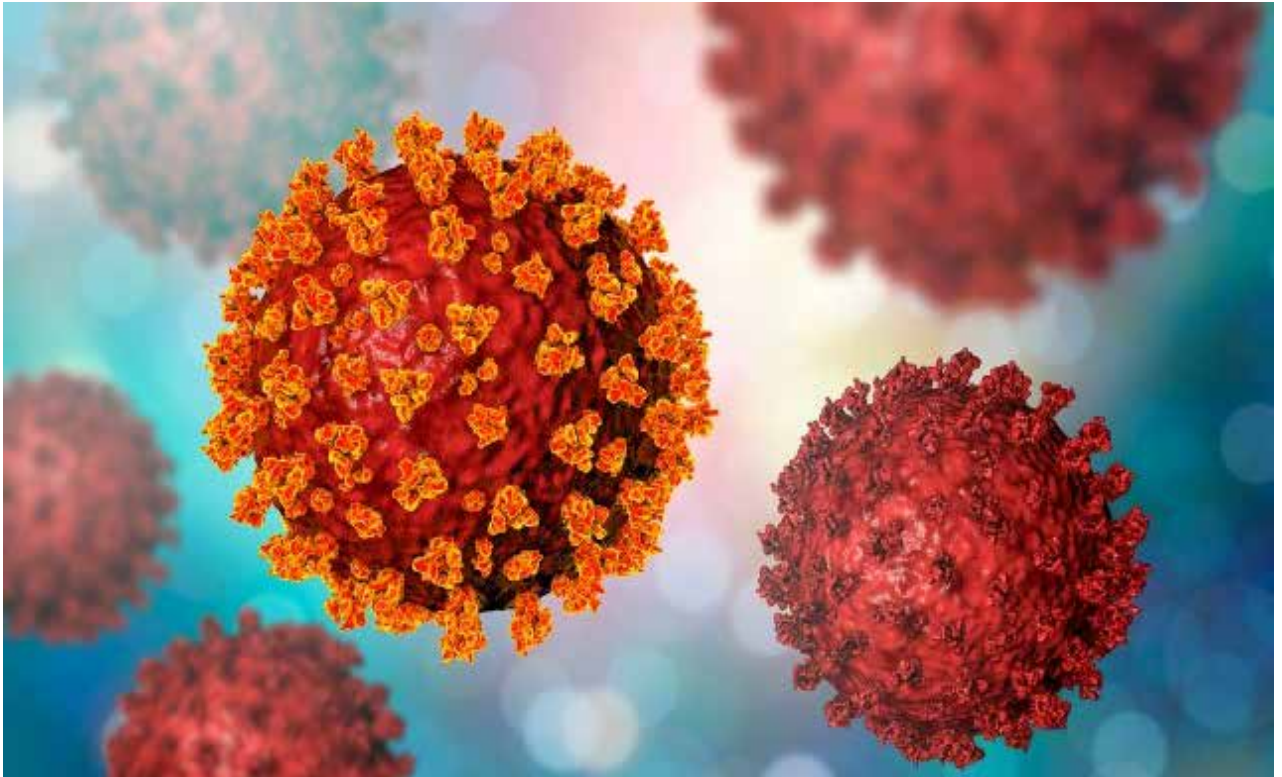
With this online system, investors can begin trading with as low as USD 500 and at a later stage, they can enhance their investment.

By Javed Mahmood



Pakistan is Easing Restrictions as the Fifth Wave of Covid-19 Ebbs

All restrictions stand as before in cities and districts reporting more than 10 percent positivity rate



By Noor Aftab

The Omicron-driven fifth wave of the Covid-19 outbreak has moved beyond its peak, with both caseload and positivity rate on a steady decline and with mortality and hospitalization rates reaching their minimal levels by early March.

The average number of daily new infections in Pakistan fell by more than 4,800 over approximately the first three weeks of February 2022.

Statistics

Daily infections in the third week of February decreased to 743,000 per day on average compared to 1,185,000 the week before. Daily hospital census in the same week decreased to 24,000 per day from 37,000 before this period. Daily reported cases decreased to 2,700 per day on average compared to 5,100 during the earlier week.

Based on the GISAID and various national databases, the Alpha variant is circulating in six provinces and territories; the Beta variant in two provinces

and territories; Delta variant in seven provinces and territories; Gamma variant in five provinces and territories; and Omicron variant is circulating in seven territories.

By 1 June 2022, daily estimated infections are projected to decline to 36,590; cases in the third dose scenario to decline to 80 per day; daily hospital census to decline to 500; and daily hospital census in the third dose scenario to decline to 260.

Vaccination

As we move into the final week of February, Pakistan has administered at least 205,527,345 doses of Covid-19 vaccines. Assuming every person needs two doses, this is enough to have vaccinated about 47.5 percent of the country's population.

During the last week, Pakistan averaged about 2,048,124 doses each day. Almost 59 percent of students between the ages of 12 and 17 have been fully vaccinated and 3.4 million

people over the age of 18 have been administered booster doses.

At present, 61,329 teams are working and administering 2.2 million doses daily. At this rate, it will take further 22 days to administer enough doses for another 10 percent of the population.

Out of 150 million population over 12 years of age, 90 million (58 percent) people have been fully vaccinated so far, and by March 2022, this number will increase to 110 million (72 percent).

What medical experts say

While the current trajectory is very favorable, several steps should be taken to guard against risks from future variants. First, surveillance efforts should be maintained and strengthened so that if a new variant emerges, the country is prepared in advance.

Secondly, purchasing effective antivirals should be accelerated if possible so

that sufficient doses are available if a new variant, particularly one that is more severe than Omicron, emerges. Even in the absence of a new variant, epidemiologists expect Covid-19 to return in the winter of 2022, so there will be a need for antivirals even in the absence of a new variant.

Thirdly, efforts to persuade the unvaccinated to get vaccinated should continue. A careful consideration should be given to plan the fourth dose of vaccine. Evidence shows that immunity after a third dose wanes steadily.

Given that the Omicron wave is rapidly subsiding, a major push on a fourth dose now seems unnecessary except in high-risk individuals. A fourth dose push when a new variant emerges, or later in the year in anticipation of a winter increase in Omicron, may be more appropriate.

Fourth, even as most individuals return to pre-Covid-19 activities, individuals at risk (over 65, immunocompromised, and multiple co-morbidities) should take precautions if and when transmission increases. The precautions should include using a high-quality facemask, avoiding high-risk indoor settings and social distancing.

Omicron BA.2

The BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron variant is not only faster at spreading, but may also cause more severe diseases. The yet-to-be peer-reviewed findings, recently posted on the preprint repository BioRxiv, show that the BA.2 sub variant may have features that make it as capable of causing serious illness as older coronavirus variants.

Neutralisation experiments show that the vaccine-induced humoral immunity fails to function against BA.2 like BA.1. Although BA.2 is considered as an Omicron variant, its genomic sequence is heavily different from BA.1, which suggests that the virological characteristics of BA.2 are different from that of BA.1 variant.

Relaxations in restrictions

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) removed three cities from the list of cities/districts where it earlier decided to keep restrictions in place, as Covid-19 positivity rates decline countrywide.

NCOC earlier issued a list of six cities and districts where the Covid-19 positivity was higher than 10 percent, saying that the already enforced restrictions would remain in place there. The cities and districts included Gilgit, Muzaffarabad, Mardan, Karachi, Hyderabad, and Peshawar. However, the NCOC removed Karachi, Hyderabad and Peshawar from the list after witnessing a declining coronavirus trend.

Some of the general curbs enforced in the country have been relaxed including occupancy level of public transport increased from 70 percent to 80 percent; occupancy level of railways increased from 80 percent to 100 percent; and education sector allowed opening with 100 percent attendance with stringent Covid-19 protocols.



The NCOC further relaxed restrictions on indoor and outdoor gatherings in cities with a positivity rate of less than 10 percent. Guests limit increased from 300 to 500 in indoor gatherings of all types, including weddings.

Outdoor gatherings of all types, including weddings are now allowed for fully vaccinated individuals without any guest limit. Ban on meal/beverages serving during in-flight/land journey and public transport for domestic travel extended.

In cities with a positivity rate higher than 10 percent, indoor gatherings of all types, including weddings remain banned. Outdoor gatherings, including weddings,

have been allowed with a cap of 300 fully-vaccinated guests. There is a complete ban on indoor dining. However, outdoor dining for fully-vaccinated citizens and takeaway service has been allowed.

Restaurants and eateries have been allowed to offer takeaway service 24/7. Indoor gyms at 50 percent capacity for fully-vaccinated individuals have been allowed. Cinemas have been allowed to open at 50 percent capacity for full-vaccinated individuals only. Shrines have been allowed to open at 50 percent capacity for fully-vaccinated individuals only.

There is a complete ban on contact sports like karate, boxing, martial arts, water polo, kabaddi and wrestling. Children will

continue to attend schools with strict SOPs, while those above 12-years of age must be fully vaccinated.

Railways has been allowed to operate with 100 percent occupancy level for vaccinated individuals only. Wearing masks has been made mandatory throughout the journey. However, a complete ban on serving meals/snacks during the journey will remain in place.

Offices have been allowed to operate at 100 percent capacity of fully vaccinated workers with normal working hours. Vaccination for students above 12 years has been made mandatory (at least one dose). No exemption other than medical reasons will be entertained.

Closure for Noor Mukaddam's Family

Civil society circles cautiously hail the trial court ruling although both parties are expected to go into appeal



By Asadullah

After about a four months long trial, the Additional District and Sessions Judge (ADSJ) of Islamabad on February 24 announced the verdict in the murder case of Noor Mukadam convicting the main accused Zahir Jaffer and sentencing him to death.

Domestic servants of Jaffer's family Mohammad Iftikhar and Jan Mohammad – the co-accused in the case – were sentenced to 10 years in imprisonment.

In a packed courtroom, the Additional District and Sessions Judge, Ata Rabbani, announced the verdict which the court has reserved on 22 February. The court also convicted Zahir Jaffer for raping Noor Mukadam whom he mercilessly killed and beheaded and handed him 25 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of PKR 200,000.

However, parents of the principal accused, his father Zakir Jaffer and mother Asmat Adamji, and all other suspects including TherapyWorks employees, were acquitted.

Muhammad Iftikhar and Jan Mohammad, who were working at Zahir's home as watchman and gardener respectively, were punished for abetment of crime. Another employee, Jameel (chef) was acquitted by the court.

Discussing the prosecution evidence, the court noted that Noor Mukadam

went to the house of Zahir Jaffer of her own will and after a brawl she attempted to escape from the house on 19 July 2021 to save her life but the watchman did not allow her.

The principal accused overpowered her and forcibly took her to the room.

She lastly attempted to save life on July 20 by jumping from the room situated at first floor and rushed towards the main gate having mobile phone in her hand but the accused Iftikhar and Jan Mohammad did not allow her to go outside the house. The main accused Zahir Jaffer again forcibly took her to the room and locked her.

The judge noted that both the domestic servants witnessed the cruel treatment meted out to the victim by Zahir Jaffer but did not bother to inform the police. As per the verdict, through this evidence the prosecution has established the role of all the three convicts.

The court absolved the chef Jamil Ahmed saying that "there is no evidence against him regarding the commission of offence, he is not visible in the CCTV footage, even he was not performing his duty at main gate."

The verdict further stated that the reports of Punjab Forensic Science

Agency (PFSA) substantiated the allegation that Zahir Jaffer after forcibly detaining her into the room, raped Noor Mukadam before beheading her.

It said that the counsel of the principal accused in order to dodge the legal course, made efforts to prove the Zahir was mentally incompetent. However the medical board declared him mentally fit.

Discussing the role of Zakir Jaffer and Asmat, the verdict states: "It is admitted fact that the accused Zakir Jaffer and Asmat were not present in the house of occurrence from July 18, 2021 July 20, 2021 as they had gone to Karachi." Moreover, the complainant Shaukat Ali Mukadam nominated him as accused in supplementary statement.

The court rejected the allegations that they were involved in the murder and then tried to destroy the evidence through Therapy Works.

"It cannot be presumed that the accused Zakir Jaffer and Asmat Zakir while sitting in Karachi had facilitated and abetted their son in commission of murder, abduction, wrongful confinement. There is no strong and solid evidence to prove that they had knowledge that their son was going to commit murder of Noor Mukadam", the verdict said.

It went on to state that “it was the duty of the prosecution to establish that the accused had knowledge of the plan of their son, then the legal burden could not be on the shoulder of the accused to inform the police to save the life of Noor Mukadam” adding that “mere on the basis of the CDR the court cannot presume that they are involved in any manner in the crime committed by their son.”

As far as the role of Tahir Zahoor and his therapy workers namely Dileep Kumar, Wamiq Riaz, Samar Abbas, Abdul Haq and Amjad Mehmood is concerned, the verdict said that Zahoor did not go to the house.

The court noted that the accused did not remove any evidence from the crime scene, and “the crime scene was intact when the [investigation officer] visited the spot.”

Taking a lenient view for therapy workers of not informing the police about the murder, the judge termed this as “natural phenomenon” saying that “in the worried and shocking condition the members of therapy team could not inform the police immediately.”

Subsequently, the court ruled that the prosecution has succeeded to establish the case against Zahir Jaffer and two domestic servants watchman Iftikhar and gardener Jan Mohammad.

However, the verdict absolved the parents of principal accused and therapy workers saying that: “they are acquitted of the charges leveled against them.”

Earlier, in his closing arguments, complainant Shaukat Ali Mukasam's lawyer Shah Khawar said that the evidence laid by the prosecution is based on the recording of CCTV footage, DNA and forensic reports.

He argued that the prosecution has proved its case beyond any shadow of doubt and the accused are liable to be punished strictly in accordance with law.

The prosecutor Rana Hassan Abbas told the court that the accused was caught along with the murder weapon from the crime scene, his shirt was stained with blood. He requested the court to give exemplary punishment to the accused persons since this case is being followed by every citizen, and has become a test case for the judiciary.

Advocate Asad Jamal, counsel of Asmat Jaffer mother of the principal accused Zahir Jaffer informed the court that the only evidence against Asmat was Call Details Record (CDR). He pointed out that the record was obtained from the office of the Superintendent of Police and it did not link her with the commission of crime.

Advocate Basharat Ullah Khan, counsel of Zakir Jaffer, father of the principal accused told the court that all the state machinery was after this case. He criticized interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed for conducting press conferences related to this murder case.

He however requested the court to decide the case on merit as it deals with the routine cases since media hype has turned this a high profile case.

Zahir Jaffer's counsel pointed out the prosecution did not produce any eye witness in the murder trial. He argued that the prosecution has failed to clarify as to why there were no finger prints of the accused on the murder weapon.

The lawyer representing the domestic staff argued that they have informed the parents about the presence and brawl between Noor Mukadam and Zahir Jaffer. The lawyer said that since Noor Mukadam was a frequent visitor of Jaffer's house therefore the domestic staff did not expect she might be murdered.

Noor 27 was murdered and beheaded allegedly by Zahir Jaffer on 20 July last year. Following the gruesome murder, the accused was taken into the custody.

Later on the police widened the scope of this case and arrested Zahir Jaffer's parents, domestic staff and therapy workers.

As per the challan submitted before the trial court in September, she lost six life-saving opportunities due to the active connivance of the accomplices of the principal accused, Zahir Jaffer.

Moreover, the challan said that on the day of the incident, July 20, Jaffer had contacted his father, who was in Karachi, on phone four times and the latter knew about the illegal detention and the situation at their home.

But his parents never informed the police,

and even after their son beheaded the girl his father Zakir Jaffer tried to relax the murderer and told him: “You need not worry, I can handle this, I am sending people to rescue you and to dispose of the dead body.”

As per the challan, Jaffer was scheduled to fly to the US on July 19 at 3:50pm via Qatar Airlines but he did not go.

The challan stated that on July 18, Noor came to Jaffer's house in F-7/4 and the security guard let her in. A pet dog also expressed familiarity with her. On July 20, both entered into a brawl after Noor turned down his marriage proposal and then the alleged killer illegally detained her in a room, the challan referred to the statement of Jaffer in which he confessed to killing Noor.

The accused stated that Noor had rejected his marriage proposal and he detained her inside a room. She got furious over her forced detention and warned Jaffer of consequences. She threatened to file a complaint against him with the police.

As per the statement, Jaffer informed his parents about the incident and ordered the domestic staff not to allow anyone to come in or let her go from the house.

The challan said Noor managed to come out of the room and ran away towards the main gate but the security guard Iftikhar did not let her go. This was an opportunity where she could have saved her life, it said.

Jaffer then detained her in the room again, the report said, adding that Noor again made a desperate effort and jumped out from the washroom's window and ran towards the main gate. However, the security guard instead of helping her went to the basement.

Referring to the Call Detail Record (CDR), the challan stated that before killing and beheading Noor, Jaffer had made calls to his parents at 2:21pm, 3pm, 6:35pm and 7:29pm.

The report said in order to conceal the evidence and the body of the deceased, Jaffer called five Therapyworks employees to his F-7/4 residence - the crime scene.

Karachi's Violent Street Criminals

How can random hoodlums rob, kill, maim, and rape people with impunity without the law turning a blind eye?



By Azfar Ashfaq

Snatching of mobile phones, cash and valuables at gunpoint by armed muggers is not new for millions of citizens of Karachi. One or two in every household have a story to tell as to how they fell prey to street criminals riding on motorcycles in broad daylight and how lucky they were to escape with their life. However, 28-year-old Shahrukh was not that lucky.

On 12th January, the mother and sister of Shahrukh reached their home on Kashmir Road in a rickshaw after shopping and a lone mugger followed them on a motorbike. He held them at gunpoint and was snatching their jewellery and purses when Shahrukh, who got married around a week ago, came outside. Sensing an imminent threat, the mugger fired at him, leaving him in a pool of blood to die as they rode away.

The killing sparked widespread condemnation compelling the police to trace out the killer. It turned out that the killer was himself a cop. Under controversial circumstances, he committed suicide when a police team tried to arrest him.

The actual number of crimes of mobile phone snatching, house robberies, car and motorbike theft and snatching is much higher in Karachi compared to the official figures as many victims do not bother to go to a police station to lodge an FIR. Those who do show up are often discouraged by the police on different pretexts since no SHO wants his high-ups to know about a surge in any type of crime within his jurisdiction.

Against this backdrop, the Surjani Town police registered a house robbery case on 14 February in which the complainant stated that two robbers barged into his house on the night of 13 February, held them at gunpoint, collected cash and jewellery and gang-raped his 17-year-old daughter before they fled.

When the police started investigation, it came to their knowledge that there were several similar unreported incidents. In a matter of three days, police traced the duo and claimed to have killed them in an encounter. The police disclosure that the

criminals, hailing from Rajanpur, had raped 15 girls in as many house robberies is enough to send a chill down everyone's spine.

In the morning of 18th February, TV journalist Athar Mateen was shot dead by armed muggers when he tried to stop them from looting a citizen by hitting their motorcycle with the car he was driving on a main road in North Nazimabad. He was returning home after dropping off his children to their school. To date, his killers remain at large.

Just two days ago, 10 to 12 armed robbers looted around 100 citizens trapped in a traffic jam in Korangi Causeway and no police or Rangers patrol reached there to stop them.

Since the beginning of this year, 14 people have lost their lives and over 150 suffered bullet wounds in various incidents of street crime in Karachi alone. Despite the huge presence of police and Rangers, the impunity with which the armed criminals are

roaming in the metropolis and using their weapons against unarmed citizens is mind boggling.

CCTV footage of various incidents that went viral on social media contribute to the growing sense of insecurity among Karachiites.

Earlier this month, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah brought in a new Karachi police chief, Additional Inspector General Ghulam Nabi Memon. It was said that his predecessor was removed because of an alarming surge in street crime.

In his interaction with the media, he concedes that many crimes in Karachi go unreported, but says he has ordered all SHOs to ensure registration of FIRs of all crimes without any delay. "Lahore is a smaller city as compared to Karachi, but annually 200,000 crimes are reported there. In contrast, there were annually 45,000 crimes in Karachi in 2020, and 84,000 crimes in 2021 only because the police convinced the victims not to get their FIRs registered," he said.

Regardless of the numbers, it is clear that law enforcement agencies in Karachi have failed to protect the life and property of citizens. And adding injury to insult, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government,

which has been ruling Sindh since 2008, tried to use the situation to their political advantage when its key representatives including the chief minister claimed that the rising crime trend in Karachi was because of bad economic hardship and inflation.

Opposition parties in the city have been pointing an accusing finger towards the provincial government for appointing what they call "non-locals" to Karachi police by taking bribes.

"Local policing is a must for restoring a durable peace and elimination of street crime in Karachi," says Mohajir Qaumi Movement-Haqiqi chairman Afaq Ahmed. "If the rulers are not ready to appoint locals then peaceful citizens of Karachi will have to take steps for protecting them and their families."

Similar views are expressed by MQM-P. "Both the criminals as well as law enforcers are non-locals. Over 10,000 incidents of mugging, robberies, and vehicle theft have taken place in less than two months of 2021. How is it possible without the collusion between law enforcers and criminals?" asks senior leader Kanwar Naveed Jameel.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's parliamentary

party leader in the Sindh Assembly Khurram Sher Zaman seeks intervention of the federal government as he wrote a letter to the interior minister asking him to "take whatever appropriate measures are available" saying "the people of Karachi have lost confidence and hope in the Sindh government and Karachi police".

Following strong criticism at the failure of law enforcement agencies, the Sindh CM chaired a meeting on law and order and berated police and Rangers high-ups for failing to rein in criminals.

"Where are your SHOs, what are they doing and what is their performance," Shah was reported to have asked the Sindh and Karachi police chiefs at the meeting. He also expressed serious concerns over the release of suspected criminals by courts on bail and ordered the authorities to introduce the electronic tagging of all such criminals.

For many in Karachi, all these steps are cosmetic in nature until the government takes a firm action against those who buy looted goods from criminals and sell them at their shops and in markets or send them to other cities. After all, they are the ones who are making money out of people's miseries.



The Rise and Rise of the Lynch Mob in Pakistan

What will it take for Pakistan to successfully tackle the issue of self-righteous mobs dispensing what they consider justice at will?



By Aimen Bukhari

In recent years, Pakistan has seen an alarming rise in the mob lynching, especially by religiously-motivated groups of people. In the past three months alone, the nation has witnessed horrible incidents of lynch mobs targeting people arbitrarily accused of blasphemy. People in Pakistan have turned into lynch mobs because of a lack of law and order.

The lynching problem has a significant impact on Pakistan's worldwide image and is a major human right and rule of law concern in the Muslim nation of 220 million people. As a result of the widespread condemnation of the Khanewal incident and Mushtaq's lynching, the country's authorities seem to have woken up and taken a much-needed hard line stance.

"We have zero tolerance for anyone taking the law into their own hands," PM Imran Khan tweeted on February 13. "Mob lynching will be punished with the full force of the law".

Police have apprehended over 100 members of the mob. Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, Khan's advisor, said Pakistanis are unified in their opposition to mob lynching. "Muslim scholars believe a mob should not have punished him," he said. He said, "We have rules, and people are punished for breaking them," referring to Pakistani law, which makes blasphemy a capital offence.

"What they did has brought infamy to Islam and Pakistan," he said on Radio Mashaal. Ashrafi also asserted that the present administration is initiating a massive awareness campaign. In order to promote tolerance and interfaith peace, "we are organising committees at all federal and provincial levels," he stated.

However, it is not just individuals accused of blasphemy who are sought out and frequently slain. There have been several occasions on which people suspected of being involved in the theft have faced the mob's fury, like in the tragic example of two brothers, falsely recognised as robbers, who were lynched in

Sialkot some years ago. This is a dangerous trend that, if allowed to continue, may reach a stage where no one will be able to manage marauding lynch mobs.

Violence conducted by mobs against minority populations is typically premised on claims of blasphemy. More often than not, such claims end up being unfounded. Even in the instance of the Gojra massacre, a rumour about the violation of hallowed religious scripture contributed to the killing of innocent Christians.

While it may appear that the most vulnerable in society are being preyed on by mob fury, the fact is that no one is exempt, regardless of one's riches or rank. The killing of Salman Taseer, former governor of Punjab, confirms this fact.

Law and order are certainly public goods. Just like clean air, the benefits of sustaining peace and order accrue to all, not just to a few. Law and order are critical to the well-being of both the state and society.

As per Zohra Yousuf, the former chairman of Pakistan's Human Rights Commission, recent declarations by government officials of no tolerance for lynching mobs are meaningless since they fail to address the fundamental concerns of rising religious radicalism as well as abolish or modify the country's blasphemy legislation.

She said Khan's administration caved in to the Tehreek-e Labaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right organisation agitating around the issue of blasphemy. Everyone knows how blasphemy laws are often utilised as a means of resolving conflicts. People cash in and exploit blasphemy laws. In an interview with Radio Mashaal, she said that this is what occurred to the Sri Lankan manager. If we must have these laws, we must change them so that they are not abused.

However, in Pakistan, opposing the blasphemy legislation could lead to more violence and death threats. When Salam Taseer, the governor of Punjab, questioned the blasphemy laws in 2011, one of his police guards shot and killed him.

But with the rising incidents of mob violence, it is time for the government to think hard about what kind of nation it wants in the future and take steps accordingly. After another lynching event, Asad

Jamal, a law specialist, warns that Islamabad's method for dealing with the issue would not work. He said that "nothing will change" until it is treated as a national emergency, necessitating far-reaching changes.

Jamal believes that the administration will have to change the present curriculum to make any progress. Students are being indoctrinated into fundamentalism by the existing syllabus, according to Jamal. He believes that blasphemy must be treated with extreme prudence by the judiciary to ensure that the courts do not hear bogus cases and that people falsely accused of blasphemy receive justice.

According to him, "neither the current government nor the state" is ready to proceed down that path.

However, this rising mob violence can only be explained by a thorough investigation. A broader view of the issue would reveal that frustration over perceived social and economic ills, a lack of access to justice, religious fervour, and intolerance fostered by the Zia regime, and, most importantly, a failure to enforce the law play a significant role in the rise of today's fanatical mobs ready to use violence to solve their problems.

And it's a shame that, when it comes to blasphemy claims, certain media outlets take advantage of this inclination by further fanning the flames.

It would be impossible to reverse this long-term tendency without a multi-pronged strategy. However, the state must first recognise the shortcomings of its own deeds and inactions. There is no way to fix the situation without first arriving at the conclusion that this trend indicates a diminution of the state's authority.

The authorities must also investigate what steps have been taken to alleviate social problems and improve the courts and law enforcement. They should also consider if our curricular, with clear undertones of intolerance and discrimination, might be a part of the problem.

It will take time and political determination to address the broader issue of rising intolerance. In the short run, the nation's discourse has to be tamed in order to alleviate the worries and rage that fuel these mobs of people.

One crucial responsibility of the media is to convey the word that, no matter how strong the provocation, taking the law into your own hands is never justified. As a rule, this idea should have no exceptions or caveats.



The Sad Plight of Sindh's Wretched of the Earth

Hardly a month goes by when we do not receive reports of an outrage against the poor and the down-trodden



By Hamza Qureshi

Another month, another outrage against the lives and properties of a marginalised group in Sindh, another iteration of the system that invariably consigns such outrages to oblivion without there being reckoning, ever.

This time, it was the Bhand community, with five of its members allegedly murdered in cold blood over a land dispute by the powerful Zardari tribe. They ended a 60-hour-long sit-in after an FIR was registered against the seventeen Zardari tribesmen nominated by the Bhand.

The sit-in was accompanied by a blockade of the National Highway, bringing vehicular traffic between Sindh and Punjab to a halt. The Bhand Community was protesting against murder of its five members in locality of Nawab Wali Muhammad, Nawabshah.

The unfortunate souls were killed in an alleged attack by Zardari tribe. As per our sources, a recent land dispute has caused this conflict.

Earlier in December 2021, a sit-in was arranged by Mallah and Bhand Communities at National Highway near Qazi Ahmed, Shaheed Benazirabad District. Nawabshah District was renamed to Shaheed Benazirabad by then PPP's Provincial Government in 2008. The sit-in was attended by hundreds of political workers and social activists.

That time, the highway remained closed for two days. Mallah and Bhand Communities were protesting against illegal occupation of hundreds acre of their ancestral agricultural land, allegedly by members of Zardari tribe.

Eventually, a jirga was called to resolve the dispute. The jirga was held on 3 January under supervision of Sardar Manzoor Panhwar. It was agreed that the final judgement will be announced in a period of 15 days. Local sources shared that there was a delay in announcement.

Meanwhile, on 12 February, members of Zardari tribe reportedly reached the lands

in 20 vehicles and tried to harvest the crops. They were also accompanied by Police. The farmers and workers belonging to Bhand Community resisted.

Zardaris allegedly opened fire which led to killing of five members of Bhand Community and the local Police Chowki Incharge, Sub Inspector Abdul Hameed Khoso. Ten people were also injured in this incident.

To vent their outrage and to get justice to their slain, the members of Bhand and Mallah communities blockaded the National Highway. They claimed that the Zardaris are trying to settle their lands with support from ruling party of Sindh. They further allege that the district police is also backing the culprits in encroachment of 800-acre land.

The sit-in was attended by several political leaders including Arbab Ghulam Raheem, Ayaz Latif Palijo of Qaumi Awami Tehreek, Syed Zain Shah of Sindh United Party, Nationalist leader Roshan Buriro and Leader of the Opposition in Sindh Assembly Haleem Adil Shaikh.

The political figures supported the cause and expressed their sorrow over the deaths. Ayaz Latif Palijo said that the Chief Minister must himself visit the Bhand Community and an FIR for the incident must be immediately registered.

The protestors were adamant they would not allow the traffic to flow until culprits including Mohsin Zardari and Abid Zardari were caught. They further asked the government for suspending the Mukhtiarkar, CIA Incharge, and the SSP in-charge.

Our local sources shared that the Mohsin Zardari is closely related to main leader of ruling party in the province. Senior Journalist Imdad Somro has reported that the high-ups wanted to develop this fertile patch land into a hunting ground.

The police ultimately registered an FIR against the 17 nominated persons and arrested seven of the accused. Mediation between the administration and the two parties was assisted by former Sindh law minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar, PPP MPA Ghulam Qadir Chandio, Syed Zain Shah of the SUP and Deputy Commissioner Amir Panhwar.

Later, SSP Amir Saud Magsi went into the sit-in and announced alongside the protestors that seven of the culprits had been apprehended and the police were trying to arrest the perpetrators who remained on the run. With this announcement, the sit-in ended and traffic was allowed to pass through.

Interestingly, two FIRs have been registered for the incident. The first FIR is based on a complaint lodged by the Bhand community against the Zardari tribe. The other FIR recording the murder of SHO Sub-Inspector Waheed Khoso, has named the members of both tribes – Zardari and Bhand.

The arrested suspects belonging to Zardari tribe were presented in court against sections of murder and attempted murder. SSP Amir Saud Magsi remembered Waheed Khoso, the slain police officer, as a brave and fearless officer.

Later, the bodies of deceased were laid to rest in their village, Ismail Bhand, Qazi Ahmed. Funerals were attended by hundreds of people.

A team of The Truth International (TTI) visiting the area ahead of this tragic incident

observed that the administration was not able to play its full role due to political and religious pressure. It would seem the provincial government has become a handmaiden of the local feudal lords including sardars, peers, and waderas.

The elitist credentials of the administration are cemented when

The politically powerful families of Sindh ensure the administration's allegiance by placing their own sons in civil and police establishments, who then use their offices to defend feudal or tribal turf. In effect, this puts the entirety of executive resources at the personal disposal of the high and mighty of the province.

Shahrukh Jatui, who received a life sentenced for murder, is one example. His family managed to afford him a life of luxury in prison during his case hearings and eventually managed to buy him a leave on medical grounds, putting him in a deluxe suit of a privately owned clinic.

Meanwhile, we also have 23-years old Rubab Chandio, whose father, grandfather, and paternal uncle were gunned down. She is still fighting for justice while the main culprits remain at large.



Eschatology and Global Political Dynamics

How Jewish End Times beliefs are key to an understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict



By Azmat M Saqib

Part 1

Study of end times is Eschatology

Expressing his contempt of premillennial belief in the Rapture and Tribulation in his book 'Keeping Faith', this how President Jimmy Carter describes them:

“One of the most bizarre admixtures of religion and government is the strong influence of some Christian fundamentalists on US policy in the Middle East....Their religious premise is....when the Messiah returns, true believers will be lifted into heavens, where, with God, they will observe the torture of most other humans who are left behind....It is the injection of these beliefs into American governmental policies that is a cause for concern.

“The believers are convinced that they have a personal responsibility to hasten this coming of the “Rapture” in order to fulfill Biblical prophecy. Their agenda calls for a war in the Middle East against Islam (Iraq?) and the taking of the entire Holy Land by Jews (occupation of the West Bank?), with the total expulsion of all Christians and other gentiles....At this time of Rapture, all Jews will either be converted to Christianity or be burned.”

President Carter’s description demonstrates that the belief in eschatology even in modern and postmodern times is alive and well, especially in the foreign policy circles of Washington, Tel Aviv, and Tehran.

This article is based on a study conducted in 2010 at National Security Analysis Department of Johns Hopkins University, USA. It covers beliefs about the End Times of the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and

how these beliefs express themselves through foreign policy and conflict.

End Times beliefs of all the three are based on their Scriptures and sayings of their Prophets and Saints. Historically, Jews in Diaspora and Christians in 16th and 17th centuries Religious Wars, experienced violence and sufferings which transformed religious concepts previously unheard-of, such as, privatization of religious beliefs, freedom of religion and conscience, and separation of Church and state.

It also led to the development of different schools of interpretations concerning apocalyptic prophecies. On the other hand, none of the Muslim catastrophes led to any permanent and fundamental changes that altered the way Muslims think about the end of history.

Despite modernism, the majority of the Muslims do not hold to the “sacred tenet of secularity” within the Western world. Instead, Muslims believe that governance and Islam should be connected, and this idea is the major theme of Islamic ideology.

All the three religions have certain commonalities when it comes to eschatology:

- i) Followers of the faiths fall into three categories, that is, fundamentalist, moderate and secular.
- ii) Attitudes toward End Times have again three categories;
 - a) After a series of End Times events, God will interfere and establish world order,
 - b) Human society will gradually evolve into the Golden age,
 - c) Some completely dismiss and ignore such prophecies.

- iii) Perspective of the Golden age stems from two questions,
 - a) whether God's interference necessary to bring in Golden age,
 - and b) can believers act so as to hasten the onset of Golden age.
- iv) Common End Times happenings are:
 - a) Societal degradation
 - b) Trials and Tribulations
 - c) Coming of the Christ
 - d) Wars of Armageddon and Gog Magog
 - e) Kingdom of heaven on earth
 - f) Final Judgement
 - g) Establishment of the eternal world (Heaven and Hell)

Judaism

Unlike Christians and Muslims, Jews do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Their belief in the End Times revolves around the first coming of the awaited Messiah. In Jewish history, several revolts against the gentile repressive orders, either in the Holy Land or in certain parts of Europe, were led by false messiahs.

To name a few, Simon Bar Kokhba was declared Messiah by a leading Rabbi of the second century; and Sabbatai Zevi declared himself messiah under 17th century Ottoman rule, but outwardly converted to Islam under duress from the Caliph. These false messiahs led failed revolts causing misery and bloodshed of Jews.

In 1897, secular socialist Jews founded the Zionist Movement to end the sufferings of Diaspora. Obligated by Lord Balfour of UK, Jewish bankers funded mass migration of Jews from Europe and the nascent state of Israel during the first half of 20th century.

Emigrants leaving settled civilized societies of Europe for wilderness of Palestine had "return to the promised land" as a key motivator. Zionists introduced a major diversion from the centuries old End Times Jewish belief that only the Messiah will end Diaspora and establish the state of Israel.

Secular Jews saw Israel as a modern state in line with European ideals. Religious Zionism, which emerged out of mass migration and the War of Independence (1948), believed in strict obedience of Torah teachings and considered the state of Israel as a pre-requisite to the Coming of the Messiah.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews consider state of Israel as a sacrilege, since according to them, only Messiah has the right to establish the state of Israel and end Diaspora.

Religious Zionist view the occupation of Palestinian land as their divine right. According to them, Israel is at a constant state of war with all those who oppose the Jewish State. This state of war will end when the Messiah comes, defeats the enemies of Israel, resurrect the Jews and establish the globally dominant State of Israel.

Studying the role of religious parties along with their End times beliefs, in the present-day 120-member Knesset, 20 percent seats are occupied by the Religious parties. Likud, a centre-right party is also a supporter of religious Zionism. If Likud party members are added to their numbers, the percentage goes to around 45 percent.

Hence, religious parties play a significant role whether in government or in opposition when it comes to policies that are effected by End Times beliefs. The Jewish right to settle in all the Palestine, future building of the Third Temple and endeavours to prepare grounds for Greater Israel are some of the items on the agendas of these parties.

Hence every Israeli coalition government will be susceptible to these religious and emotional influences, resulting in continued suffering of the Palestinian Arabs.

This political amalgam impacts the Israeli-Arab conflict in the following ways:

1. Jews will continue expanding settlements in the West Bank
2. Jews will get preference to Arabs when it comes to right of disputed land ownership
3. Isolation and weakening of Palestinian cities and towns will continue
4. Neutralization or subjugation of regional Arab States through friendship, technology assistance and coercion
5. Preemptive strikes in Gaza and Lebanon will continue
6. Aspiration to occupy East Jerusalem and the right to worship on the Temple Mount, presently under Muslim control
7. Pressurizing the American policy makers to ignore the illegal actions of the Israeli government and extract maximum financial and military aid

Jews consider it their ancestral and divine right to all of the above issues, and indirect political backing of the ruling elite has pushed the Palestinian Arabs further to the corner. Arabs view the occupiers as tyrants and transgressors to be resisted by any means possible. But the settlers are convinced that Jewish settlements are helping to speed up the coming of the Anointed One.

Western leaders trying to find a credible solution to the Middle East turmoil must understand the role of religion in the region and competing views of the End Times. They must understand the fundamentalists' views of both sides, which are the root cause of this conflict.

A better understanding of the apocalyptic views of the actors involved will help in effective communication with the two sides and in achieving a lasting agreement.

(To be continued.)

Hurtling through History

The intriguing journey of Poland's Nowa Huta from communism to capitalism



By Rana Azam

Built as a showcase of socialism soon after World War II, it came to be known as a bastion of anti-Communist struggle as the Iron Curtain started to crumble. Today, it is a living symbol of capitalist-democracy. Such is the story of Poland's Nowa Huta city.

Founded as a separate city in 1949 just east of Krakow, the country's second largest city, Nowa Huta has since become a district of its older neighbour. Its name, literally "The New Steel Mill" in Polish, is a giveaway to the city's origins: It was intended to become an ideal city for Socialist propaganda, and populated primarily by industrial workers.

Planned as a colossal centre of heavy industry, Nowa Huta is one of only two planned socialist realist settlements or districts ever built, the other being Magnitogorsk in Russia. As well, it is "one of the most renowned examples of deliberate social engineering" in the world.

In the aftermath of World War II, Poland's new the Socialist government encountered stiff resistance from middle-class residents of Kraków. A referendum held by the authorities was soundly defeated by the people of Kraków – a major embarrassment to the government.

Against this backdrop, the authorities sought to "correct the class imbalance" by building a satellite industrial city that would bring people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to the region, such as peasants and the working-class.

At the heart of the new city was - you guessed it - the colossal Vladimir Lenin Steelworks, intended to produce more steel than the entire country was able to manufacture before the war. Thus began post-war Poland's most ambitious urban planning project: a utopian socialist city that the rest of the nation could model itself after.

The urban plan of Nowa Huta itself emphasised the city's monumental character, with five large boulevards converging at the Central Square, giving Nowa Huta a distinctive pentagonal shape.

"For most of the original Nowa Hucians who migrated from rural Poland, it would have been like entering a new world – one that they themselves were helping build", BBC Travel Luka Jukic recently wrote.

"The new steelworks would be a perfect expression of Soviet-style gigantomania - a colossus demonstrating the supposedly Promethean powers of socialism to transform the human and physical landscape", Dr Katherine Lebow wrote in her 2013 book *Unfinished Utopia*.

The former Administrative Building of the Steelworks was the crowning glory of Nowa Huta's Socialist Realist architecture with its faux Renaissance exterior and luxurious interior still displaying the style's

ideal. Although it is closed to the public, the Promotion of Nowa Huta Foundation still offers tours of the building.

Stalin's death in 1953 came as a setback to this utopian project, and the subsequent wave of de-Stalinization saw the Socialist Realist style fall out of favour. Nowa Huta's massive town hall and theatre were never abandoned, and the remainder of the city was finished much more modestly.

Following the political liberalisation of the Polish October in 1956, it became possible to introduce modernist style in architecture. Polish architects were allowed to visit Stockholm to learn about the newest solutions in urban design. The earliest major demonstration of this change was what came to be known as the "Swedish" apartment block, developed according to Le Corbusier guidelines.

Notable among other buildings from that era is the Swiatowid cinema. In the 1980s, the first postmodernist buildings were built, a notable example being the Centrum E housing estate. Many apartment blocks were built using plattenbau in the 1970s and 1980s.

The story of Nowa Huta is inextricably intertwined with the story of Poland as a

nation - and that of Communism as a political ideology. Thus in 1980, when anti-Communist fervour gripped Poland, Now Huta was in the vanguard of the pro-democracy movement spearheaded by the Solidarity trade union.

As it happened, the Vladimir Lenin Steelworks of Nowa Huta - founded to bolster the region's working class credentials - had the largest workplace chapter of the union, with a membership rate of 97 percent. Equally ironically, the Catholic church emerged as a bedrock of support for the union and the protests. Poland's ruling communists found themselves standing in opposition to the workers they were meant to represent.

By 1973, the city boasted the largest statue of Lenin in Poland. However, thousands of onlookers watched the bronze monument being pulled down in 1989 after numerous protest actions by local citizens.

Also notable is the city's sacral architecture, particularly the Arka Pana (Lord's Ark) Church, built to resemble Noah's Ark. It was designed by the architects Wojciech Pietrzyk and Jan Grabacki, with the design being influenced by Le Corbusier's Notre

Dame du Haut in Ronchamp.

Today, the city boasts many tributes to ardent opponents of Communism, the ideology that led to its founding. Streets formerly named after Vladimir Lenin and the Cuban Revolution have been renamed to honour Pope John Paul II and the Polish World War II hero Wladyslaw Anders. Other streets were renamed after Edward Rydz-Smigly and Ignacy Moscicki, politicians of the pre-World War II Sanation government.

In 2004, Nowa Huta's central square, once home to a giant statue of Lenin, was renamed Plac Centralny im. Ronalda Reagana (Ronald Reagan Central Square) in honour of the former US President. However, this decision led to many objections, and the traditional name is still widely used.

Lenin's bronze statue that once stood here is now on display at the High Chaparral Museum in Hillerstorp, Sweden - although a bright green statue of a urinating Lenin was installed here as part of an arts festival in 2014.

The writer belongs to Awami Workers Party.



The Heavenly Crown of Bagh, AJK

A tourist spot and a winter sports destination with immense potential for tourism development



TTI Desk Report

Locals in Azad Kashmir's Bagh area refer to Ganga Peak as "Ganga Choti", but more commonly, it is called the Crown of Bagh. In the summer, the majestic mountain is a brilliant green, and in the winter, it is a fluffy white.

The road leading up to the peak is a popular tourist destination because of its beautiful scenery and pleasant air. Holidays bring tourists in large numbers and a swell of vehicular traffic to the region.

There are a variety of natural sights and paths along the road, including freshwater lakes and snow-covered mountains. All of this adds up to a very delightful experience. A poet appreciating Kashmir's splendour correctly remarked:

Tell me what land can boast of such treasures
Is aught so fair is aught so sweet?
Hail! Paradise of endless pleasure!
Hail! Beautiful and beloved Kashmir.

Ganga Choti is a high mountain peak at an elevation of 10,200 feet (3045 metres), located in the Pir Panjal Range in Bagh District, Azad Kashmir. The route to the peak is fairly steep. It is reachable from Sudhan Gali, Bagh, and is a four-hour hike.

It is an arduous trek because you have to gain height at every step. But the government has built impressive roads that stretch all the way to summit. So, it is up to the tourist if they want to trek or go by a car.

The trek to top gives some exceptionally magnificent views of the valley and meadows. From the peak, one can experience a 360 degree panoramic view of the whole heaven-like area. The next higher peak is named Pir Kanthi, which lies at an aerial distance of around 10 kilometres from it.

Bagh itself is a lovely city in Azad Kashmir. Kashmir, the heaven on earth, is the delight of tourists. Its picturesque

beauty and wholesome environment have earned it the name of "Tourists' Paradise."

With its lakes and mountains, its magnificent chinars and high slender poplars, delicious fruits, its serene rivers, and streams swarming with Himalayan trout, and a host of innumerable natural attractions, Kashmir has become the sine qua non of the traveller to the East. The English traveller and amateur cricketer Godfrey Thomas Vigne prophesied this in 1885.

The luscious green meadows give comfort to the eyes. You visit the valleys of Kashmir like Bagh and you just simply become enchanted by its breath-taking splendour.

The narrow and twisting asphalt road to the top becomes an unpaved mule route as it nears the top. The last few kilometres are only accessible by 4x4 vehicles with high clearance, making the approach a little more challenging.

The average slope is 9.24 percent. The ascent to the top is 5.7 kilometres (3.54 miles) long, beginning in Sudhan Galli.

Winter sports at Ganga Choti

Ganga Choti is one of Pakistan's greatest spots to ski in the winter since it is blanketed with beautiful snow. Sporting events are held throughout the winter months therefore, attracting a large number of tourists.

The snow-covered meadow hosted a skiing tournament on 10 February this year, with a number of skiers from Pakistan and Afghanistan taking part. The AJK Winter Sports Association worked with the AJK government's department of sports and tourism to organise the three-day tournament.

The Ganga Choti area is ideal for alpine skiing, snow-boarding, and ice skating throughout the winter months. Plans for an electric elevator at Ganga Choti are aimed at promoting its tourism potential.

I am enjoying the viral memes of my characters: Kiran Tabeer

By Kaukab Jahan

When there is a talk about memes on social media, Pakistani memes have no comparison. The biggest meme of this year so far on Pakistani social media is about Fizza and Shizza, derived from a clip of television drama series Haqiqat episode Judwan aired about two years ago on A Plus TV.

In the drama, two identical twin sisters who got married on the same day to the men, brothers in relation, living in the same house, mistakenly found themselves with the wrong partner on their wedding night.

Kiran Tabeer, who played the roles of Shizza and Fizza simultaneously, is enjoying all these memes and is excited to have this newfound fame through the power of social media.

There is another reason for Kiran, which is Parizaad. She played the role of Parizaad's sister, Saeeda.

The Truth International talked to Tabeer and asked how she was taking her popularity through social media.

TTI: Did you have any idea that this play would get fame after two years?

Kiran: This play was aired in 2020, and I had no idea that it would become so popular again after two years. Moreover, I am surprised that the episode and that specific scene were based on a true story, which was indeed a very serious issue that is being taken with a different perspective by the public, and they are enjoying it by making memes of it.

TTI: Did you find any meme quite offending?

Kiran: I like most of them but yes there are some which are very personal. People must remember that I played those characters; that was not my real life. So I think social media users should be careful when throwing offensive comments on actors just because of their characters.

TTI: How has this recent fame moved your career?

Kiran: Yes, positively! I am getting a lot of endorsements on social media. Many brands are using this meme in different ways. It is a good move for my career where I am earning money as well.

TTI: Did you get more followers on social media after these memes?

Kiran: Yes, of course! After the first meme appeared on social media, my Instagram following increased by 40000 within three days.

TTI: Do you think after resurfacing the drama and its certain clips that got viral, the issue also came into the light where boys and girls are not allowed to see and meet each other before marriage?



Kiran: Yes. After the drama went viral, many religious scholars were discussing this issue on social media. People were hesitant to talk about these issues. Before yes, this is a social issue, and it can become serious in the case that has been shown in the drama. There was indeed a time when marriages were arranged like this.

TTI: Every character of the drama serial Parizaad became popular in one or another way. What would you say about your role?

Kiran: I did not have any idea that my character would become famous as well. I accepted this role as the drama was being shot in Islamabad where I reside. The character of Saeeda was the only one who remained sincere with Parizaad till the end. She was the one to whom he looked to through his thick and thin and someone whom he trusted. I loved my character.

TTI: You started your career by hosting television shows. Why did you leave it?

Kiran: Yes, I enjoyed that phase of my career a lot but now I am addicted to acting. In acting, you depict the characters of people which you are not in real life. I love this aspect of acting.

TTI: Talking about acting, you also worked in a feature film Jeevan Haathi. So when are your fans going to see you in the next film?

Kiran: Yes, it was the only bold work of my career. After that, I was not offered a role that I wanted to do. But yes there were many offers of item numbers in the film. I don't want to do item numbers because of some family limitations.

TTI: After doing a variety of roles, any character which you want to play in any film or drama?

Kiran: Yes. I want to play the role of a poor girl living in slum areas.

2022 Oscar Nominations: Major Takeaways?

By Shahmir Niazi

Oscar nominations for 2022 are out and the psychological drama film, *The Power of the Dog* is leading the race with the most nods. This year's ceremony would mark the 94th edition of the Academy Awards – the most prestigious and significant feat for an actor to achieve, which is known to honor Hollywood's finest stars.

The awards gala, scheduled for March 27, has already generated considerable interest amongst the fans with the nominations of their favorite stars – every bit of whose performances they've savored on.

Amidst another pandemic-inflicted year, with slim movie theatres attendance, streaming services including Netflix and Prime have made significant inroads into the industry with their original films becoming major hits. No wonder Netflix's *The Power of the Dog* achieved 12 nods, including best picture, best director, and recognition for starring actors.

A Couple of Talents

For an actor, what can be greater than being nominated for an Oscar? Well, there's one: being nominated in the same year as your life partner. Yes, you've rightly guessed. We're talking about none other than the star couple of Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz. Bardem has been nominated for the American biographical film, *Being the Ricardos*, while his wife, Cruz scored nods for her marvelous acting in the Spanish drama film, *Parallel Mothers*.

Wait, there's more. There is another A-list couple that has achieved this feat this year. Kristen Dunst and Jesse Plemons not only have amazing off-screen chemistry, but they have played an outstanding role as a couple in *The Power of the Dog*. Unlike Javier and Penelope who've previously won four Oscar nominations and one award each, for Kristen and Jesse, this is their first nomination.

Two For Two?

Hollywood's best-known film director, Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story*, received the best picture nod. But this shouldn't come as a surprise. Spielberg, popularly known as one of the wealthiest filmmakers in the world, already holds a staggering 11 nominations.

If the films are making it big, wouldn't it be an injustice if the craftsman isn't recognized? Hence, the second nomination, in the 'best director' category for Spielberg. He is in the race along with other big names of the industry including Billy Wilder, William Wyler, and Martin Scorsese.

Another highlight of the nominations was the comedy-drama film *Belfast* director's record-breaking nominations. Yes, we're talking about Kenneth Branagh, who became the first person to be nominated in seven different categories. The Irish filmmaker also earned his first original screenplay and best picture nods.

Beyonce, Eilish, or Miranda?

In the original soundtracks category, there is a nail-biting contest between the industry's greats. Billie Eilish for *No Time to Die*, Beyonce for *King Richard*, and Lin-Manuel Miranda for Disney's *Encanto* are competing for this coveted category.



For Miranda, there is an added significance of the nomination since he is on track to achieve the EGOT status – accorded to those who've completed the Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony cycle. But given the great artists he's up against, it wouldn't be easy sailing.

The 13-time nominee, Diane Warren with her song "Somehow You Do" is also in the race. But should we expect a different result this time around, given that she has never won?

Animation Leads the Way

The Danish animated docudrama film *Flee*, directed by Jonas Poher Rasmussen, achieved a record-breaking trilogy of nominations, never seen before in the history of Academy Awards.

The film tells the real-life story of the film director's childhood friend, an Afghan refugee who fled his home for Denmark, through a mix of cartoons and sketches.

It was selected as the Danish entry for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film, along with nods in the Best Documentary Feature and Best Animated Feature categories.

Gaga Snub

With an unprecedented number of films released during the past 12 months, the race to secure nomination was bound to be tougher than usual. Vying for the same number of slots, it was quite inevitable that some stars would miss out.

For example, this year's awards ceremony would miss the usual red carpet glam that is associated with Lady Gaga's glittery outfits. Although the star performer had been tipped for a best actress nomination for the *House of Gucci*, where she plays the wife of an heir to the Italian fashion house, who eventually hires a hitman to kill him – she was unable to make it through.

Social media is rife with millions of Gaga fans across the world expressing their ire over her omission from the coveted list of nominees. It's certainly not a good start of the year for the singer-turned actress. But despite the snub, Gaga has taken the high road and showcased her support for the nominees. Well done, Gaga! This is why your fans adore you.

PSL7: The Season of Glory

By all accounts, the current edition of PSL has surpassed all past editions in the quality of entertainment



By Shah Faisal

From the apprehensions of an Omicron outbreak early on to the heroics of Shaheen Afridi in the last over of the last league match, PSL Season 7 has been a rollercoaster ride punctuated by plenty of off-the-field drama and on-the-field fireworks by big-hitting batters.

From the restricted crowds in Karachi to the housefull stadiums in Lahore, the league stage of PSL's seventh edition reached its conclusion with a thrilling match between Lahore Qalanders and Peshawar Zalmi that took the super over to decide.

Looking back at the league stage it appears that, unlike past seasons, this was a friendly season for batting. Batters scored heavy runs and hit more sixes than other PSL seasons. The record for most 200 plus team scores in a PSL season was broken before the tournament reached its halfway mark.

In the Karachi leg of the tournament, a team scored 200 or more runs 7 times in their innings which is a higher number than the combined 200 plus scores in the last 2 seasons. The aggregate of runs scored in a match was also high in this year's PSL. Four out of the top six matches with the highest aggregate of runs were played this year.

Total six matches aggregated more than 400 runs per match, which is the highest in any PSL season. The closest second was 2019 when only two matches aggregated more than 400 runs. These stats reflect what a feast PSL seven has remained for batters.

Runs weren't just scored, they were scored heavily and with good strike rates. In terms of individual scores, Fakhar Zaman is leading the board with 521 runs, on track to surpass Babar Azam's record for most runs in a PSL season (554). He is followed by Muhammad Rizwan, who's still his fairy-tale, with 479 under the belt so far. Shan Masood rounds off the top three with 457 runs.

With all of them in such great form, there is a chance both Rizwan and Masood may end up scoring more than five hundred runs. This is also the only season where three batters have accumulated more than 450 runs.

PSL7 has seen three centuries scored so far, that's the highest number of hundreds in a season, and the last time it happened was in 2020 when Rilee Rossouw, Chris Lynn, and Kamran Akmal scored 100s. There are still four matches to be played in this year's edition and perhaps we may see another

hundred which would make it a PSL with most hundreds scored.

Two of the three hundreds scored this season are in the list of top 6 fastest hundreds in PSL history. Jason Roy took 49 while Harry Brook needed only 48 balls to record their fastest PSL centuries.

Not just hundreds but half-centuries were also scored and at record pace. In the list of half-centuries. Three of the top 5 fastest half-centuries were scored in 2022, all three were scored in 18 balls. There were also two other instances in PSL7 where batters just needed 20 balls to score their fifties.

In terms of team scores, two out of five highest scores in PSL history were recorded this season. Quetta Gladiators were on the receiving end both times. They conceded 229 against Islamabad and, then, were later trashed by Multan Sultans who recorded the highest total (247/3) this year.

Quetta lost that game by 117 runs which is also a record. No team has ever lost a game with such heavy margins in PSL's history.

As the league stage was an easy walk for batters the bowlers took epic



punishment. Shahid Afridi suffered the most painful fate among them. His PSL ended early but not before recording the worst figures for a bowler in PSL history. He conceded 67 runs in his quota of four overs with a wicket on the last ball.

Afridi also conceded 7 sixes in his spell which is also a record for most sixes conceded by a bowler in a PSL match. Afridi was accompanied by Waseem Junior who conceded 61 runs in his four overs. These spells from both of them have earned them a place in the list of the top 5 most expensive bowling spells in PSL history.

In general, spinners have bowled with more economic rates compared to fast bowlers. Shadab Khan is the top wicket taker so far who bowled with rhythm and is having his best time with the ball in hand. His 17 wickets with the ball and 291 runs with the bat are evidence of him playing in his best T20 cricket.

Imran Tahir (16) and Khushdil Shah (15) are the two bowlers below him on the wicket takers' list. The failure of bowlers in this season can be attributed to the batter-friendly wickets, shorter boundaries and dew in the night which allowed batters to play aggressively down the line.

Though it was a rich league for batters on the field, this year's PSL has been a tough one for management and teams off the field. Certain players like Hales and Livingstone opted out of the tournament in the middle of the season for personal reasons.

For a tournament that was lacking star international players to start with, the premature departure of these players raised a lot of concerns for other players – those who have not played in PSL so far – and also for the fans. PSL is still in its formative stage and scenarios like these may hinder its rapid growth.

The episode of James Faulkner with PCB on the payment issue is a great moral setback. This is a bad omen for PSL because it can affect the economic growth of PSL in the future. Big names define the financial value of leagues and for PSL to remain deprived so heavily can make the investors and sponsors disinterested.

Besides these, this year's PSL has also had its share of misfortune, injuries to major players like Shadab Khan, Rehman Ullah Gurbaz, Hassan Ali, Muhammad Amir and Shahid Afridi were major setbacks for fans and for the spirit of PSL. Adding to this was the departure of Afghan players for their national duties. For a PSL that was already lacking the West Indian players, the departure of Afghan players proved a sombre sight.

PSL also had to encounter certain misfortune on the ground as well. A pathetic display of cricket by Karachi Kings and Quetta Gladiators undermined the overall quality of the competition. Karachi Kings lost 9 out of their 10 games which is the worst performance by a team in a PSL season. They showed no signs of hope throughout the tournament.

The other worst performer was Quetta who did manage to win a few games in the later stages of the tournament. These poor runs from them in the beginning and then by injuries stricken Islamabad team made PSL less anticipated and less interested for the excited fans.

But these unfortunate events were not enough to stop PSL from amazing the fans and viewers. Young players like Zaman Khan, Zeeshan Zameer, Muhammad Haris, and Abbas Afridi emerged as potent players who can play significant cricket against effective players. Harris is the stand-out among all the emerging players. His talent is visible, his confidence is high, and his future looks bright.

Another positive point for PSL so far this season was its organization. At the start of this season, Karachi was fully submerged in the Omicron variant of Covid19 and staging a PSL was not just challenging but fraught as well. PCB along with the government made quick and fruitful decisions that manifested the desire for staging the tournament. So far, no aberration has occurred and the tournament is going towards a healthy end.

Thus, from the early lose start to the tournament to the later tight end of the league stage, from missing out on West Indian players to the departure of Afghan players, from a sad end to Shahid Afridi's career to the meteoric rise of Muhammad Haris, PSL has had a bumpy journey in its seventh edition but it has got itself moving which is the first and foremost requirement for success and glory.

Remembering Rehman Malik



Desk Report

Former Interior Minister Senator Rehman Malik has died at the age of 70 in a local hospital in Islamabad due to Covid-19.

Rehman Malik was given the portfolio of Advisory to PM on Interior after the 2008 elections when the PPP government was formed. He was elevated to the Status of Federal Minister on his election as Senator from Sindh. However, he had to resign from the ministry on the issue of dual citizenship. Following the Supreme Court's decision, Rehman Malik was again made the prime minister's adviser on interior affairs.

Government job

During PPP's second tenure from 1993-1996, he was appointed additional director general in Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) but he emerged bigger than that position. After taking refuge in the UK, Rehman Malik set up his own private security company there. Very few people know how he entered in government job and how got speedy promotion.

During his tenure at FIA, USA arrested, Ramzi Youssef. Rehman Malik also arrested the father of former Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif and former Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif on which the members of Sharif family had strongly opposed him.

Rehman Malik remained in jail for a year and but he managed to go abroad. After taking refuge in the UK, Rehman Malik set up his own private security company there. He wrote a 200-pages letter to then-President Rafiq Tarar mentioning the Sharif family's corruption.

During exile, he assisted late Benazir Bhutto her in providing security for her.

During his stay in the UK, he persuaded former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and former Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif to forget their political differences and cooperate with each other. Benazir Bhutto had so much confidence in Rehman Malik that the Charter of Democracy agreement between PPP and PML-N was signed at Rehman Malik's house.

Although the Sharif brothers had expressed their reservations about going to his house, they still had to go to Rehman Malik's house.

Rehman Malik has also been instrumental in bringing about reconciliation between the PPP and then-military president Pervez Musharraf, and thanks to this, the National Reconciliation Ordinance was issued, under which thousands of leaders and activists of other parties, including the PPP, were attacked. Cases dropped. The Supreme Court later quashed the ordinance.

When Benazir Bhutto returned home in October 2007, Rehman Malik accompanied her as Chief Security Officer. Rehman Malik was with Benazir Bhutto when the suicide attack on Benazir Bhutto took place on December 27, 2007 outside Liaquat Bagh.

In this incident, when Benazir Bhutto was taken to the hospital in a critical condition, Rehman Malik and the other leaders in the car went to Zardari house, F-8 instead of hospital.

During this period, when the journalists contacted Rehman Malik, he said that Benazir Bhutto was well and he had taken her to F8. Many questions were raised after Rehman Malik left the country immediately after the suicide attack on Benazir Bhutto.

Like other high profile murders, BB's case was never investigated properly, though PPP was in power.

Rehman Malik is also the author of four books, including the Modi War Doctrine and India Anti-Pakistan Syndrome.

During the PPP era, he was awarded the official honors 'Sitara-e-Shujaat' and 'Nishan-e-Imtiaz' while he was conferred the honorary degree of Ph.D.



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