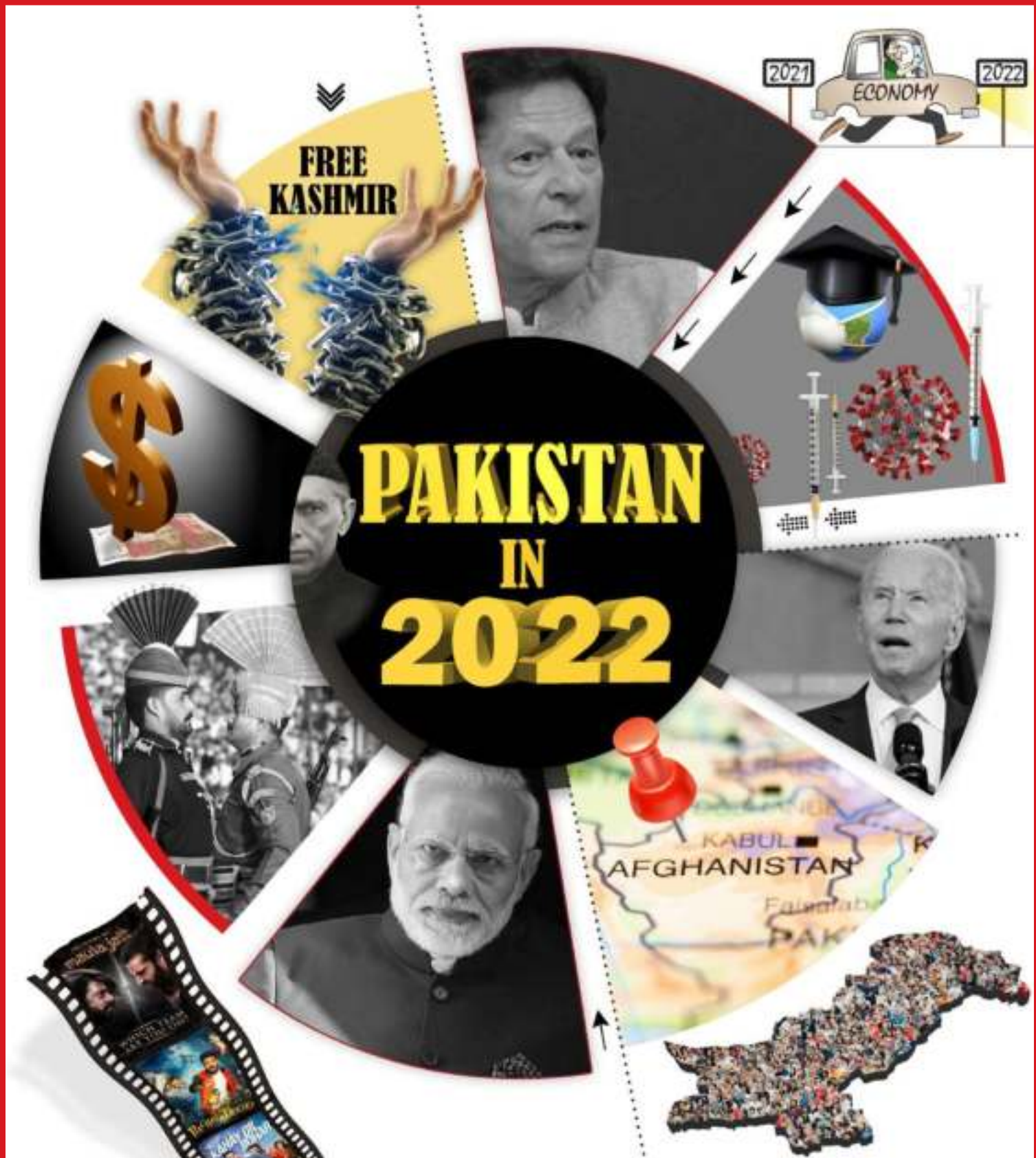


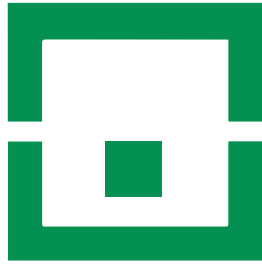
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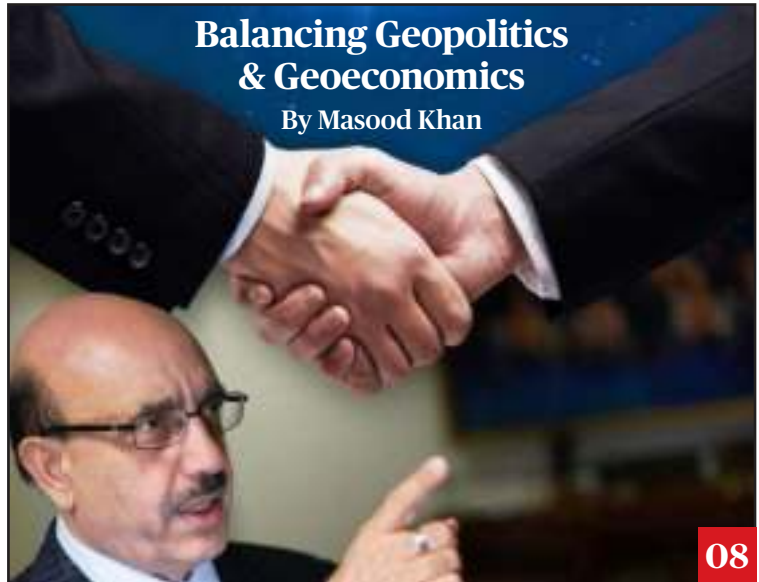
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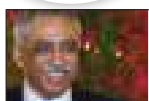
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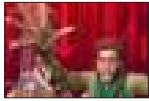
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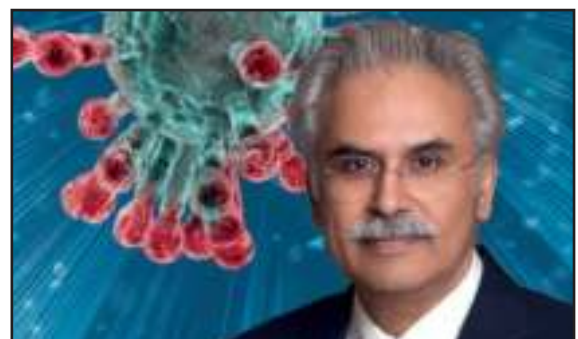
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# Past Forward



Ibrahim Sajid Malick  
Editor, *Narratives*

**A**s we welcome 2022, there is a sobering realisation that the problems which plagued the beginning of the decade – the pandemic and the economic fall-out – are not going away anytime soon. But, at *Narratives*, we are cautiously optimistic. Despite several challenges, Pakistan has fared quite well in dealing with the epidemic. A well-managed vaccine campaign successfully vaccinated one-third of the population – not enough, but much better than other similar nations around the globe.

2021 was not an easy year for Pakistan. Mob and vigilante violence in general, and the assassination of a Sri Lankan national reminds us that violence is the critical tool of choice for those on the fringes. And violence is especially concerning given the region's geopolitical events. With the Taliban gaining power in Afghanistan, ISIS rearing its ugly head in the region, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) violating ceasefires, and Indian fascism next door, Pakistan must devise a strategy to combat the resurgence of violence from non-state and mainstream groups. It has been a challenging year in terms of security. It appears that this will be a concern for the foreseeable future. With the dawn of the new year, Imtiaz Gul illustrates two scenarios for “a financially hamstrung Taliban regime” as it struggles to gain both, international legitimacy and the funds needed to survive.

On the economic front, things have been rough as well. The world has faced a violent onslaught of inflation, which entails harsh measures in Pakistan's difficult circumstances. Repeated price increases for gasoline, sugar, wheat, food and other necessities have cost the government dearly, especially in terms of public support.

Nonetheless, there has been a boost in wheat, rice, sugarcane, and maize production, and development in large-scale industry and the services sector, resulting in GDP growth, which, given the epidemic, is no minor achievement. As Abid Sulehri writes in this issue, “agriculture in 2022 is dependent on how quickly our farmers adapt to climate change and shift to climate-smart agriculture.”

In 2021, the government focused on strengthening and improving social protection programmes. The impact of inflation will undoubtedly take its toll on the government; but it should be noted that it also invested in welfare. The cash allocation for the Ehsaas programme has been enhanced, and the procedure for universal healthcare has been widened in partnership with the provincial governments through the Sehat Sahulat Program and the Kissan Card.

In his optimistic piece, Hunaid Lakhani, a leading educationist, recommends that mission educators must be linked to several objectives: Rebuilding a global governance system capable of effective integration and swift response to threats such as pandemics, trade wars, and populism; adopting norms and practices that promote sustainable economic activity; achieving freedom, equality, and standards of justice; and enabling environmentally sustainable development on all continents.

As Ambassador-designate to the United States, Masood Khan writes in this issue, “Pakistan will have to work deftly on the economic and political fronts to secure its place in the new global order.”

As we kick off 2022, let me leave with a stanza by Allama Iqbal:

“Let this be our beautiful departure from stagnation; let our minds come alive; enter another dimension; go beyond the stars eagerly struggling to find that... which our naked eyes did not know existed; rise like a falcon born to soar and not be alone, but be present amongst others.”



# thinktank

## New Age Diplomats

By Masood Khan

The writer is Pakistan's new envoy to the US. He is the former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and has also served as the country's ambassador in China.



# Balancing Geopolitics & Geoeconomics

Pakistan will have to work deftly on both the economic and political fronts to secure its place in the new global order

**G**one are the days when traditional diplomacy used to work. Modern diplomacy, more or less in its present form, began in the early 19th century when the Congress of Vienna was convened in 1814-15 to define balance of power, address bilateral and international problems and codify rules for interstate diplomacy. Initially, this model of diplomacy was state-centric, with a clear distinction between major powers and states with “limited interests.” This was followed by the emergence of the Concert of Europe comprising Austria, Britain, Russia and Prussia as an embryonic form of multilateral governance for cooperation. After the Second World War, the United Nations heralded a new era of full-fledged multilateralism supported by the Bretton Woods Institutions and specialised agencies, with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council sitting at the apex decision-making seats. The diplomats were stereotyped as male, pin-striped cookie-pushers.

No more. Now diplomats act more like entrepreneurs or CEOs of start-ups to get traction for their nation, facing stiff competition. The world has changed because of globalisation driven by post-industrial and digital revolutions. Three matrices still project national power: military strength, economic development and human security.

The diplomats’ tasks have been redefined drastically. But two home truths need to be underlined: diplomacy and foreign policy are not synonymous; and foreign policy begins at home. Let me elaborate.

First, diplomacy is one of the instruments of foreign policy meant to promote and protect the national interest, resolve differences by means of dialogue and negotiations, in most cases discreetly and behind the scenes. It is of course backed by national power, overtly or covertly. Foreign policy, on the other hand, adopts a declared broader and comprehensive



*Speaking at the Consulate General of Pakistan in New York, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi highlighted Pakistan's shift from geostrategy to geoeconomics, heralding a new era in Pakistan's diplomacy.*

strategy to pursue peace and war, combat transnational threats and work for global commons.

Second, the efficacy of diplomatic outreach and productivity suffer if internal polity, economy and social fabric are chronically volatile and fragile. Domestic policy and foreign policy have to move in tandem.

This does not, however, reduce the burden of the responsibilities of Foreign Offices and missions abroad in advancing the interests of their nations, especially when the going is rough at home. It is then that we have a challenge to turn things around by making the best use of bilateral ties and multilateral forums. Many nations, during wars and even after defeats, have turned the tide for their nations by employing astute diplomacy.

The net result of our foreign policy strategy and diplomatic efforts will revolve around three questions: Will we attract more foreign investment and promote trade? Will we reinforce our national security? And lastly, are we being seen as a polity trying to promote and protect human rights, counter violent extremism and terrorism and shape a tolerant, pluralist and inclusive society?

The economy is our absolute priority; our strategic compass.

Even the most conservative foreign estimates for Pakistan's GDP growth for 2021-22 range from 3.2 to 3.5 percent (according to the Economist Intelligence Unit and the World Bank, respectively), but the government's forecasts are higher, up to 5 percent. This is not bad at all, after the beating our economy received from the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to other developing nations, Pakistan has dealt with the pandemic quite effectively, with a combined strategy of smart lockdowns, vaccinations, cash transfers, fiscal stimulus packages and continuing business activity. The result is that the economy is poised to rebound.

There are other positive indicators too. Foreign remittances, investment and industrial production have increased; and the services sector has performed well. Our challenges are inadequate revenue generation as well as the decline in exports and agricultural produce.

Although the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI), in September 2021, reclassified Pakistan from an Emerging Market to a Frontier Market, it acknowledged that Pakistan's equity market meets the criteria for market accessibility for emerging markets but not of size and liquidity. As the growth rate increases and foreign investments flow in, we should ad-



*Pakistan's nascent tech sector is poised to play a leading role in its economic diplomacy.*

dress these problems.

Let me reiterate that trade and investment are the very essence of diplomacy.

Pakistan is giving primacy to geoeconomics. This is not a buzzword. What it means is that from now on we will soft-pedal geostrategic preoccupations and entanglements, while being fully prepared for our national security imperatives, and harness all our diplomatic tools to bring Pakistan out of the economic quagmire and put it on the path of rapid growth and sustained development. To achieve this overarching objective, we have to reduce our geo-strategic overstretch. We cannot craft our destiny as a strong and prosperous nation by constantly eating our seed corn. It is futile to pursue the mirage of a trickle-down policy, which has not worked since the 1960s, and is not likely to bear fruit in the future. We should, instead, start and sustain a bottom-up revolution. A beginning in that direction has been made.

To achieve economic security for Pakistan, our diplomatic efforts should centre on economic growth, infrastructure development, higher education, energy, foreign direct investment and emerging technologies, among others.

By now, there is growing awareness in Pakistan that new technologies, which are the key driver of economic growth, can help Pakistan take a quantum leap in economic development, international trade and job markets. Artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning, blockchain, the

*It is futile to pursue the mirage of a trickle-down policy, which has not worked since the 1960s, and is not likely to bear fruit in the future. We should, instead, start and sustain a bottom-up revolution.*

Internet of Things, cloud computing, 3-D printing, biotechnology, breakthroughs in gene sequencing and nanotechnology are radically changing industrial production, agriculture, energy, transportation and supply chains. The exact impact of these changes in our global markets and societies is not fully known. Our diplomats have to brace and prepare for the revolutions that are being set off by these technologies.

Against this backdrop, here are some of the priorities that we have for our reoriented diplomacy.

A door on tech start-ups has opened up for Pakistan in 2021, crossing the \$300 million mark in e-commerce for the first time. Pakistan's National Incubation Centre (NIC) forecasts that shortly this

figure will grow to \$380 million-\$400 million. Most of the businesses are being funded, under joint ventures, from the United States, the UAE and Singapore. *Bloomberg* reports that Pakistan "has seen more money flow into its nascent technology sector during 2021 than in the previous six years combined." Pakistan has also been identified as the "Last Big Untapped Nation" in the tech sector. Amazon has opened registration in Pakistan, widening the scope for online international trade. The time is opportune to work for a unicorn boom.

Dividends of US companies – Procter & Gamble, Motorola, Philip Morris, Caterpillar, Abbott, Pepsi and Coco Cola – are good in Pakistan. ExxonMobil has re-entered the Pakistani market; and Cargill has expressed its intent to invest \$200 million in our agricultural sector, including food processing.

New opportunities for Pakistan-US cooperation are being explored in the areas of pharmaceutical industry, diagnostics, the health sector, digital economy, alternate energy, IT, FINTEC, and the green technology. Materialisation of these opportunities would depend on our greater understanding and resolution of issues related to data protection, intellectual property rights, ease of doing business and Pakistan's exit from the Grey List of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

At the same time, we should consolidate the gains we have made in leveraging our economic geography by strengthening ties with China and faithfully implementing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The CPEC gives us a platform to diversify our connectivity to Central Asia and South-West Asia. We should develop and integrate our national and regional supply chains, encompassing the entire cycle of production, distribution and consumption. What we need is connectivity on all sides. It is in this context that we should cast a fresh glance at the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline, in which Russia is a tacit guarantor, if not a partner. The US-led investments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, by generating livelihoods and businesses, will more readily eliminate terrorism than military responses alone.

The Pakistan-European trade has received a boost from the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP Plus) mainly because of tariff preferences,



subject to the implementation of 27 core international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and good governance. The EU is one of Pakistan's top trading partners; and the prospects for broader market access to the Union are bright. The European Commission recognises the potential of Pakistan's economy but counts costs of doing business, restrictive regulatory regime, over-reliance on textiles and clothing and infrastructure bottlenecks as detrimental for trade and growth.

Pakistan announced its Vision East Asia Policy in 2003, in pursuit of economic diplomacy, but it has been pursued perfunctorily. Now is the time to engage with Japan and South Korea, on the one hand, and upgrade relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as bilateral trade and investment linkages with Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand, on the other. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam – the group called CLMV – too are important. Despite Pakistan's best efforts, it has not attained full partnership with ASEAN. However, that is not an absolute barrier for bilateral economic ties; since 2004, Pakistan, has been an active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). By the way, the East Asian region is comparatively more hospitable to Pakistanis and Pakistani goods and services and its countries have always been keen on investing in Pakistan. Although Build Back Better World (B3W) is a Group of Seven (G7) initiative, perceived to be an alternative to the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it cannot be 100 percent exclusive in the sense that those countries that are part of the BRI would not qualify for B3W; or vice versa. There would be opportunities for countries like Pakistan for tie-ins.

The Gulf countries have embraced geoeconomics with extraordinary zeal; and have speedily sloughed off geo-political fixtures and fixations. So, there is a confluence of two policy shifts – in the Gulf and Pakistan – that can be used to enhance their economic collaboration. There is a reason the Gulf countries are making this choice: they are forced to wean their economies from fossil fuels to make way for green, sustainable technologies. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic has contracted their economies. That's why they have decided, separately, to turn

their countries into entrepreneurial hubs and international super-connectors. It has become imperative for them to diversify their economies and be competitive amongst Gulf peers in the fields of infrastructure, alternate energy, food industry, cyberspace and new technologies.

Pakistan's relationships with the Gulf countries are already geoeconomic, especially in the areas of manpower working there, our dependence on oil and gas and agricultural exports. In the emerging scenario, we are still relevant to the Gulf markets and we can contribute to them by employing our human resources. With

*It would be naïve to presume that geoeconomics can be divorced from geopolitics and pursued in isolation. Geopolitics, in fact, creates the enabling environment. We should avoid imprudent and impolitic geostrategic activity that can be harmful to our national interests.*

the growing human capital in Pakistan, we can find jobs in the niche markets or in major infrastructure projects and the service sectors. What's more, we can attract Gulf investment to Pakistan. We can persuade the Gulf countries to relocate their excess capacity to Pakistan, open oil refineries and petrochemical complexes on our ports, and invest in agriculture, the construction industry and the blue economy. This would be possible if our delicate geopolitical balance between the Gulf countries and Iran continues to work.

Another economic frontier for Pakistan is Africa, especially in the African countries where Pakistan peacekeeping operations have served and where

there is a sizeable presence of Pakistan's diaspora community. Aware of the immense opportunities, the Government of Pakistan has launched its Engage Africa Policy and its Ministry of Commerce, under its Look East Africa Policy, has been making fresh efforts to promote trade between Pakistan and Africa. Many African economies are growing fast and that's why Africa is being projected as the "Continent of the Future." Even today, the size of Africa's nominal GDP is \$2.6 trillion, which is likely to grow rapidly in the future. Although Pakistan has been trading with many African countries, its share in Africa's total trade volume of \$1 trillion is less than \$5 billion. There is rich potential to expand Pakistan's exports of rice, engineering goods electrical appliances, textiles, clothing, pharmaceuticals, sports goods, surgical instruments, furniture and many more products to Africa. Similarly, Pakistan is a fertile market for African products and minerals. Other areas ripe for investments are science and technology, infrastructure development, telecommunications, agriculture and agroindustry.

It would be naïve to presume that geoeconomics can be divorced from geopolitics and pursued in isolation. Geopolitics, in fact, creates the enabling environment. Therefore, Pakistan will have to work on both fronts deftly with the realisation that our redemption as a nation lies in economic power, even to promote our geopolitical agenda, which cannot be simply switched off. In any case, we should avoid imprudent and impolitic geostrategic activity that can be harmful to our national interests.

More importantly, we have to put our fiscal house in order. Unless we increase our revenues, we will not be able make the requisite technological changes to take our economy to the next level.

We should not envisage a future of perennial hostility with our eastern neighbour, though settlement of outstanding conflicts is necessary for economic cooperation with it. But until we get a window into South Asia, we should continue to maximize our chances of economic success through partnerships with East Asia, West Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Finally, the projected geoeconomic shift requires a low profile, an altered national mindset, hard choices and, above all, strong political will. ■

A photograph of two soldiers in ceremonial uniforms facing each other. The soldier on the left is in a black uniform with a black and white plumed helmet. The soldier on the right is in a brown uniform with a red and gold plumed helmet. Both are holding rifles. The background is a blurred crowd.

# FRONTIERS

No Time for Flexibility



# Distant Neighbours

Pakistan-India relations: Prospects remain bleak



By Abdul Basit

*The writer is a former envoy of Pakistan to India and Germany, and President of the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), Islamabad.*

As a former diplomat, I may still feign optimism (about Pakistan-India relations) but the way India is moving unapologetically away from its secular foundations and embracing the inherently parochial and ornery Hindutva, my hopes are fading. I hope I am wrong.”

The above is the concluding paragraph of my recently-published book *Hostility: A Diplomat's Diary on Pakistan-India Relations*, but it seems my “hope” is unlikely to come true anytime soon.

Pakistan-India relations are a long saga of ups and downs. Hopes for a relatively better future are engendered and then quickly dissipate. Now the two countries are yet again mired in an extended deadlock. And diplomacy, the exciting art of the possible, is looking demoralisingly hopeless.

Be that as it may, it is also a somewhat cockamamie notion that bilateral talks, should they resume, would readily solve the Rubik's cube of India-Pakistan hos-



*As India gathers more diplomatic and financial clout, the international community is increasingly reticent to call out its atrocities in Kashmir.*

tility. Those who have been involved in bilateral negotiations know quite well there is no room for inflated optimism. The current situation is far more complex than it was a few years ago. There are multiple new variables swaying equations at both systemic and sub-systemic levels. Pakistan and India being the largest countries in South Asia and riven by seemingly intractable mutual hostility, are players in shaping in varying degrees the regional and global geostrategic and geo-economic milieu.

The fact of the matter is that Pakistan is now dealing with an increasingly hubristic India. Its arrogance stems from its growing economic and diplomatic clout, emboldening it to continue riding roughshod over the imperatives of peace and prosperity in the region. In the absence of any significant and sustained pressure, India cannot be expected to come to the negotiating table and make tenable compromises.

The international community by and large remained reticent when India, in violation of its own constitution as well as international law, stripped Occupied Jammu and Kashmir of its special status

on August 5, 2019. The decision was also in defiance of the Indian Supreme Court which in a ruling on April 2018 declared that Article 370 could neither be amended nor revoked, and added that the special status of Jammu and Kashmir had assumed permanence.

Earlier, India pushed South Asia to the precipice when it breached Pakistan air space on February 26, 2019 and threw a couple of bombs in the Balakot area of Pakistan to avenge the Pulwama attack in occupied Kashmir on February 14. Had India's highly irresponsible strike not turned out to be an absolute dud, the situation could have escalated irredeemably.

Par for the course, the world largely looked the other way lest India be offended. None of the major powers even implicitly admonished India. The statements emanating from different capitals only advised both countries to exercise restraint and settle their issues through talks. From US to Russia, all were driven by their national interests. They could barely afford to go beyond issuing anodyne statements. Clearly, India is so far managing to be playing all sides skilfully.

Whereas it fully subscribes to the



*September 2021: Modi and Biden at the Oval Office to discuss joint COVID-19 policies, a sign of India's closer ties to the US.*

anti-China Quad, India is also managing the SCO, BRICS and RIC reasonably well. Even on the issue of S400, the US is in two minds whether or not to invoke CAATSA (Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) against India. So, when major world players are pandering to a country with blind eyes, there is little reason left for India to make uncomfortable compromises with Pakistan, especially when they may also be seen by the incumbent Hindutva government in New Delhi as antithetical not only to the fundamentals of its worldview, but also damaging to its domestic electoral politics. The BJP government under Prime Minister Modi is only set to “teach” Pakistan, not to reach out to Pakistan to work out quid pro quos.

How can a resumption of bilateral talks be fruitful if there is no compulsion to engage meaningfully. Needless to emphasise, India has never been serious

about resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. And unless this core dispute is fairly settled there is simply no possibility for the two countries’ relationship to get to an irreversible trajectory of building mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. Ironically, regional economic cooperation has also become hostage to the Pakistan-India hostility. No wonder, SAARC could not hold a summit meeting since 2014.

In the past, Pakistan had been too impatient to engage India. Resultantly, it had been conceding ground both on Kashmir and terrorism. Even a cursory look at the joint statements issued between the two countries on January 6, 2004 (Islamabad), July 16, 2009 (Sharm el Sheikh), July 10, 2015 (Ufa) and December 9, 2015 (Islamabad) would demonstrate the fact that Pakistan had not been up to the challenge. Unprecedentedly, Kashmir was not specifically mentioned in the

Sharm el Sheikh and Ufa joint statements. And in the statements issued in Islamabad in 2004 and 2015, Pakistan committed itself unilaterally on the issue of terrorism. It still boggles many legal and diplomatic minds as to how Pakistan could give assurances to conclude the Mumbai attack trial without having the legally requisite cooperation from India.

More damagingly, the 2004 joint statement sufficiently equipped India to tarnish the legitimate Kashmir struggle and portray it as terrorism. India was over the moon when the US declared Hizbul Mujahideen, an indigenous resistance movement fighting foreign occupation, as a terrorist outfit in August 2017.

It is also a fact that even the back-channel talks from 2004 to 2014, gradually started focusing more on the Mumbai attack trial in Pakistan rather than finding a permanent solution to the Kashmir dispute along the lines of General Pervez Musharraf’s four-point formula. It goes without saying that Pakistan had been most casual in dealing with India. If diplomacy is conducted episodically, incoherently and apologetically, the results cannot be different to what Pakistan has so far attained.

Pakistan should stop dithering and, for a change, show some mettle and moxie. It will achieve nothing by hastening the process of engaging India. Now that Pakistan has taken a position post-August 5, 2019, it should stick to it. Unarguably, diplomacy cannot be put in cold storage indefinitely. Some would contend that if the two countries could clinch a ceasefire deal in February 2021, they might also be able to achieve agreement on issues related to Kashmir and terrorism. However, this agreement must be seen in the context of the ongoing Sino-India tensions on the Line of Actual Control. India never responded when Pakistan proposed formalising the 2003 ceasefire understanding from the UNGA podium in 2015.

It needs to be underlined that India is not exactly yearning for the resumption of formal bilateral talks. Pakistan has always been an issue in India’s electoral politics. Elections in its largest state, Uttar Pradesh, are to take place in February 2022. Pakistan must expect a ratcheting up of tensions even on the Line of Control in the run-up to the elections rather than hoping the hidebound rightist government in New Delhi will talk to Pakistan.



*Modi meets with Putin to negotiate a new arms deal between their countries.*



India may prefer to wait till after the general election in the country in 2024.

Moreover, India is highly unlikely to engage Pakistan on Kashmir till elections are held in the occupied region which, in turn, cannot take place without first completing the so-called delimitation of constituencies in the so-called new Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The question remains whether New Delhi would prefer to restore the statehood status of Kashmir before or after the elections. In any case, the statehood would be without restoring the special status and without reincorporating Ladakh.

India's strategy is clear. It is trying to consolidate the new but illegal normal in occupied Kashmir; keep Pakistan on the defensive on terrorism, especially the Mumbai attack trial; and on the issue of Kulbhushan Jhadav. As for the latter, Pakistan must not rule out India taking the matter to the United Nations Security Council under Article 94 of the UN Charter sometime in 2022, impugning Pakistan of non-compliance with the July 17, 2019 ruling by the International Court of Justice.

India is also yet to digest the loss of space in Afghanistan. It will not easily let its loss turn into Pakistan's advantage. UNSC resolution 2593 adopted on August 30, 2021 under the Indian presidency, on which both China and Russia abstained, is a clear indication that India does not want to see Afghanistan stabilise. A chaotic Afghanistan is seen in its interest. Accordingly, it will continue pursuing this objective through different ways and means. It is no surprise that India has invited the heads of the five Central Asian Republics to attend the Republic Day parade on January 26, 2022.

From Pakistan's perspective, it would be a huge mistake to do more of the same and expect different, better results. The incumbent government is already into its fourth year of power. Now that it has taken a principled position that bilateral engagement will be resumed only when the status quo in Occupied Kashmir, as existed before August 5, 2019, is restored, displaying undue and untimely flexibility will be nothing but an exercise in diplomatic futility.

Instead, Pakistan must ramp up its Kashmir diplomacy to build international pressure on India. The latter must stop its grisly human rights violations in



*Gen. Pervez Musharraf's conciliatory approach towards former Indian PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in their joint meeting in 2004 enabled India to wrongly brand Kashmiri freedom fighters as terrorists in the eyes of the world.*

***Now that the Pakistan government has taken a principled position that bilateral engagement will be resumed only when the status quo in Occupied Kashmir, as existed before August 5, 2019, is restored, displaying undue and untimely flexibility will be nothing but an exercise in diplomatic futility.***

Occupied Kashmir; it must free all political prisoners including the Hurriyat leadership; it must revoke all the draconian laws which are wreaking havoc in Occupied Kashmir; it must demilitarise the urban areas; and it must rescind close to four million domicile certificates that have been

issued to Indian nationals to settle down in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

It also must be stressed that Pakistan will never get an effective and positive response from multilateral forums unless it works bilaterally. Decisions are taken in Beijing, Washington, Paris, London, Berlin, Tokyo, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and other capitals, not in New York, Geneva or Jeddah. Multilateralism does not work in a vacuum. Even the OIC Council of Ministers conference in Islamabad in March 2022 will be squandered if Pakistan failed to roll up its sleeves and do what is necessary to be done bilaterally with 56 other member states.

Let's remember diplomacy needs patience, perspicacity and perseverance. Pakistan is in for a marathon, not a sprint. Slapdash approaches do not deliver. Taking half-baked measures and that, too, in fits and starts; resorting to whataboutery; and having no clear strategy with tactical niceties are all recipes for inconsequential diplomacy.

It is India which has created the present impasse. Ergo, it is for India to break it. Pakistan should have no issue responding positively, provided its eastern neighbour is ready to dispense with its unacceptable mulishness on Kashmir. However, I do not see that happening in the foreseeable future. "I hope I am wrong." ■

# FRONTIERS

2022 Offers No Hope





# Portrait of Despair

Will Kashmir continue to witness more violence and bloodshed in 2022 as Modi's government tightens its reign through more repressive laws and the world turns a blind eye to the carnage in the valley?



**By Altaf Hussain Wani**

*The writer is Chairman, Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR), Islamabad. He is a member of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, AJK chapter.*

**T**he Kashmir conflict has long-standing political and economic implications not only for its people but the entire region and beyond. The protracted conflict remains one of the major causes of unrest and instability in South Asia and has had a devastating impact on the lives of common Kashmiris.

The root cause can be traced back to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The dispute hangs like a sword of Damocles over the two countries and continues to haunt the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan to this day. It has turned the two countries into armed camps equipped with nuclear weapons. The conflict has assumed dangerous proportions, posing a serious threat to peace in this highly volatile region.

The primary issue relates to the right of self-determination guaranteed to the Kashmiri people by the United Nations. The then leadership of India and Pakistan made a solemn pledge to hold a referendum in the state to allow the people of Kashmir to decide their own political future. Unfortunately, subse-



*Despite pursuing a mostly peaceful path towards self-determination, the Kashmiris have been ruthlessly suppressed by successive Indian governments.*

quent Indian rulers not only backtracked from the promise, but also resorted to Machiavellian intrigues to suppress the Kashmiris' legitimate demands and delegitimise their just struggle for the right of self-determination.

India's perpetual refusal to conduct a plebiscite in the region triggered an anti-India resistance movement in the late 1980s, when the Kashmiri people felt there was no other option. Despite this, the majority of the Kashmiris are not rabid fanatics – they simply want to live in peace. Their struggle, spanning a period of 73 years, has been largely political in nature. The enormous suffering and deprivation that it has endured as a consequence of being an 'occupied' nation is what frames the political outlook of their struggle.

The Kashmiri leaders, who are democrats in attitude and progressive in approach, have never shied away from holding a dialogue with either of the countries holding the key to the solution. But their urging for a peaceful settlement of the dispute has always been misconstrued by India as their weakness. Instead of addressing the issue through the peaceful means of dialogue and diplomacy, successive Indian rulers have always treated Kashmir as a colony. Exploitation

of Kashmir's resources, and killing and maiming of its population through heavy militarisation and brutality, have been the Indian Government's consistent policy. The reckless violence unleashed upon the Kashmiris by the Indian State over the past 30 years has resulted in widespread death, destruction, and massive violation of civil and human rights of the Kashmiri people.

Several international human rights organisations of repute, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, have regularly and graphically illustrated the plight of the Kashmiris. More importantly, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights' landmark report of 2018, which serves as an indictment of India's dangerous and destructive role in the region, called for an independent investigation into rights' abuses committed by the Indian forces. But ironically, this rapidly growing global concern has not been able to break the continuing vicious cycle of violence in the region.

Despite the growing calls for elimination of all forms of violence, life in Kashmir is getting tougher for the native population, who are battling for survival under India's prolonged military occupation.

There has been no respite from the



*A Kashmiri protestor throws stones at an armoured Indian patrol vehicle in Srinagar.*

violence. Instead, the political and human rights situation took an ugly turn in the aftermath of the BJP government's 5th August 2019 controversial decision that led to the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which had guaranteed special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

While social, political and economic life remained critically suppressed, the valley of Kashmir reeled under a suffocating military siege and communication blockade for more than 14 months. Thousands of Kashmiris, mostly youth, were arrested under the notorious Public Safety Act and thrown into prison. Hundreds of top-ranking politicians were also arrested and booked under the infamous black laws and left to rot in jails outside the Kashmir valley.

What ails the Kashmir valley today is

the ongoing massive and multi-pronged social, political and cultural onslaught against its indigenous population by the Indian Government. The apartheid regime's ultranationalist policies have pushed the region deeper into a quagmire of uncertainty, chaos and lawlessness. The Kashmiris' fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of speech and expression, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to peaceful protest remain strictly prohibited.

Illegal imprisonment of political activists under sedition laws, and a witch-hunt against civil society, rights activists and journalists, the systematic killing of Kashmiri youth, and the everyday mayhem and carnage on the streets has now become so commonplace that it ceases to shock the leaders of foreign countries. Kashmir is swept under the carpet in bi-

lateral discussions between world leaders. When billions of dollars in deals and geopolitical alliances are at stake in their negotiations, why would they want to jeopardise their own interests? So the Kashmiris are left to their fate.

The level of indifference and apathy with which the international community treats the dispute is one of the major reasons behind the continuing bloodshed in the Kashmir valley.

The inaction on the part of the global community has emboldened and encouraged the government of India to continue and further escalate its brutal policies of oppression and suppression to silence the Kashmiris. Unfortunately, the Muslim world too is completely silent and except for issuing empty statements no practical measures have been taken to alleviate the unending sufferings of the Kashmiris. Western and European countries, by and large, see the Kashmir problem through the prism of India. Owing to their respective economic interests, no country is ready to take a categorical stand on the issue of Kashmir, and the United States, which has now embraced India as its strategic partner, is turning a blind eye to the downward spiral of cruelty and chaos in Kashmir, remaining just a silent spectator. This is unconscionable.

So long as realpolitik continues to steer the dynamics of the Kashmir dispute at the international level, the ruthless suppression, which has been a prominent feature of India's Kashmir policy, is likely to persist in the future.

Under the persisting regional and international scenario, there is not much hope of any positive change taking place in the region. Violence seems to be increasing in the valley as the BJP government has started to implement its Plan B, which is all about changing the region's demography, culture, language and history, constructing more temples, establishing more pilgrimage-sites for Hindu devotees, and making Kashmir a Hurriyat-free region much before the next elections in 2024.

This is a disastrous recipe that is bound to open the floodgates to more violence and bloodshed in the region.

After banning the Jamat and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) under the notorious Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the Indian government is considering the imposition of



*The brutality and callousness of the Kashmiri occupation has peaked under the current Indian PM, Narendra Modi.*



a complete ban on the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference. The majority of the high-profile campaigners for the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, including politicians, civil society activists and rights defenders, have already been booked under the black laws and incarcerated in jails outside the valley, with little hope of their release. All voices of reason are being silenced one by one.

Fraught with serious political ramifications, this move is tantamount to pushing the Kashmiris to violence. Squeezing space for political dissent will increase the level of anger, anxiety, and sense of alienation among the Kashmiri youth who are already living under suffocating conditions. While the Modi government seems to be in no mood to provide any kind of relief or space for political dissent, the growing alienation of Kashmiris might probably compel the youth to choose a violent path in order to vent to their anger. Under the given circumstances, any hope of improving the ground situation in Kashmir remains elusive.

Adding to the sense of alienation and despair, the termination of Muslim government employees is yet another conspiracy to render Kashmiris jobless.

On the other hand, India has started a disinformation and propaganda campaign against Pakistan and Kashmiris, accusing Pakistan's ISI of sending the Taliban from Afghanistan to fight in Kashmir. The Taliban take-over of Kabul will now become yet another excuse for Indians to kill Kashmiri youth by simply branding them as foreign terrorists.

The Modi government's recent track record of dealing with Kashmir shows that it will not hesitate in exercising state power as it believes that the use of military muscle is the only way to teach the Kashmiris a lesson. This policy, which bears all the imprints of authoritarian rule, actually revolves around Doval's dogma of "offensive defence strategy," which seeks to control, by any means, all of Kashmir, its people, its land, and resources.

Doval believes that the policy of appeasement by New Delhi towards Kashmir and Pakistan has cost the Indian state heavily. He also believes that the state must not shy away from exercising its full might against the Kashmiris, or even Pakistan, when needed. Interestingly, Doval's strategy synchro-



Relatives of missing Kashmiri activists and youth hold a protest highlighting their plight in 2017.

*The BJP regime has been stoking anti-Muslim sentiment in India, using it as a strategic weapon to push its ultra-nationalist agenda in Kashmir and delegitimise the Kashmiri struggle for freedom.*

nises with the hardcore Hindu nationalists' ideology, who consider Kashmiri Muslims and Pakistan a threat to India's sovereignty.

The rising tide of xenophobia and Hindu nationalism within the Indian society is yet another dangerous aspect that has had a devastating impact on the lives of Kashmiris. The BJP regime, which rose to prominence on the back of communal politics, has been capitalising on this growing anti-Muslim sentiment in the country, using it as a strategic weapon to not only push its ultra-nationalist agenda in Kashmir but to also delegitimise the Kashmiri struggle for freedom by equating it with the rhetoric of "cross-border" terrorism.

This is what the BJP has done during the previous elections and a similar sort of strategy, intended to further marginalise the Muslim majority community in Kashmir, is being applied to appease right-wing parties which played a vital role in BJP's ascendance to power.

Secondly, the rise of Hindu nationalism has profound political ramifications for India's relationship with Pakistan. It is already evident that the right-wing parties take a more hardline approach when it comes to security, especially as it relates to Kashmir and Pakistan.

Out of seven, five Indian states including Uttar Pradesh (UP), the heartland of Indian politics, are set to go for elections in the first quarter of 2022. The UP is considered the most important one as it will set the tone for the general elections scheduled to be held in 2024. Knowing that the route to New Delhi goes through the assembly polls in 2022, there is every likelihood that the BJP, which has nothing to sell to the public, would return to its all-time favourite Pakistan-bashing campaign and may even resort to desperate and risky options, including false flag operations, in Kashmir to woo the Hindu voters.

Given the BJP's history of using Kashmir to stoke nationalist sentiment in the Indian mainland, there is a fear that the Modi regime may attempt to repeat the Pulwama-type attacks in Kashmir to extract political benefits in the upcoming polls. 2022 looks certain to be another grim year for the people of Kashmir. ■



# FRONTIERS

## Afghanistan 2022: Future Bleak



# Desperately Seeking Legitimacy

As the New Year dawns, a financially hamstrung Taliban regime struggles to both gain international legitimacy and the funds needed to survive. Will it succeed?



**By Imtiaz Gul**

*The writer is the founder and Executive Director of the Centre for Research and Security Studies.*

**T**he roadmap for international engagement with Afghanistan became clearer with three major developments within the last two weeks of December: the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) Foreign Minister's Conference in Islamabad; a US-proposed UNSC (United Nations Security Council) resolution passed unanimously; and the US Treasury's concessions on American-origin financial aid flows to the crisis-ridden Afghanistan.

The Treasury Department announced that it was issuing more licenses to facilitate the flow of international aid to Afghanistan "as long as it did not reach individuals sanctioned by the U.S." The licenses will also enable the Afghan diaspora to use banking channels for sending funds to their families in Afghanistan. Additionally, they would help the transfer of European Union (EU) funds (one billion Euros) through banking channels.

This move in Washington on



*Recent concessions by the US have paved the way for the much needed humanitarian aid to reach desperate Afghans.*

December 22 ensued following a string of appeals and pressures, particularly from within, including a letter by 46 mostly Democratic lawmakers who warned President Biden that "sanctions against Taliban officials now in charge of governmental functions are creating a chilling effect for financial institutions and aid organisations serving Afghanistan."

The UNSC resolution was equally promising. It said: "This resolution provides an exemption from the U.N. Security Council assets freeze against listed members of the Taliban and associated entities solely for the provision of humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan, which the council will review in one year."

**What does all this mean for the months ahead, if not years?**

## **Scenario 1:**

Based on the aforementioned three major developments, one can assume more soft-peddalling vis-a-vis the Taliban by the United States and its major European allies. This will facilitate the inflow of the one billion Euros the EU has committed plus the roughly \$480 million

pledged by the United States.

The Afghan economy continues to slide; businesses have contracted by nearly 50 percent since mid-August; the national currency, the Afghani, continues to lose its value vis-a-vis the dollar; and the \$9.5 billion assets belonging to the Afghan central bank remain frozen in the United States. Consequently, the Taliban regime remains financially hamstrung by the above factors. However, the United Nations receives a substantial part of the \$8 billion that it has asked for to provide aid and services to Afghanistan in 2022, through a parallel aid and service delivery system.

Unwillingly, the Taliban have agreed to the parallel UN-led delivery system, also assisted by the OIC, because they lack international legitimacy. And further, they lack the funds to freely run the government.

Contracted businesses, unemployment and worsening economic conditions have resulted in increased crime and poppy production. Smuggling from Pakistan and Iran have also picked up.

At the same time, ties with Pakistan



**Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi pushed through an agreement to establish a fund for Afghanistan at the 2021 OIC Foreign Minister's Conference in Islamabad.**

are getting tense because the Taliban – through their anti-Pakistan vitriol – are trying their best shake off the tag of being “Pakistan’s proxies.” This is further sully Pakistan’s image internationally. Their lack of action against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is another irritant in bilateral relations. Elements within the Taliban circles, particularly opportunistic factions who jumped on the bandwagon after August 15, keep reviving historically contentious issues, such as the Durand Line, to vitiate the air between the two countries.

The Taliban face little political opposition, but there is a groundswell of public resentment against them because of starvation, unemployment, and a regular exodus of desperate Afghans who do not see any future for themselves.

But despite all these handicaps, the Taliban regime continues to survive and moves on in a helter-skelter manner, hanging by a thread. Fortunately for them, there is little political opposition, because the US and its allies refuse to financially support any anti-Taliban forces. But they withhold recognition because their primary objective is to keep the Taliban regime on a leash while providing the bare-minimum support.

So the Taliban, who have improved revenue collection and contained corruption, muddle along on a shoe-string budget as the Biden administration grapples with the issue of whether to recognise the Taliban or not.

#### **Scenario 2:**

*The Taliban face little political opposition, but there is a groundswell of public resentment against them because of starvation, unemployment, and a regular exodus of desperate Afghans who do not see any future for themselves.*

Despite receiving massive humanitarian assistance, social unrest against the intransigent Taliban regime mounts. The economy is continuously contracting. The assets remain frozen and Afghanistan’s international banking capacity is constrained because of US sanctions and the designation of the Taliban as terrorists by the UN.

Corruption is on the rise because the Taliban lack financial resources. The flow of UN-led humanitarian assistance, nevertheless, is dependent on official sweet will, which serves as a perverse incentive for the officials who hold the key to distribution and disbursement of aid and sala-

ries. This means more official corruption – and the aid officials are in the habit of greasing palms in order to be seen as “successfully performing the aid distribution task.”

Relations with Pakistan remain sour and complex. The Taliban are trying to leverage relative international goodwill to keep Pakistan at a distance. Random officials keep denigrating Pakistan to appear as “sons of the soil” – obvious attempts to deflect public criticism and to create acceptance among common Afghans, particularly the younger generation that sees its eastern neighbour as the source of Afghanistan’s ills.

The disconnect between the younger population and the rulers is growing. Any Afghan who has a choice, is anxious to leave the country for a better future. This represents extreme socio-political volatility for the Taliban. It also means continued pressure on Pakistan’s borders because of the flight of all those who are anxiously seeking opportunities to get out.

#### **Common to Both Scenarios**

The general socio-economic conditions are deteriorating, making the political situation messier for the regime. This represents an ideal situation for the opponents of China and Pakistan to fish for influence among the Taliban.

In their desperation, they are leveraging China and Pakistan’s desire for stability in Afghanistan with an overzealous Indo-US alliance that wants to deny China, in particular, any foothold in Afghanistan.

This works in the Taliban regime’s favour, as they are getting indirect concessions from the US, which would hate to see China and Russia cultivate the Taliban regime to expand their sphere of influence.

Will this geo-political contest be a bane or a boon for the Taliban? The first few months of 2022 will make it abundantly clear. Most of the elite – politicians as well as highly paid bureaucrats/diplomats who fled the country – are positioning themselves for scenario II. However, one thing is clear regarding the immediate future – the Taliban face no literal fighting opposition as most of them have left the country and those who are still inside are fatigued with the perennial state of conflict. So, unless external vested interests intervene with funding, the Taliban face no real military opponent. ■





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# HORIZONS

Diverging Interests





# Pak-US: Shaky Ground

Pakistan's relations with the US are largely – but not entirely – contingent on its engagement with the Taliban government

By Ibrahim Sajid Malick

**A** year after the United States suffered its most serious brush with constitutional failure since the Civil War – on January 6, 2021 – American democracy continued its descent into the abyss. Meanwhile, the Biden administration tried to put lipstick on the pig by inviting 110 countries to participate in the “Summit for Democracy.”

Pakistan, the fifth-largest country globally, with a functioning democracy, did not attend. The shortcomings in Pakistan's democratic apparatus primarily stem from the interference of global players, including the USA, who exercise influence over vital elements of Pakistan's security and foreign policy.

Democrat and Republican talking heads in America claim that after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan is no longer significant to the US. However, China-Pakistan ties have kept both the State Department and the Pentagon on their toes.

For its part, Pakistan has ceased reacting to the United States' carrot and stick approaches. The Taliban's triumph in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of US forces from the nation after almost two decades, has changed the geopolitical terrain of Central and South Asia. Pakistan, which has openly and secretly supported the Taliban since before the US forced the organisation out of Kabul in 2001, may take some solace in the success of its long-term partner.

Still, events in Afghanistan in August 2021 upended Islamabad's relationship with Washington. Pakistan's civilian and military leaders appeared to have grown accustomed to the status quo of recent years. The Taliban gradually gained control of more territory. At the same time, US and NATO forces' aims and ambitions waned, even as they retained responsibility for propping up Kabul's weak government (with Pakistan's help). Islamabad



*How will Biden respond to the rapidly evolving geopolitical scenario in the Af-Pak region after bringing his troops home from Afghanistan?*

must now devise a new strategy with a more coherent and intransigent government than Kabul has had in a generation. In Washington, there is growing resentment over the perception that Pakistan contributed significantly to the US' loss in the longest war in US history.

Before invading Afghanistan in 2001, the US offered Pakistan two options: renounce the Taliban and help the US, or continue to back the group and become a de facto opponent of the US war effort. General Pervez Musharraf, who took over the country in a military coup in 1999, chose the middle ground. He opted to assist US forces in their pursuit of al-Qaeda operatives fleeing Afghanistan, including utilising Pakistani highways and aircraft. He did, however, give asylum to key Taliban officials and material and advisory assistance to the group when it re-

covered a foothold in Afghanistan in the mid-2000s.

American officials have been dealing with the aftermath of the surprise Taliban capture of Kabul in August and the ensuing rushed evacuation. Now attention has moved to recognise the mistakes committed in the Afghan conflict. Washington is examining where things went wrong, and Pakistan, given its long relationship with the Taliban, is seen as a factor.

General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, stated in congressional hearings on Afghanistan in September 2021 that “we need to properly investigate the role of Pakistan[s] provision of] sanctuary” in understanding how the Taliban succeeded. Similarly, during another congressional hearing last year, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, “This is one of



**US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley has accused Pakistan of undermining US interests by providing shelter to the Taliban.**

the things we're going to be looking at in the days and weeks ahead – the role that Pakistan has played over the previous 20 years.” He went on to say that the US administration was considering “the role we would want to see [Pakistan] play in the coming years and what it would take for it to achieve that,” implying that a review of how to engage with Islamabad in the future was underway.

In the Senate, 22 Republican senators have introduced legislation to censure Afghanistan's new Taliban administration and nations that have helped the Taliban. The bill also requires a report

that includes “an assessment of support by state and non-state actors, including the government of Pakistan, for the Taliban between 2001 and 2020,” as well as “sanctuary space, financial support, intelligence support, logistics and medical support, training, equipping, and tactical, operational, or strategic direction.”

On December 15, 2021, the US Senate overwhelmingly passed a version of the National Defence Authorisation Act, or NDAA, authorising \$778 billion in defence spending – \$25 billion (a 5 percent increase from the previous one) more than President Joe Biden had requested – send-

ing the measure to the White House for signature. It is larger than those enacted during the Vietnam and Korean Wars and Ronald Reagan's military buildup. For the yearly legislation outlining the Department of Defence policy, the bill had substantial support from both Democrats and Republicans.

Pakistan's Senate, in turn, expressed “concern” over the measure introduced in the United States Senate, which Pakistan's media labelled as “anti-Pakistan.”

Pakistan is being blamed for the US military and Afghan leadership's failings while disregarding its backing for the Taliban. It has not formally recognised the new Taliban rule. Still, it has been making a deliberate effort to interact with it, with government officials making the case in speeches, op-eds, and interviews.

*America wants Pakistan to not formally recognise the Taliban administration and use its influence in building a “Washington-friendly” government.*

In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan went beyond calls for humanitarian aid and financial liquidity to prevent Afghanistan's economic collapse, saying that “we must strengthen and stabilise the current government, for the sake of the people of Afghanistan.”

America wants Pakistan to not formally recognise the Taliban administration and use its influence in building a “Washington-friendly” government.

Despite an adverse geopolitical climate in which the United States and Pakistan have close relations with each other's adversaries (India and China, respectively), there are still prospects for collaboration in non-security areas. Cooperation is always possible when interests coincide. Pakistan now seeks stronger relations based on geoeconomics. ■



**Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in New York, to shore up ties with the US in the wake of the Taliban takeover.**



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# The newsmaker

## Cornered Tiger



# Still at the Crease

Faced with grave economic and political challenges, a hostile opposition and somewhat soured relations with the establishment, will a frazzled PM remain in the saddle till the next elections in 2023?



**By Amir Zia**

*The writer is a senior journalist and managing editor, Narratives.*

**P**olitical instability and uncertainty are inbuilt in Pakistan's parliamentary form of democracy. But Prime Minister Imran Khan appears all set to stay at the crease through 2022 and cross the finishing line of his five-year term to become the first politician to perform this feat since the days of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s.

Of course, this forecast is subject to many ifs and buts as accidents, disasters, health issues and scandals emerging out of the blue cannot be factored in. However, going by the trajectory on which the opposition forces – be it the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and its leading parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – are moving against the government, plus all the other challenges and road bumps combined, it can be safely said that Prime Minister Imran Khan will continue to hold the fort till elections take place in the country sometime in 2023. And while Imran Khan is in the saddle, the chances of convicted former premier Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan are remote – given the fact that all the speculations regarding his deal with the military establishment have finally come to naught.

However, this does not mean that the PTI Government will have a smooth



*Despite the DG ISI appointment fiasco, PM Imran Khan has maintained a functioning relationship with the establishment.*

sailing. On the domestic front, the government would continue to face many genuine as well as self-created, grave economic and political challenges along with governance issues, which a hostile opposition would try to exploit to the maximum. On the external front, the government would be kept on its toes because of its complicated relations with the United States, open hostilities with India on the eastern border and a troubled Afghanistan on its western front. But none of these challenges are likely to develop into a full-blown crisis and upset the carefully laden appletree or force any of the stakeholders to show their cards.

Let's first take the challenge the PTI Government faces from the opposition in 2022. The PDM and other opposition forces would continue to make aggressive gestures, issue ultimatums and threats about forcing an in-house change or launching an agitation to oust the government. However, none of them would go into a do or die mode, the reason being both the objective and subjective constraints of the opposition parties.

The government has indeed taken a number of highly unpopular steps on the economic front and suffers from an image problem because of its inability to ful-

fil many election promises and its real or perceived incompetence. However, even now, its support base has not been wiped out and Imran Khan still remains a popular and credible leader, with a following in all four provinces and among all ethnic and religious groups. There is discontent against the government because of high inflation and economic and political instability, but it has not yet reached a level where it would trigger mass unrest on the streets of Pakistan.

Yes, the opposition can bring in the captive crowds to rallies and public meetings, but a sustained mass agitation is not their cup of tea. The opposition's dilemma increases because its own tried and tested leaders are tainted with allegations of corruption. Both these factors remain a key hindrance in the launch of any broad-based anti-government movement.

All in all, the opposition lacks a programme to mobilise the masses, and a credible leadership and organisational structure to launch protest campaigns.

The opposition also suffers from a lack of trust and unity within its ranks. The division is two-fold. One, among the heavyweight opposition parties such as the PML-N and the PPP; neither of them would allow the other to use its shoulders



*Taming inflation will be crucial to the PTI's prolonging their stay in power.*

to climb the ladder of power. The other is within the parties themselves. The PML-N is a prime example of this: generation next of the Sharif family is engaged in a bid to capture the party leadership, resulting in an internal party power struggle. However, Shehbaz Sharif is unlikely to part ways with his older brother, who holds the popular PML-N vote. He would like to enter the electoral arena in 2023 keeping the party intact. Similarly, Nawaz Sharif would also like to keep the party

*It can be safely said that Prime Minister Imran Khan will continue to hold the fort till elections take place in the country sometime in 2023.*

united and bide his time before passing on the mantle of the party's leadership to his daughter, Maryam Nawaz. Shehbaz, for him, remains merely a stop-gap arrangement.

The PPP, which had parted ways with the PDM because of its disagreement on strategy, still does not want the Parliament to end its term prematurely, as this would also affect its government in Sindh. That is the reason for its mantra of in-house change, which Bilawal Bhutto and Co. will not be able to force, not merely because of its unwilling partners but also because they themselves lack the political will to do so. The public outbursts of the PPP are nothing more than posturing.

The senior opposition leadership also knows the risk of upsetting the apple-cart. An Imran Khan ousted from power prematurely would become a political martyr and prove more ferocious in his attacks in the next election campaign. Additionally, the opposition would not want to set a precedent which may one day come to haunt its own leadership and result in unintended consequences. These may include the ouster of the top leaders from the power equation in the form of the much-speculated national government or any other model, if the current one collapses prematurely.

The second challenge for the PTI Government could have emerged from



*The PM's loyal followers, though humbled, are yet to give up hope on their Kaptaan.*



the infighting among the institutions – the executive versus the army or the executive versus the judiciary. Luckily for the PTI, even in its fourth year in power, at least it has working relations with the institutions, even if they are far from ideal.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's un-called-for tiff with the military leadership over the appointment of the ISI chief proved short-lived and is now water under the bridge as the working relations between the two sides remain normal. However, this episode has damaged the perception of both players being on the same page. The page is not torn, but some wrinkles have appeared on it now. However, this shouldn't be surprising in a country like Pakistan which has flawed elected institutions and suffers from capacity issues of the civilian leadership. Certainly, there are both internal and external issues on which the Prime Minister and the military leadership do not see eye-to-eye, but they remain manageable and have not crossed the point of no return.

However, there are political forces who would want to see the military act against Imran Khan and orchestrate his ouster, as was evident from the statements of former president Asif Ali Zardari, as well as the organised propaganda campaign of a deal between Nawaz Sharif and the military. However, the differences between the civil and military leadership are not of a fundamental nature. Therefore, the desire for Imran Khan's ouster through some backchannel deal is unlikely to materialise.

The military leadership would continue to support the current political set-up as the country cannot afford any misadventure and remains in desperate need of at least a semblance of political stability and continuity.

What the opposition hopes to achieve through its brinkmanship and aggressive approach is to ensure its relevance, keep the PTI on the back foot and create some political space for itself in the next general elections.

Imran Khan, on his part, will try to go in for some popular measures in the last one-and-a half years in power and perhaps reenergise the accountability campaign against corruption, with the aim of bringing some of the high profile corruption cases against the opposition leaders to a closure, specially focusing on Shehbaz Sharif, who is trying to present himself as



**Bilawal and the PPP's hopes to reach the top via an intra-parliamentary power shuffle have little chance of bearing fruit.**

*If Imran Khan is looking at staying in power beyond 2023, then along with his sermons, which are abhorred by most liberals, he would have to improve his game on a war-footing and deliver on at least some of his electoral promises.*

an alternate to Imran Khan.

While both the government and the opposition have their eyes fixed on the next general elections, at least in 2022 and part of 2023, Imran Khan's detractors would have to live with his verbosity on 'Naya Pakistan,' 'Riyasat-e-Madina' and accountability, as well as bear his sermons on morality and how vulgarity, obscenity and the 'evil social media' are corrupting the youth and causing moral decay.

But if Khan is looking to stay in power beyond 2023, then along with his sermons, which are abhorred by most liberals, he would have to improve his game on a war-footing and deliver on at least some of his electoral promises, bring down inflation and revive economic activity. The mighty Khan is still very much in the game, though he appears a bit ruffled and worn-out. ■



**The PML-N struggles to keep pressure on the government as a new generation comes to the fore.**



# **Viewpoint**

A Negative Outlook

**By Mohammed Zubair**

The writer is former Governor Sindh and the spokesperson for former premier Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz.



# Same Old, Same Old...

With the PTI government continuing to trip over itself every step of the way, the opposition gives overthrowing it another go

**C**onsidering the way 2021 ended, especially the last few months of the year, 2022 does not promise a very positive outlook. And this holds true for politics, the economy, foreign policy and governance. Since coming into power, Imran Khan and his government have been struggling, going from one crisis to another. But then there was hope – hope of an economic turnaround, prices coming down, employment generation, improved governance and strengthening of the provincial governments in Punjab and KP. More than anyone, Prime Minister Imran Khan was very optimistic about better days ahead, but with recent events such as the spectacular loss in the KP local government elections, which till now was considered the PTI's citadel of political power, maybe, just maybe, the PM is losing hope as well. That all is not well is clear from the Prime Minister's decision to dissolve PTI's organisational structure and his announcement that he will personally oversee the second phase of elections in KP, as well as the elections in Punjab.

If the PTI's disastrous performance in the KP local government elections is the reason for the PM to decide to oversee the next phase of elections, then he will have to oversee and directly manage every other aspect of national affairs – be it politics, governance, economy or foreign policy, because the failure is evident on all fronts. As a former cricket captain, the PM should know better than anyone that it is not just about overseeing everything that guarantees positive results. You need a world class team to support you and there is enough evidence to suggest that the PM unfortunately lacks a strong, competent and professional team. In fact, the team at his disposal is incompetent and lacks capacity.

Coming back to politics, we need to examine how it looks going into 2022, which many people believe will be the year of elections. Before we proceed further, it is worth recalling that the KP local government elections were not



Can the opposition capitalise on the PTI's catastrophic performance this time around?

*If the PTI's disastrous performance in the KP local government elections is the reason for the PM to decide to oversee the next phase of elections, then he will have to oversee and directly manage every other aspect of national affairs – because the failure is evident on all fronts.*

the only one which resulted in a massive defeat for the ruling party. This has been a familiar pattern all through 2021. Except for Sialkot, the PTI lost all the by-elections in Punjab, including the one in South Punjab. It lost from Nowshera, its power base and the hometown of Pervez Khattak. It not only failed to retain its seat

in Karachi (vacated by Faisal Vawda) but its candidate placed fifth in the seat rankings out of six contenders. It also lost the cantonment board elections, and saw virtual decimation in key cantonments, such as Rawalpindi and Lahore.

So with its political support shrinking all across Pakistan, how can the party regain lost ground? The only way that can happen in 2022 is a much-improved performance on all fronts – what people expected when Imran Khan came to power based on promises made before Elections 2018. This was a political party coming into power not just on the promise of economic improvement, but the promise to dismantle in entirety the old, rotten Pakistan and create in its place a 'Naya Pakistan' – along the lines of the golden period of Islamic history, the Riyasat e Madina. It was the dream of a disparity-free Pakistan that the Captain committed to, in front of large excited gatherings. It was not just about economics. He vowed there would be no VIP protocol, no Governors Houses and no PMs-house. But none of this has happened in more than the three years of the PTI government and that is why there is such a loss of hope as we enter the new year.

And with the likes of Usman Buzdar and Mahmood Khan at the helm in their



CMs of Punjab & KP: Are they a liability to the PTI Government?

respective provinces, even PTI diehards would find it difficult to hope for a better and improved performance in 2022. Three-and-a-half years is enough to determine the capacity and quality of the appointed team leaders in the country's provinces. The unfortunate fact is that performance is expected to deteriorate as fatigue sets in – the signs of which are already very evident. The same is true of the federal cabinet. From the first day of the new government, it was clear the selection was extremely poor with most cabinet ministers lacking in quality, capacity and professionalism.

It's even worse as far as the economy is concerned. The biggest challenge is the high inflation that has persisted since the present government came to power. Its inability to control price hikes, especially of essential items, remains its biggest failure to date. Under IMF pressure, the mini budget with nearly 400 billion rupees of additional taxes, will certainly result in more price increases. Inflationary pressures will continue their upward journey in 2022 seriously affecting the budgets of large segments of the population and further eroding the PTI's popularity. Additionally, unemployment is expected to increase significantly and more people are expected to go below the poverty line.

The government is also struggling to control the fiscal deficit as well as the trade and current account deficits. As a result, the pressure on the rupee will continue to mount in the new year, with the rupee expected to hit the 200 mark somewhere around mid-2022. And the stock market remained dull throughout 2021 with negative dollar growth. The trend is

*Imran Khan... could surprise everyone by dissolving the assemblies and calling for early elections. This might prove disastrous for him given the fact that the momentum against the ruling party mounts each day.*

expected to continue in 2022.

In order to control inflationary pressures, the State Bank will continue to increase the discount rate in the first half of 2022. With higher interest rates and a higher fiscal deficit, the public debt will reach levels unimaginable a few years ago.

With Imran Khan's popularity hitting a new low, coupled with worsening economic conditions, the scenario for 2022 looks pretty grim for the ruling party. Whether it will come out of this difficult phase will also depend on several other factors. These include global trends, primarily international commodity prices, and the overall COVID situation. Easing of international commodity prices, including oil prices, could give the government much-needed fiscal space and the capacity to control prices.

Another major factor that will determine how the year 2022 shapes is the role of the opposition. The combined opposition under the PDM more or less failed in its effort to dislodge the government. By June 2021, it looked as if the government had been able to convincingly repel the onslaught. But since then the opposition has had several opportunities to find its way back into mustering a formidable enough force to exert maximum pressure on the government – both in the Parliament as well as on the roads. This will further weaken the government's resolve to manage the challenges that it faces in 2022.

The opposition, especially the PML-N, has managed to overcome what many saw to be a witch-hunt – conducted over the last three years in the name of accountability – and it's no less than a miracle in the Pakistani political context that the party has remained almost intact. 2022 will start with not a single PML-N leader behind bars. And further relief is also in sight for the main opposition leadership as the government's accountability narrative all but fails. That failure, in fact, makes the opposition look far more aggressive and ready to take on the government like never before.

The big question is whether the PTI government will be able to get through 2022 without hurting itself further. The past-three-and-a-half years have clearly demonstrated that the present ruling party does not have what it takes to govern a complex country like Pakistan. That is why there is a general belief among independent political analysts that Imran Khan, fearing the worst, could surprise everyone by dissolving the assemblies and calling for early elections. This might prove disastrous for him given the fact that the momentum against the ruling party mounts each day. The only other option – crawling its way through 2022, hoping against hope for support from unspecified forces and a revival of fortunes – seems remote. Meanwhile, the party seems to be on its way to further disintegration.

One thing is for sure – 2022 will be full of excitement – many fireworks and breaking news – with the political temperature constantly rising. And while the parties fight it out, the public will be watching in despair, because for them little changes, whoever is at the helm. ■



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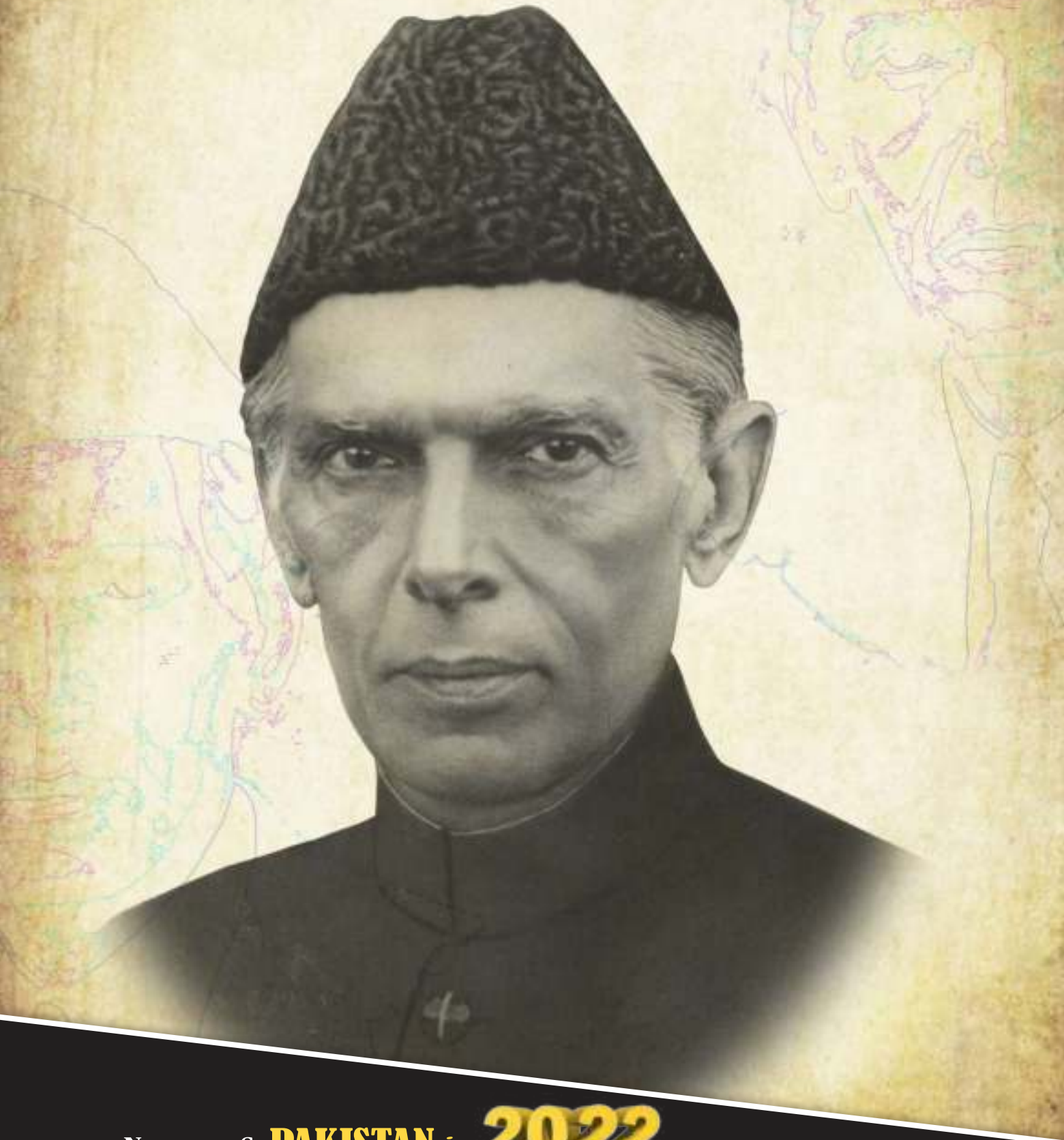


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# BRASS TACKS

Jinnah's Pakistan





# Smoking, Simmering, Smouldering

A near-miracle at the time of its creation, Pakistan requires another miracle to become the country it was envisioned to be. It was no easy task then, and it is going to be no easy task now. It has been rendered even more difficult with the adoption of policies which run contrary to the shape of the state the Quaid had stipulated



**By Raoof Hasan**

*The writer is a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information.*



*Political parties have become mouthpieces for promoting the interests of the few families which lord over them.*

*"You are free. You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques, or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State... Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that, in course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus, and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."*

*Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah*

**I**t was August 11, 1947, three days before Pakistan appeared on the map of the world as an independent and sovereign country, that Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah delivered his epoch-making speech. Pakistan was a near miracle which the Quaid's biographer, Stanley Wolpert, aptly described as unprecedented: "Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three."

During the speech that the Quaid delivered from the floor of the first Constituent Assembly on that day, he defined the contours the new-born state was to bear in the future – that of a progressive, enlightened, tolerant and liberal entity, dispensing justice to its people equally, equitably and without any discrimination on the basis of their faith, caste, colour or creed. He categorically proclaimed that the state shall

have nothing to do with the citizens' personal faith. In other words, the state shall not wear the apparel of religion. The decline that we have experienced since can be effectively attributed to the manner and extent to which succeeding governments in the country flouted those enshrining principles of the creation of Pakistan. But an even greater tragedy is that we hardly realise what we have done. We seem unconcerned about where we are headed as we continue refusing to read the wisdom behind the far-sighted words of the Quaid.

The Pakistan of today is a poor reflection of the country that he envisioned on that eventful day of August 11, 1947. But for a brief period of hope at the beginning of its journey, it has continued to slump. Each new incumbent in the seat of power has contributed to accelerating this decline. Today, we are a divided nation in quest of an identity. But the constituents that have been fed over the years and decades, and which continue to be fed, can hardly con-



*Are Pakistan's media houses in need of some soul searching?*

tribute to turning the nation into a progressive entity that would be wedded to the ideals of its creation. Instead, because of a spate of regressive policies tailored by succeeding regimes, both democratic and dictatorial, the country is on a slide downward with few chances of it being stalled.

We are a nation of bits and pieces today with no common identity to bind us together. We have drifted apart over the years because everyone who held the mantle of power tried to colour the country in a manner that suited his or her predilections. Interests of the state or the values of its creation did not figure in their considerations. In the process, we were able to build powerful family

*Bringing the Quaid's Pakistan back is really a multifaceted task which requires both conviction and courage to undertake: conviction in the fact that it is the right thing to do and courage that it is imperative to do it.*



*Cult of Personality in full affect: enraged PML-N supporters in Lahore after then PM Nawaz Sharif was dismissed on charges of corruption in 2017.*

fiefdoms which adopted policies solely to further perpetuate their financial empires. The state was rendered subservient and was made to survive on the mercy of those who controlled the reins of power. This gave birth to the individual-over-the-state relationship which served the cause of the elite, but worked to the grave detriment of the state and its inalienable interests. It became the orphan.

The ghastly sight that we witness today is reflective of the sickness that we have bred. Political parties are a sham. They have become mouthpieces for promoting the interests of the few families which lord over them. The state does not figure at all in their permutations. So the PML-N is Nawaz Sharif and the PPP is Bhutto/Zardari clan whose interests are served by these private limited political parties. The state is there to be ravaged to fill up the coffers of these individuals so that they could gather enough illicit funds to keep it hostage in their poisonous tentacles.

The tragedy is that the state is now buried under layers and layers of deceit and deception accumulated over decades which have distorted its face. Under the circumstances, even a genuine effort for retrieval has scant chance of success. A long and painful struggle is the only option that could help free the state from the bondage of individuals and help it transit to its foundational ideals and become the protector of its marginalised people who have been cruelly pushed to the brink.

This is no easy task as it can ruffle numerous powerful fiefdoms which have been hoisted by exploiting the largesse of the state which they ravaged with impunity. We have reached a point which has obliterated the distinction between those many who have indulged in remorseless plunder and those few who may still have some compassion left in them for the state. But looking for the latter community of people may be an immense challenge in itself.

It is also a reality that we have reached an abysmally low point in our existence as a nation. It is a condition which may no longer be sustainable. The state has been reduced to a skeleton going around with a begging bowl while those who have skinned it disdainfully are parked in the most luxurious properties with no fear of accountability. They have virtually bought all organs of the state with their



illicit billions, which are incessantly engaged in either proving their masters' innocence before the people, or affording them prolonged stays and relief on one pretext or the other so that they could continue escaping the clutches of the law. This is so because the system has been tailored to suit the profit of the dishonest, not the convenience of the poor and the needy people who are, in fact, disparaged and thrown to the wolves. They have no one to heal their wounds and no one to speak a word of sympathy. It is like Pakistan is not their country. They remain strangers here.

There is a reason which has cultivated this feeling of disempowerment among people. From very early on, and much against the dream of the Quaid, discrimination was scripted into the charter of the newborn state which created divisions along the lines of faith, creed, language and such other identities. Rather than mend these divisions, they have become starker with time, thus hurting the genesis of the state. There are time-faded laws which don't stand up to the benchmarks of justice and there are regulations which are cynically inimical to the interests of those who require protection. But we persist with these gross aberrations.

Much has gone wrong and much more continues to go wrong. The fact that we have sown the seeds of division does not catch the attention of those who sit in the power echelons. They are deeply immersed in the delusion of their self-righteous demeanour and remain obdurately unwilling to budge. While the big looters continue to use the power of their pelf to remain outside the domain of justice, it is the weak and the impoverished communities which suffer an excess of cruelty. The divide continues to widen further.

As I wrote in a recent article, there is a wicked chain of corruption which has many partners – the beneficiary elite, bureaucracy, judiciary and the media being the principal ones. They have joined hands in a concerted effort to sabotage the working of the government so that the remedial policies which could have helped reverse the tide of division and destruction are not implemented in earnest. While the unworthy roles of the ben-

eficiary elite, bureaucracy and the judiciary has an historical relevance to them, it is the media that stands out in the current times on account of the sinister and misleading hand it is playing in distorting reality and creating an aura around people who are established criminals. They have been convicted by the apex court of the country and are now fugitives before



*No national revival without judicial reform.*

the law. But they remain the darlings of the media because they have the booty in abundance which they share generously with their operators in the print and electronic industry. Nothing could be more gruesome than this partnership which is deeply rooted in crime and corruption and devoted to protecting the perpetrators.

The short part of the Quaid's speech of August 11 that I have quoted above is the core recipe for a tolerant and progressive Pakistan that he had envisioned. It is now clouded among so many intricate contradictions that even bringing it out in the open may be a task of much labour. But there is no alternative either. We have failed miserably in devising and practicing various prescriptions which have plunged the country deep in the valley of darkness. The daunting task is to take it out of there and put it on a course to salvation.

Bringing the Quaid's Pakistan back is really a multifaceted task which requires both conviction and courage to undertake: conviction in the fact that it is the right thing to do and courage that it is imperative to do it. But, no individual alone can accomplish it. The immensity of the task and the pitfalls that may have to be faced in the process require a brave and collective effort. The constitution and the laws flowing from it will have to be reviewed. The working of the institutions, particularly those in the domain of

religious education, will have to be regulated. Strictures which are inimical to the foundational principles of equity will have to be done away with. Equality of all faiths before law will have to be ensured and contrarian regulations abolished. The judicial system will need a special review to structure it on the sustainable foundations of provision of justice for all.

Bureaucracy will have to shed off its disdainful pretensions of being the masters and perform their due role as public servants. Media will have to be shown the mirror so that they are able to take off their masks of prejudice and stop selling their written and spoken word in exchange for the din of coins. On top of that, the nation will have to espouse compassion in preference to cruelty.

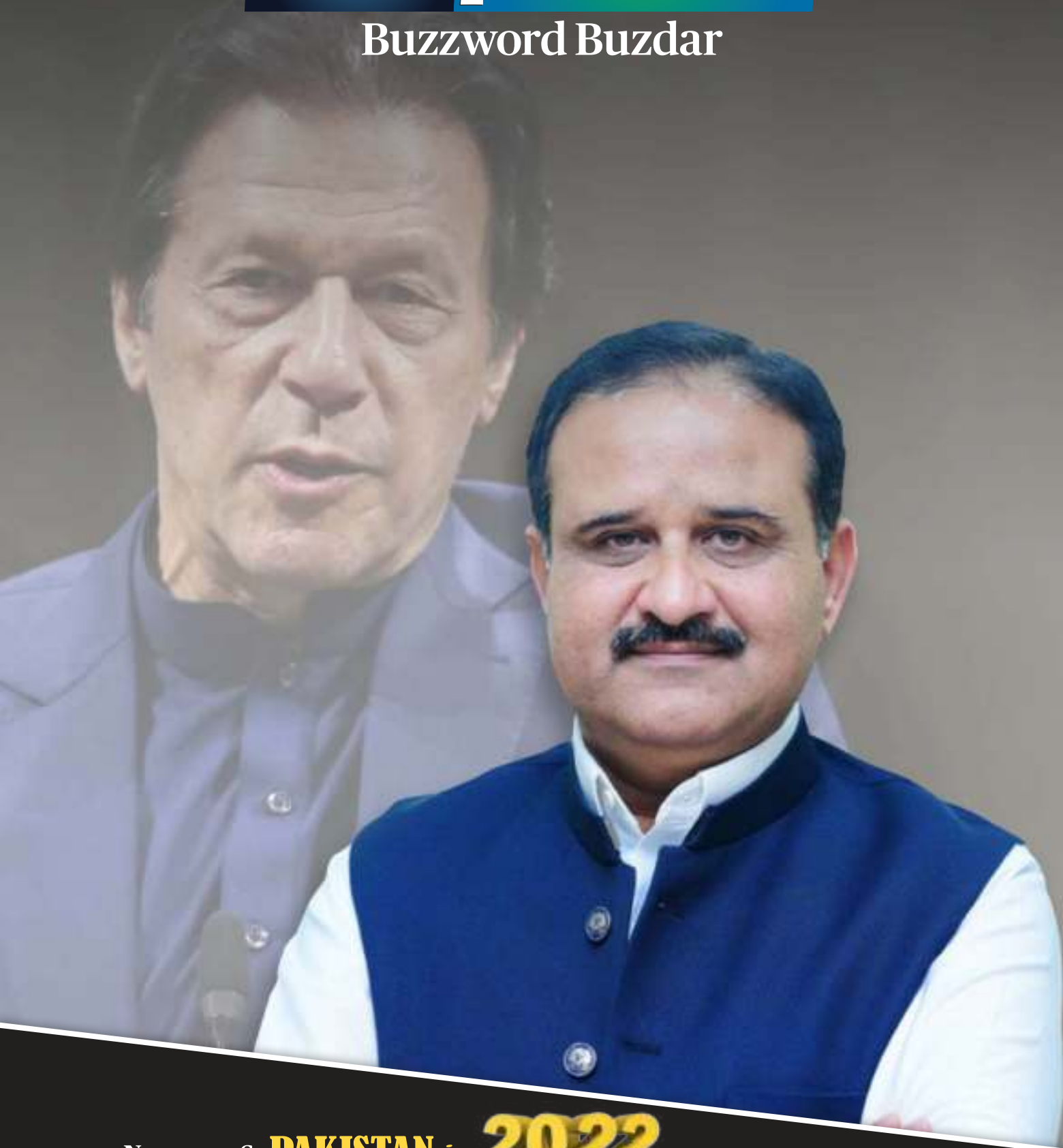
Quaid's Pakistan is smoldering, simmering and smouldering from grievous fault lines which have emerged over years of regressive policies followed by succeeding governments. These have landed Pakistan in a pit with no thought process devoted to getting it out of there. With time, we are lapsing further with thickening clouds of religiosity hovering over and their shadows lengthening with each passing day. What is needed is the formulation of a national effort to first gauge where we stand today and why, and then evaluate how we can break the vicious stranglehold of regression which is only getting tighter with time.

A near-miracle at the time of its creation, Pakistan requires another miracle to become the country it was envisioned to be. It was no easy task then, and it is going to be no easy task now. It has been rendered even more difficult with the adoption of policies which run contrary to the shape of the state the Quaid had stipulated. Nullifying the caustic effects of the strictures pursued in the past is a Herculean task. Even more difficult will be the challenge of scraping those policies which have caused the damage and formulating new ones which may be construed controversial by a regressive mindset which has evolved over time.

Yet it is a task which has to be undertaken in earnest as, otherwise, the process of degeneration will only accentuate, further bringing the state down under its vile and unbearable weight. ■

# realpolitik

Buzzword Buzdar





# PTI's Achilles' Heel

Buzdar's inexplicable entrenchment as Punjab's chief whip is one indicator that the PTI government may not be steering the ship



**By Salim Bukhari**

*The writer is a veteran journalist, who is working as the Chief Editor of City42 Group's Digital Media. He has served as the editor of Pakistan's leading English-language dailies, The News and The Nation.*

**U**sman Buzdar has become the buzzword in Punjab's politics since Prime Minister Imran Khan picked him out of the blue to head the provincial government after winning the 2018 general elections. Buzdar's selection as Chief Minister – a position formerly held by an administrator like Shahbaz Sharif and the PPP's former strongman Ghulam Mustafa Khar – surprised many, particularly those who were aspiring for the coveted political post within the party.

Prominent among those were Aleem Khan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Chaudhry Pervaiz Ilahi, Fawad Chaudhry, and sitting Punjab, Governor Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar. Interestingly outside the PTI fold, criticism of Buzdar's selection was milder as compared to that within the party –



PM Khan is sticking firmly by his right hand-man in Punjab.

at least to begin with. But from the word go, everyone in the PTI and out of it was trying to gauge the factors that propelled little-known Usman Buzdar to such a position of authority. This was followed by 'leaks,' one of which alleged that Usman Buzdar's wife is a friend of Farah Khan, at whose residence the marriage ceremony of Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi was held. It was also said that Farhan Khan proposed the name of Usman Buzdar for the Punjab Chief Ministership. And there were a host of other speculative stories in this regard.

Imran Khan is fully aware that there are people within and outside the party who want Buzdar to be removed and realising this, he sent a strong message to anti-Buzdar elements during two of his recent visits to the Punjab capital Lahore, that no matter what, come what may, Buzdar is there to stay.

This strongly-worded Prime Minister's message was not only for his party men, his assorted political allies, or the Opposition seeking his removal, but also for the bureaucracy, administration, and his assorted allies.

Imran Khan ignored Fawad Chaudhry's harsh criticism of the Punjab Chief Minister, who had called him incompetent and challenged his ability to

resolve issues confronting the province. Furthermore, all the administrative changes Buzdar made were fully endorsed by the party chief, including the transfer of six Inspector Generals and three Chief Secretaries. Fayyazul Hassan Chohan was removed twice from the position of Punjab Government spokesman and so were Firdous Ashiq Awan, Shahbaz Gill and Mirza Shahzad Akbar.

And there are reports that the Establishment has also expressed its aversion to Buzdar running the Punjab Government, but Imran Khan has stood like a rock to defend him. However, political observers are of the view that those alleged to have brought Imran Khan to power had many options to get rid of Buzdar if they seriously wished to do so. They could, for example have used the judiciary and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to throw him out. However, they argue, the impression that there have been differences between the Establishment and the PTI leadership on Buzdar is nothing but camouflage. In their opinion, Buzdar suits the Establishment the most for various reasons, among these that he gets to take the blame for its failures. The Establishment apparently tacitly concurs with this view.



*Is Buzdar the handy fall-guy or a costly liability for the PTI and the Establishment?*

There is reportedly near consensus among Establishment circles that a weak administration suits it because it is unable to take independent and steadfast decisions. They term Buzdar a 'guest actor' who falls in line and does as he is asked to.

Usman Buzdar's remaining term in office is, of course, linked with his boss Imran Khan's term as Prime Minister. Khan's allies in the Punjab, particularly, the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) under Pervaiz Illahi now accept this since all their demands have been met, the last being Moonis Illahi's appointment as Federal Minister. But it is still difficult to assume that this acceptance will endure for the remaining period of the PTI's term in office.

Meanwhile, the most controversial issue remains why the Opposition has been holding back from bringing about an in-house change? No political party has come up with a plausible answer to this million-dollar question. The Nawaz League being the main stakeholder has remained silent on this issue for nearly three years. Maryam Nawaz's public statement that her party would rather like the PTI government to complete their tenures both, in the Punjab and Centre has raised many eyebrows. Recent speculation that the Establishment is trying to cobble together some sort of deal with Nawaz Sharif that would pave the way for the latter to return to Pakistan have provided some clue as to why the PML-N has not even initiated an attempt to topple Buzdar's government in the Punjab.

*There is reportedly near consensus among Establishment circles that a weak administration suits it because it is unable to take independent and steadfast decisions. They term Buzdar a 'guest actor' who falls in line and does as he is asked to.*

Circles close to the Nawaz Sharif camp in London have confided, on the condition of anonymity, that the PML-N does not wish to inherit and carry PTI's failings – among them the existing economic crisis with skyrocketing prices and the toughest-ever International Monetary Fund (IMF) pre-conditions. Nawaz Sharif has quite categorically shared his perceptions with 'negotiators' about the ground realities in the country and suggested that Imran Khan will have to be removed from the office of the Prime Minister through an in-house change. Following that, Sharif says, whoever replaces him should dissolve the assemblies and announce dates for fresh general elections.

In his opinion, any party which could steer the country out of its worst-ever economic crisis would need a fresh five-year mandate to formulate short-term and long-term policies. However, Nawaz made no bones about the fact that he realised putting the country back on track was an uphill task. Another important issue is the current nature of the relationship of the PTI's top leadership with the Establishment, which according to political pundits, was instrumental in bringing Imran and his party to the corridors of power. The controversy that began with the appointment of the new Director-General Inter-Services Intelligence (DG-ISI) has not died down. Commenting on this, a retired brigadier said: "It is in the DNA of the military that orders, once passed and made public, have to be implemented by all means." This implementation of orders in letter and spirit became evident with the DG-ISI's transfer and all the other postings and transfers.

Some analysts are now saying that the results of the Local Body (LB) elections in Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa (KP) are a glaring example of growing bitterness, from the hitherto very cordial relations, between the PTI and the Establishment. The PTI is facing an even greater challenge in the Punjab where LB polls are due to be held. Imran Khan is now vowing to learn from the mistakes made in KP and has decided to issue party tickets under his supervision.

Khan's greatest dilemma is that his party lost the by-elections in the Punjab, and even a seat in Nowshera, and the recently held LB polls in KP due to internal groupings. In KP, Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, Defence Minister Pervaiz Khattak, and Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaisar, each headed their own group. This in addition to many other small groups. They issued tickets to their dear and near ones, leading to a shameful defeat for the PTI at the hands of the Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam (JUI). The PTI in Punjab is also divided into similar groups and if the split continues, the results in Punjab LB polls in Punjab could be horrifying.

Against this backdrop, one can easily understand why Premier Imran Khan said the next three months are crucial. Does that mean something unexpected is going to happen? That is a million-dollar question begging an answer. ■



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**By Munazza Siddiqui**

*The writer is a senior journalist and an Earth Rights campaigner.*

## Zardari's Dream

Will the PPP succeed in its mission to make its way to Islamabad?

**A**esop's fable 87 bears an astonishing resemblance to Karachi and, by extension, Sindh. The goose that laid one golden egg everyday was quite well-kept for being the source of her master's riches, until greed killed it.

Being the proverbial golden goose, what ails Karachi ultimately ails the entire country. Democracy worldwide is under threat from political authoritarianism, and the case of Sindh falls right within this ambit. The pre-national election year in Sindh is especially a tumultuous time; 2022 will be no different. In fact, the ruling Pakistan People's Party is making sure the new year brings with it more chaos than usual; the party does, after all, have a history of benefitting from disorder.

The Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2021 bulldozed through the Sindh Assembly threatens to do just that. Protests and petitions to undo the ex-

tremely controversial and totalitarian Amendment will be the defining concern of 2022. Instead of devolving powers to local bodies as agreed upon in the 18th Amendment, the new bill snatches away what little authority was left with the municipalities after the PPP rolled back the Musharraf-era local bodies system by introducing the Sindh Local Government Act 2013.

The Sindh government is under pressure from the Supreme Court to hold the local bodies' elections. But it does not want to; with nothing to show for in the last 13 years, the party in power knows that if elections are held its performance will belie all its political claims to the throne of urban Sindh.

Essentially, the amended LG Bill 2021 leaves local bodies and the population of Sindh without any recourse to problems. Behind this undemocratic move is just plain old greed for power and money. The PPP is simply unwilling to devolve administrative and financial authority to the lo-



cally elected functionaries. In essence, it is trying to feudalise urban Sindh.

The entire political opposition in Sindh is unanimous in its condemnation of the amended bill. The year 2022 will see a string of street protests, joint or otherwise. Petitions have already been filed in court on the plea that this bill violates the very letter and spirit of the Constitution. While it is true that the PPP cannot be alone held responsible for the dismal state of affairs in a city the size of Karachi, the lopsided distribution of electoral seats in rural and urban Sindh is single-handedly responsible for the current misrepresentation in the cities of Sindh.

Sindh's scattered opposition has thus far shown no interest in working together for the city or the province. And why should they, when most parties on the opposition bench get a better share of the pie by remaining on the sidelines. Also, the last 13 years of PPP rule plus the highly criticised 2017 census have seen such dramatic and forced demographic changes in urban Sindh, that the new, emerging reality has pushed the old guard out of its political depth.

It is said that Karachi is a city where it is easier to make a fortune than to earn an honest living. That speaks volumes about its politics and economy. 2022 will witness the kind of political wheeling and dealing that comes at the back of a major development. The Sindh Local Bodies Bill 2021 may, for now, be just a smokescreen to avoid holding municipal elections, but it will cast a long shadow in and beyond 2022. And on the off chance that it does manage to get implemented, the altered urban dynamics will further deepen ethnic rifts and political hostility.

Under the chairmanship of Asif Ali Zardari, the PPP has remained singularly focused on power consolidation and if it continues to play its cards the way it has until now, the party hopes to once again see an expansion in its influence beyond provincial boundaries in 2022. Despite losing Lahore's NA-133 constituency to the PML-N in the December 5, 2021 re-election, the party believes that its significantly improved performance is an indicator of the PPP's resurgence in Punjab. But that's not all.

Frustrated with Imran Khan and his Tehreek-e-Insaf, the establishment seems to be facing an acute shortage of viable alternatives. Already facing politi-



*As the PPP sets itself to take the Centre in the upcoming national elections, discontent mounts in its backyard in Sindh.*

cal resistance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the corridors of power would not want to open another front in Sindh. And so given the PPP's proclivity for power at the cost of governance, reports of a rapprochement with the establishment are not entirely beyond belief.

No longer willing to bet on a single player in Sindh or in the Centre, the establishment seems more keen to hedge its bets by employing multiple strategies; one of them is to keep the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

placated in their struggle against the People's Party in urban Sindh. There are, however, two political parties that cannot be underestimated: Mustafa Kamal's Pak Sarzameen Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi with its Amir, Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman. Both have public appeal and both appear all set to fight the long fight against the PPP.

In any case, the powers that be have until the beginning of 2023 to decide if they want to back the People's Party for both Sindh and Centre or try out a new hybrid arrangement.

The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), formed in 2017 to defeat the PPP in the 2018 general elections, has proved to be just as ineffective as the political parties that make up the alliance. The GDA could hardly dent the PPP vote bank in 2018, despite seat adjustments with the PTI, and even now it is proving to be obsolete.

It is not just urban Sindh that is groaning under the pressure of corruption and power abuse, rural Sindh is faring far worse. Despite deprivation and deterioration across vast swathes of Sindh, the party in power continues to wield political influence in the countryside and remains firmly entrenched. The old PPP guard, as well as veteran Sindhi nationalists, have all but faded away. Their young successors don't share the same ideological passion. So, not only will the GDA not be a dependable factor in 2022, rural support for the PPP will carry the party forward beyond provincial boundaries.

*The Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2021 bulldozed through the Sindh Assembly, instead of devolving powers to local bodies as agreed upon in the 18th Amendment, snatches away what little authority was left with the municipalities.*



*Years of mismanagement and neglect have affected the quality of life of Karachiites.*



*Conditions in rural Sindh, the epicentre of PPP's power, are no better than those in the urban areas.*



*Will the Jamaat-e-Islami, under its Amir, Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman (Centre), be the ones to free urban Sindh from the clutches of the PPP?*

What the PPP wants for itself from the Centre has always been diametrically opposite what the latter is willing to give to Sindh. This problem will persist throughout 2022. The party alleges that the ruling PTI has delineated constituencies across Punjab to suit itself. Unfortunately, the same holds true for the PPP in urban Sindh, especially Karachi.

But that is not going to stop Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari from trying to make their way towards Islamabad. The tabdeeli (change) that People's Party demands in the Centre is not what it is willing to allow on its own turf. As a result, the year ahead will see the party run two separate election campaigns: one on the home front and the other in Punjab.

Unfortunately, there's a clear lack of vision among the political aristocrats of

*Given the PPP's proclivity for power at the cost of governance, reports of a rapprochement with the establishment are not entirely beyond belief.*

Sindh, which is quite natural given that aristocracy by its very nature tends to be self-absorbed. That is not going to change on its own or anytime soon. However, the free flow of information assured by technological advances is forcing a paradigm shift. Corruption and power abuse are no longer being left unchallenged, and the feudal rulers of Sindh are slowly but surely under pressure to bow to optics and accountability.


The PPP had hoped that forced demographic changes in urban Sindh would dilute the opposition. It has worked in the short term, but nowhere in history has this proven to be a sustainable strategy. Despite its diverse ethnic makeup, Karachi and by extension urban Sindh is waking up to the realisation that if nothing changes, the city will collapse under the weight of misgovernance. ■



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# realpolitik

## PTI's Challenge



# The Beginning of the End?

If the PTI government in KP does not placate the people of the province and stop the infighting in party ranks, it could well lose its stronghold



**By Zahir Shah Sherazi**

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*Rizwan Bangash's defeat in the Peshawar mayoral elections is a sign that internal bickering is taking its toll on the PTI's electoral prospects in KP.*

## 2021

is done and dusted, and one is hopeful that the dawn of a new year will herald better times. The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), which has been ruled by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf for the last eight years, nurse the same hope. But as 2022 sets in, the question is, will the PTI be confronted by even more challenges in the KP now, new ones in the wake of the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan? The tribal areas' merger into KP, as the result of the first phase of the Local Bodies (LB) elections in December, are darkening the prospects for the PTI's political future in the province. The unprecedented price hike has badly hit the ruling party, and there is no denying the fact that this, along with the internal power wrangling among the PTI top brass, cost the party badly in the first leg of the LB polls. If the same

trend is observed in the second phase of elections in January, it is anticipated the results will also not be in the PTI's favour.

Particularly given the fact that it is a pre-election year, the PTI has to make sure it defends its stronghold – KP – in the 2023 general elections, where it will by then have ruled for 10 years. But this will prove an uphill task if Imran Khan's top brass in KP fail to overcome their personal enmities and regain the masses confidence. As matters stand today, voters in KP may not give the party another chance due to its poor performance.

It is also a harsh reality that the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has remained an experimental ground for both, international powers and the rulers in Islamabad. It was the frontline battleground for international players in the war against the USSR, and has remained the stage for the anti-terrorism global adventure for more than five decades. In the process, it has borne the brunt of much turmoil and unrest. Due to its geographical location, bordering Afghanistan as it

does, KP has always suffered economically. Most parts of the province are still underdeveloped due to the turbulence wrought by assorted war games, and now, as the erstwhile troubled FATA merges into KP, it has further raised the challenge for the rulers here. This merger was termed a huge victory for Pakistan, but the snail's pace in development of the area, along with a shaky administrative structure, have engendered the tribesmen's resentment. They were optimistic about the resolution of their long-standing problems, but the judicial, administrative and financial plans promised by PTI are yet to be properly implemented. Additionally, there is a worsening law and order situation in the wake of failed talks with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. Increased attacks on security forces, target killings of tribal elders, postponement of local bodies elections, coupled with the PDM's anti-state mantra and the exploitation of Taliban sympathisers by the area's religio-political parties are posing a serious challenge for the PTI in



*At a seminar in Islamabad, youth, social activists and politicians voiced their opposition to the merger of FATA with KP, claiming the process was rushed through without the consent of FATA residents.*

KP. The merged areas worst hit by the economic crisis, are yet to receive the promised three percent from the federal award, even though a cumulative Rs. 10 billion had been released for the merged areas by the federation. Due to KP's poor financial management, the majority of the funds remained unutilised, casting more doubts on the PTI's ability to perform. A document available with *Narratives* reveals that out of Rs. 62.42 billion allocated for the merged areas under a separate Annual Development Programme and Integrated Accelerated Funds, only Rs. 18.88 billion have been utilised, which is just 30 percent of the 41 percent of the funds released so far. The planning and development department documents reveal that 14 departments did not spend even a single penny for the allocated programmes, which speaks volumes for their efficiency, and this has created a further mess for the PTI government in KP, leaving it in disarray as it cannot demand

more funds from the federation. With little to no uplift of the merged areas, the Tehreek-i-Insaaf stands to lose the tribes-

*The merger of the former FATA with KP was termed a huge victory for Pakistan, but the snail's pace in development of the area, along with a shaky administrative structure, have engendered the tribesmen's resentment.*

men's confidence, which Imran Khan had earned by his rhetoric of stopping the war in FATA and giving the tribals their due rights.

The challenges the PTI faces on the political front are also tough. From the hardliner clergy to the liberal political parties, who came to power in the province in the past with election slogans of changing the destiny of the province, were never given a second chance to rule when they did not deliver, and were quickly shown the opposition benches. Analysts believe this might be the KP's political trend, or it may be the insight of the people of Pakhtunkhwa, who have rejected poor performers in the past. The PTI was the exception to KP's voting pattern. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf won with a more thumping majority in 2018 than 2013 when it was on a tightrope, clearly indicating that the party had captured the people's imagination and hearts. The KP has a history of coalition governments with different parties succeeding in their respective home grounds and joining hands to form the government. This was the case with the JUI-F, JI, PML-N and ANP who had always coalesced to form the government. The PTI ended that tradition, gaining unrivalled power in KP, but it has to take all of them along with it in the 2023 general elections. This might prove a daunting task after the disastrous December Local Government (LG) polls, and if proper damage control measures are not put in place, the PTI might well find itself out of power in the province.

The JUI-F with 17 seats in KP, the main runners up in the 2018 elections, surpassed the PTI in the first phase of the LG elections even capturing the provincial capital, Peshawar. The JUI-F, claiming to be a religious entity, has used many not so religious means – from the money game to giving tickets to electables with no ideological affiliation to the party – to expand its power base. And the in-house bickering and foul play of the PTI's top leaders in KP have been key to their own defeat.

Ground realities indicate that in the 2023 general elections the PTI will have to face a tough fight from the JUI-F in the southern districts and the Peshawar Valley as well, while the Jamat-i-Islami can gain ground in Malakand Division. Meanwhile, the ANP, QWP and PPPP will not be easy opponents in Central KP, including Charsadda, Mardan, Peshawar



*CM Mahmood Khan has been the silver lining in PTI's rule in the KP, but with debts mounting, can he turn the ship around in time for the next elections?*



and Swabi. The Hazara Division will be equally challenging as the PML-N and the Hazara Qaumi Mahaz are also flexing their muscles, while the religious vote of the JUI-F in far-off Hazara and Kohistan, and the JI's influence in Chitral, could pose a serious threat for the PTI if it fails to reunite the party under Pervaiz Khattak.

On the other hand, Chief Minister Mehmood Khan's three-year rule, which many had believed would be an unmitigated disaster, turned the tables on his opponents, thanks to assorted huge development projects launched and many others in the pipeline. This had never happened during the tenure of previous governments. Mega projects undertaken under Mehmood Khan included a universal health cover for all 40 million people of the province. According to this project, anyone with a KP CNIC would be ensured a free health cover of about one million rupees in any government or private hospital of the country. And it would also cover complicated procedures such as liver and kidney transplants, costing about four to seven million rupees. The humble, cool-headed Mehmood Khan, who in his opponents' opinion had been considered a slow mover and not as clever as many other shrewd politicians of the province, has, in fact, been very tactfully dealing with the bureaucracy as well the establishment. However, it is known to be a fact that most, if not all, of his decisions are based on instructions from Bani Gala and the bureaucracy, the power strings of which are in Islamabad and which is very close to Prime Minister Imran Khan. But whosoever plans or executes his projects, every success adds a new feather to Mehmood Khan's cap, whether it be the merger of FATA into KP, the billion tree programme, the operation of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Universal Health Care, the Swat Motorway, the Hazara Express, or the hydro-electrical power projects. He is the commander, leading all these projects. Much is now being planned for the year 2022 onwards, which the KP government believes will make the province an ideal state unit like Riasat-e-Madina. Top of these plans is the food security plan, the second phase of the Swat Motorway, the Peshawar-Dera Motorway, linking it with the CPEC route, and four major tertiary care hospital in Peshawar, Hazara, and the Southern District.

However there's many a slip between



*The JUI-F's recent success in the KP LG polls shows the opposition is gaining momentum in KP with national elections around the corner.*

the cup and lip – as we in Pakistan unfortunately know only too well. There is a huge gap between planning on paper and the execution of projects when there is no money. So Mehmood Khan is no doubt under severe pressure to perform as he has to take care not only of the internal bickering among the party's top leaders, but also to keep the promises made.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's major challenge will be the financial crunch in the next two years. Only 10 percent of the total needs of the province come from the province's own resources, while it has to rely on federal assistance or loans from financial institutions to see to the other 90 percent. And these loans are mounting with the surge in dollar rates and mark-ups every year. The provincial revenues from different resources is estimated above Rs. 35 billion – of these about 18 billion come from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) collection, about 15 billion from land revenue, and more or less Rs. 3 billion from the mineral sector, while the rest of the province's budget expenditures are met from federal reserves or loans. This leaves the province pretty cash-starved. Despite that, plans for huge projects continue to be made, which with the ground reality seem increasingly unrealistic. According to a loan document available with *Narratives*, though the KP government has been claiming miracles about developing the province in various sectors, it has taken accusative loans of Rs. 160 billion (principal plus interests) during the financial year 2019 to 2020. The breakup of the loans shows it has taken about £130

million for additional financing for BRT from the French Development Agency (AFD), \$70 million for regional development from the ADB, additional financing for the KP road improvement project, \$75 million for the dualisation of the Mardan-Swabi Road, and another \$121 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for economic development projects. Additionally, there are loans of \$70,000 for the Tourism sector, \$500,000 for health, \$446 million for transport and communication, and \$175 million for the agriculture sector. All of these loans are granted by ADB, with a two percent profit ratio and have to be paid in foreign currency as per increased rates.

The food security project, the agriculture sector and the road infrastructure plans of the KP government will, however, be facing a serious financial crunch if they cannot generate extra resources from their own means. And mega motorway and food security projects will be affected if the funds are not mustered for it. The food security project plan document shows it will have a short-term cost during the first 2-3 years of about Rs. 56.315 billion; the medium term (4 to 7 years) cost of the project is estimated at Rs. 109.45 billion, while the long term (8 to 10 years) cost is \$70.36 billion. Similarly, the estimated costs of projects related to agriculture and allied sectors are around \$93.855 billion, while irrigation and infrastructure sectors have been estimated at \$142.27 billion.

Whether these ambitious projects come to fruition or not will determine the fate of the PTI government in the future. ■



Future Vulnerable





# Cloudy Outlook

The economy faces several challenges that are likely to carry over into the new year



**By Sakib Sherani**

*The writer is a former member of the Prime Minister's economic advisory council, and heads a macroeconomic consultancy based in Islamabad.*

Pakistan's economy is entering 2022 in a vulnerable state. After emerging from the severe balance of payments crisis of 2018 with a period of IMF-led stabilisation, the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the sharp spike in global commodity prices has put renewed pressure on the economy.

After recording surpluses on the external current account for several months between July 2020 and February 2021, the country has witnessed rising monthly deficits since. While the fiscal year 2020-21, ending June 30th, recorded a moderate overall current account deficit of US\$ 1.9 billion (equivalent to 0.6 percent of GDP), the first four months of the current fiscal year has seen the deficit shoot up to US\$ 5.1 billion, a swing of almost 500 percent over the same period last year.

The swing into the red has been driven by the sharp turnaround in the trade deficit. While exports have recorded

impressive double digit year-on-year increases each month since last year, led by textiles and apparel, the expansion in exports has been dwarfed by the surge in imports. Import growth in US dollar terms has averaged in the high double digits each month since January 2021, with a cumulative increase of 70 percent in the first five months of 2021-22 (July to November). The import surge has overshadowed the increase in exports by a ratio of 2.6:1, meaning that Pakistan's exports are financing only 38 percent of the country's import bill. *Figure 1: CAD*

As a result, the trade deficit has shot up over 112 percent during July-November compared to the previous year, with foreign exchange reserves held by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) having declined from a peak of US\$ 20 billion in August, to US\$ 18.6 billion as of December 10 – despite the US\$ 2.7 billion Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocation and a US\$ 3 billion deposit from Saudi Arabia.

Not surprisingly, the Rupee has slipped 19 percent against the US dollar since the beginning of May, falling from around Rs. 151 per US dollar to Rs. 180 per US dollar in the inter-bank market, cumulatively losing over Rs. 29 against the

greenback. In the kerb market, the US dollar has been quoted as high as Rs. 186 for buying, indicating a widening differential with the inter-bank rate that invariably accompanies speculative as well as panic buying. *Figure 2: Trade deficit*

The external account is not the only area where macroeconomic weaknesses have surfaced. The "internal balance" has been completely out of whack for the past three years running, with the fiscal deficit recorded at 7.1 percent of GDP in 2020-21. The average budget deficit for the past three years amounts to 8.1 percent of GDP – the most elevated for nearly three decades.

As a corollary to the persistently large fiscal imbalance, public debt has increased sharply during the past three years, rising 60 percent from its June 30, 2018 level to almost Rs. 41 trillion as of end-September 2021. *Figure 3: Pressure on USD/PKR*

The large fiscal deficits, among other factors, have also led to inflation being elevated. Headline consumer price inflation has spiked to 11.5 percent year-on-year during November, while averaging 9.3 percent in the first five months of the fiscal year. Food inflation has come in at

Figure-1

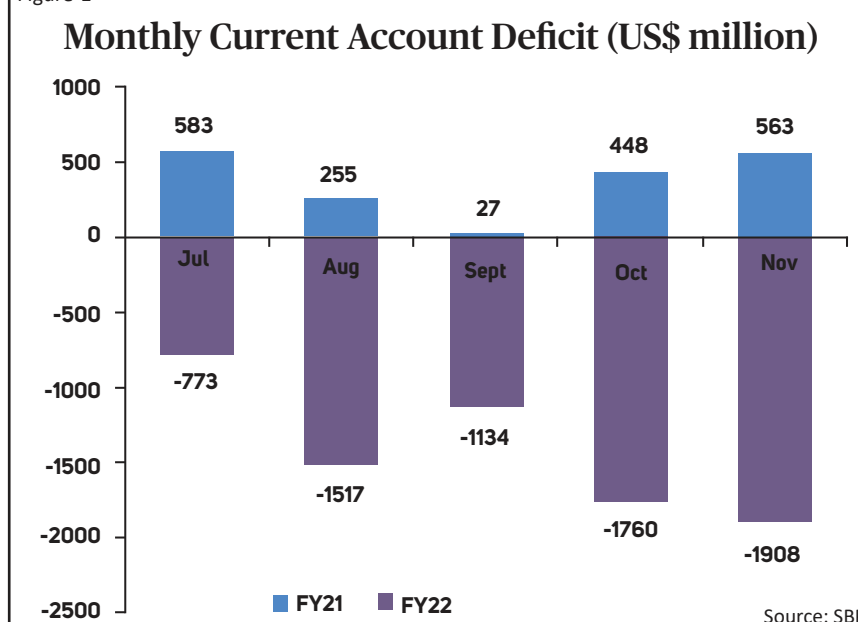
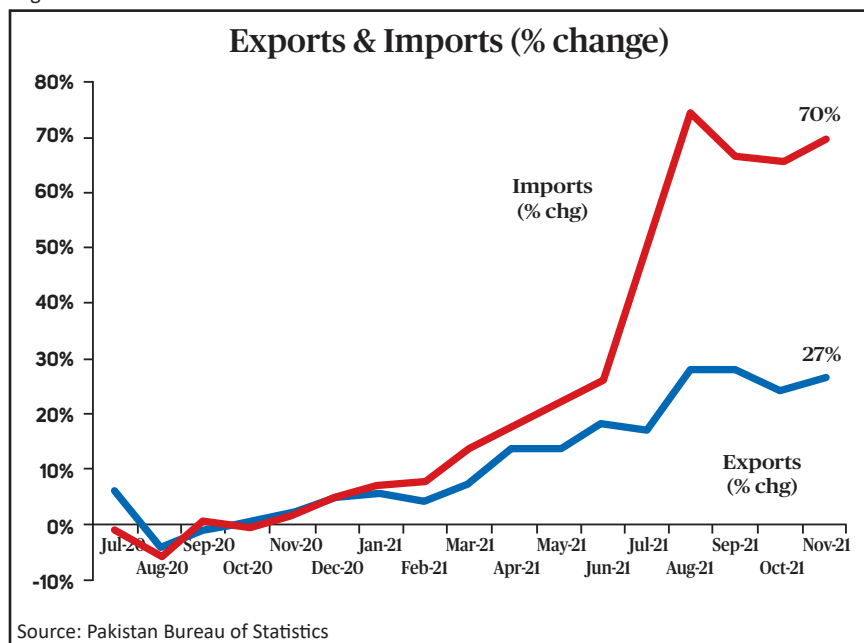


Figure-2



11.9 percent in November (urban), and has averaged 10.4 percent between July and November.

With rising food costs accounting for nearly 50 percent or more of the headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation during this period, it is clear that non-fiscal and exogenous factors have been at play as well in causing the inflationary spike. Imported inflation via international commodity prices and a falling Rupee were important causative factors as well.

The current episode of a short burst of growth leading once again to an unsustainable gap between imports and exports, underscores the limitations of the flawed go-to growth model Pakistani

policymakers have repeatedly chosen. It also points to a long and painful path of structural reforms and institutional overhaul that is needed to turnaround the economy. *Figure 4: Public debt*

#### What next?

The rising pressure on the external account and the Rupee has increased uncertainty in the economy, especially with regards to not just where the exchange rate will stabilise against the US dollar, but also about the continuation of the government's expansionary policy mix.

The uncertainty has been compounded by the fluid developments over the past few months next door in Afghanistan, and the as yet unsettled situ-

ation there. The situation in Afghanistan has the potential to either provide a degree of stability on Pakistan's western border after over forty years of conflict there, or for a period of protracted instability whose effects spill over into Pakistan with regards to internal security as well as the economy. So far, the latter appears to be a more likely outcome given the policy of active and conscious neglect of Afghanistan's deteriorating humanitarian condition by the international community.

Another factor causing a wobble in the exchange markets is the uncertainty surrounding Pakistan's return to the fold of the IMF programme. Given the pressure that has emerged in the external account, and which has manifested itself in the weakness of the Rupee, the financial and currency markets are looking closely towards progress, or lack of, in ongoing negotiations with the IMF. A resumption of the Fund programme has become necessary for stabilising the external account, even though it will mean that the government will have to take politically difficult decisions it had avoided when it suspended the programme after the successful reviews in March 2021. With the finance minister signalling his inability to restart the IMF programme on his own terms, it also means that the government will be forced to jettison its growth-oriented policies and reintroduce stabilisation and demand management policies once again.

Whatever the outcome with regards to the IMF programme, a recalibration of the government's growth policy is required. To cool down the overheating parts of the economy that are driving the surge in imports, headline growth will need to be sacrificed at the margin. To avoid slowing down the entire economy, a more targeted approach that is directed at the consumer and other non-essential sectors, such as cars, mobile phones, durable goods, fast moving consumer goods and other consumer items is required.

#### Outlook

The global economic outlook, as well as Pakistan's, is clouded by uncertainty yet again as the new year begins. While international commodity prices have pulled back significantly, as well as somewhat unexpectedly, since hitting near-term peaks in October, volatility in the markets has remained high. The rapid



Source: Bloomberg (as of December 23, 2021 closing)



spread of the Omicron variant of the novel Coronavirus has cast a shadow on the prospects for the global economy.

Other grey spots for the world have come from China's intensifying economic slowdown, despite following a fairly successful Zero-Covid strategy during 2021. The latest Caixin Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) has declined into negative territory (below a reading of 50), indicating contractionary conditions in the manufacturing sector. China's economy has been buffeted by high-profile bankruptcies of systemically-large real estate developers like Evergrande, an energy shortage, and is facing growing headwinds due to muted policy stimulus, unlike other large economies like the US and EU.

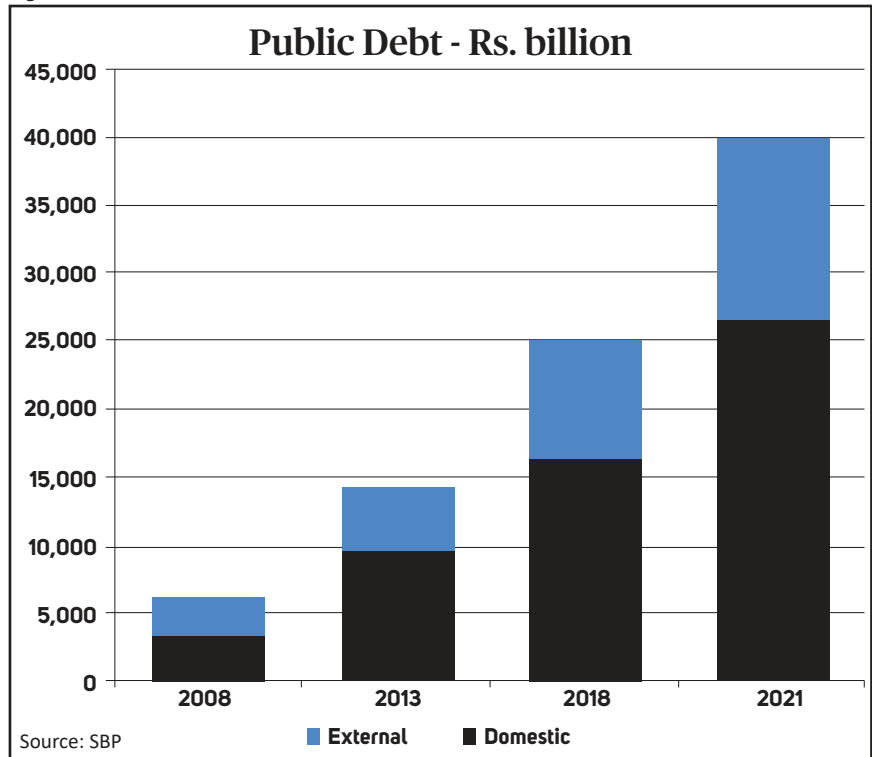
At the same time, the global supply chain disruption is likely to take several months to ease, causing inflation to remain elevated well beyond the pain threshold of most central banks. The US Federal Reserve has led the change in tone of central banks around the world by altering its read of inflation from "transitory" to "uncomfortably high" and thus requiring immediate attention. The US Fed has not only signalled the end of its bond purchase programme, but also three moderate interest rate increases in 2022.

All of the foregoing developments have consequences for Pakistan. A slowdown in the world economy, depending on how protracted and widespread it is, can affect exports as well as remittances. A rising interest rate environment in the US will almost certainly reduce availability of capital for emerging markets, while increasing the cost. With an elevated external financing requirement, this aspect could hurt Pakistan's ability to tap into global capital markets.

However, the most consequential of the developments for Pakistan's economy will be the direction of movement of international commodity prices. While commodity prices have been buffeted by contrarian developments in recent weeks, especially in the oil markets, the most likely trend in the near term appears to be downward. This would mean that Pakistan is offered significant respite by a cooling down in the overheated commodity markets.

If this positive development were indeed to play out, then inflation can be ex-

Figure-4



*Whatever the outcome with regards to the IMF programme, a recalibration of the government's growth policy is required. To cool down the overheating parts of the economy that are driving the surge in imports, headline growth will need to be sacrificed at the margin.*

pected to begin easing moderately after a few months. The inflationary outlook is hinged almost entirely on the outturn in international commodity prices, as well as the strength and timing of government efforts to dampen the overheating in the

economy. One negative factor that will keep a floor under the downside for inflation, however, will be the need for the government to collect petroleum taxes and levies under the IMF programme. This will limit the pass-through of a fall in international commodity prices, and ensure higher-than-otherwise interest rates.

While headline GDP growth for 2021-22 may exceed the government's expectations on the back of bumper crops, the momentum in economic activity is almost certainly going to decelerate as the year progresses, with the policy stimulus in place since 2020 being replaced with anti-growth austerity measures, and elevated interest rates.

A quick return to the fold of the stalled IMF programme, with all its negative ramifications for the economy overall, will provide a measure of stability to the external account and the Rupee. On the other hand, if the IMF chooses to haul Pakistan over the coals for whatever reason (geopolitics or technical), then the external account, as well as the Rupee, are likely to face a period of instability.

In sum, will Pakistan's economy achieve a "hard landing" or a soft one in 2022 remains an open question for now, but the balance of risks appears to place it somewhere in between at the start of another year. ■



# INFOCUS

Towards a Food Secure Pakistan





# Transforming Agriculture

The PTI government is taking the first step to exploit the agriculture sector's true potential



**By Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri**

*The writer is Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute.*

**C** OVID-19 compelled governments all over the world to re-focus on health, agriculture, and social protection. Health and social protection are quite understandable, let me explain why agriculture. During the lockdowns, when international travel, borders, and cargo shipments were restricted, only countries self-sufficient in agriculture could ensure food se-



*The Kisan card brings much needed assistance to Pakistani farmers via subsidised inputs.*

curity to their people. Covid is not over yet and so the focus on agriculture remains.

In our case, agriculture was always important. People my age can recall that we grew up reading, "Pakistan is an agrarian country," and "Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy." However, during the last two decades the share of agriculture in Pakistan's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) saw a gradual decline. In fiscal year (FY) 2020-21, this share was 19.2 percent of the GDP.

Despite losing its share in GDP, agriculture is still important for us, for food security and livelihoods. It provides employment to around 38.5 percent of the labour force. More than 65-70 percent of the population depends on agriculture for its livelihood. Moreover, our export basket is predominately agro-dependent.

Even without lockdowns, Pakistan needed to focus on enhancing the production of basic food commodities, not only to improve food security, but also to balance the current account deficit through import substitution of food commodities.

After the 18th amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, agriculture was devolved to the provinces. However, once again the federal government is taking a keen interest in the agriculture sector and trying to support the provinces in bringing about agricultural transformation.

Before we go to the future of the agriculture sector in Pakistan, let us have a quick glance at where we stand today. Pakistan is one of the few countries among its peers, that despite COVID-19, had a growth in GDP of 3.94 percent, dur-

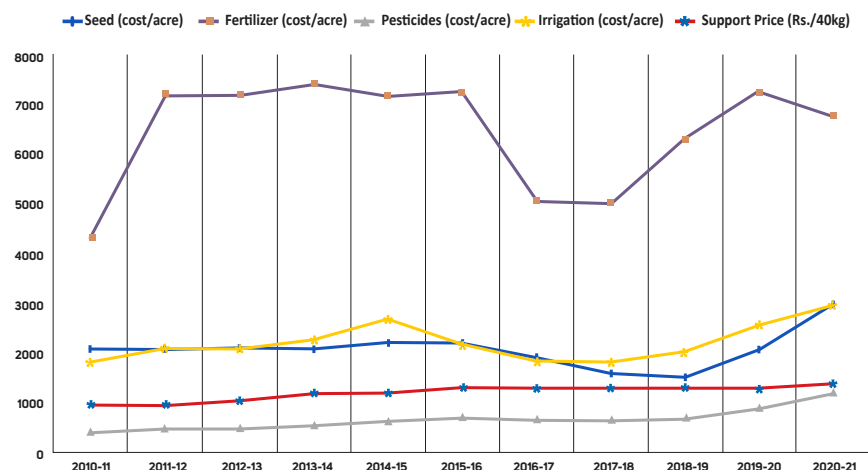
Table-1 Agriculture Growth (Base=2005-06) (%)							
Sector	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.18</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>2.77</b>
1.Crops (i+ii+iii)	0.16	-5.27	1.22	4.69	-4.96	5.54	2.47
i) Important Crops	-1.62	-5.86	2.60	3.56	-7.69	5.24	4.65
ii) Other Crops	2.51	0.40	-2.51	6.26	2.60	8.08	1.41
iii) Cotton Ginning	7.24	-22.12	5.58	8.80	-12.74	-4.82	-15.58
2.Livestock	3.99	3.36	2.99	3.70	3.82	2.10	3.06
3.Forestry	-12.45	14.31	-2.33	2.58	7.28	3.60	1.42
4.Fishing	5.75	3.25	1.23	1.62	0.80	0.60	0.73

P: Provisional

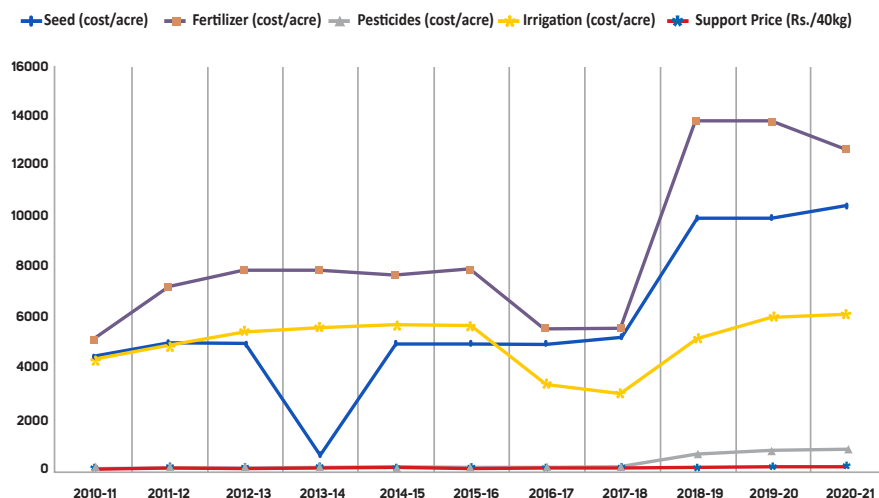
Source: Economic Survey of Pakistan 2020-21: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Table-2

### INPUT COST TRENDS: WHEAT



### INPUT COST TRENDS: SUGARCANE



ing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-21.

The agriculture sector played an important role in this growth. It grew by 2.77 percent against the target of 2.8 percent. The growth of important crops (wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize and cotton) remained 4.65 percent in FY 2020-21. In fact, the production of major 'Kharif' crops (which are sown in April-June and harvested from October to December) such as sugarcane, maize and rice indicated considerable improvement compared to last year and surpassed the production targets. Wheat, the most important crop of 'Rabi' (sown in October-December and harvested in April-May), showed a growth of 8.1 percent and reached a record high production level of 27.293 million tonnes. However, the cotton crop in 2020 did suffer, mainly due to a decline in area sown, heavy monsoon rains and pest attacks. In

*A manifestation of climate change is a reduced supply of water. To improve water efficiency, lining of old watercourses, use of laser levellers for land, and soil moisture meters are being provided under the ATP.*

the last fiscal year, cotton production reduced by 22.8 percent, to 7.064 million.

Likewise, livestock having a share of 60 percent in agriculture and 11.53 percent in GDP, achieved growth of 3.06 percent during FY 2020-21 (Table 1).

Current numbers, amidst the pandemic, are impressive. However, the actual potential is much higher than these numbers. An average farmer's per acre yield in Pakistan is 29 maunds (40 kg) for wheat, 50 maunds for coarse rice, 57 maunds for maize, 18 maunds for cotton and 656 maunds for sugarcane. Compare these numbers with a progressive farmer in Pakistan, who gets for each acre 45, 80, 80, 35, and 950 maunds of wheat, coarse rice, maize, cotton, and sugarcane, respectively.

Why is there such a yield gap among farmers, farming in the same country under similar agro-climatic conditions? Preparedness of progressive farmers against Climate Change (water scarcity, water productivity, increased temperature, intense but shrunk monsoon) i.e., climate-smart agriculture is one factor. However, the other factors that favour progressive farmers, in no particular order, include timely availability/affordability of inputs especially certified seeds, fertilizers and pesticides; their access to research, development, and extension services; farm mechanisation; and adequately trained human resources etc.

To reduce the yield gap between a conventional and progressive farmer, therefore, requires addressing the factors hindering the crop productivity of a conventional farmer; i.e., timely provision of quality inputs at an affordable price (the figures below for wheat and sugarcane crop reveal how the input cost has increased); providing them with research-based extension services, enabling them to adopt climate smart and precision agriculture techniques, improving their access to farm equipment, and developing their strong forward and backward linkages with the secondary (industrial) and tertiary (services) sectors.

The federal government is trying to address most of these factors through the "Agriculture Transformation Plan" (ATP) approved by the Prime Minister and being implemented by the federal and provincial governments under his direct supervision.

Implementation of the ATP is already



underway. To expedite the varietal approval system for unavailable technology and to weed out fuzzy seed companies, amendments have been made in the Seed Business Regulations Rules, 2016. Likewise, a track and trace system is being introduced to establish seed authenticity for farmers. These initiatives would help in improving the seed quality of major crops.

The 'Kisan Card' in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, and 'Hari Card' in Sindh are being rolled out to provide a subsidised supply of farm inputs to targeted beneficiaries through the use of data and digital technology.

According to a recent estimate, in Punjab province for every 10,000 acres, there are 140 tractors, 102 cultivators, 14 rotavators, and 5 disc harrows. To foster farm mechanisation, provision of subsidised farm equipment under ATP and the Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme have been approved and spadework is being done in this regard.

One of the manifestations of climate change is a reduced supply of water. Our agriculture is mainly dependent on the Indus Basin, which is being inefficiently managed. To improve water efficiency, lining of old watercourses, use of laser levellers for land, and soil moisture meters are being provided under the ATP.

To provide customised and timely advice to farmers, ICT-based interactive extension services are being introduced in Punjab. Other provinces hope to follow soon. Cellphone based precision agriculture is being practiced in India and Kenya for cotton, sugarcane and cumin crops. Attempts are being made to replicate this model for our major crops.

To improve the quality of agricultural research, existing public sector research centres in Punjab are being converted into "Centres of Excellence" for sugarcane, rice, wheat, and maize. These centres are being turned into autonomous bodies, governed by independent boards of governors, and a market-based incentive mechanism is being introduced for researchers. Research centres in Turnab, Mingora, Quetta, and Mirpur Khas are also being upgraded.

Timely availability of capital had been a major challenge for farmers, especially small to medium farmers. According to a recent report, most of the farm and off-



Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Food Security Jamshed Iqbal announces the launch of the ATP.

*Agriculture in 2022 is dependent on how quickly our farmers adapt to climate change and shift to climate-smart agriculture.*

farm agricultural credit ends up in a few hands in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. A farm credit of Rs. 292 billion was provided to 2707 borrowers in these three cities, compared to Rs. 345 billion provided to 146,1899 borrowers in the rest of Pakistan. This skewed distribution requires a paradigm shift in the agri-credit market. This is being introduced through different schemes initiated by State Bank of Pakistan and commercial banks under the Kamyab Pakistan Programme.

The list of interventions under ATP is quite long, including olive deepening, shrimp farming, and cotton revival initiatives. There are different interventions to reduce post-harvest losses through promoting warehouses, silos, and the introduction of an "electronic warehouse receipt regime" by different commercial banks.

The crux of what I have mentioned here is that agriculture in 2022 is dependent on how quickly our farmers adapt to climate change and shift to climate-smart agriculture. It is dependent on how best we use ICT based and cellphone based services to customise our extension services. It is dependent on timely availability, at an affordable rate, of key inputs including quality seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. The productivity enhancement needs to be followed by a reduction in post-harvest losses and providing protection to farmers against product glut in the harvesting season; hence the future of agriculture is dependent on modern storage facilities. And finally, it depends on rewarding research that may get translated into action.

A cursory look at the ATP reveals that most of the above mentioned aspects are being addressed in the plan. The federal government has provided a policy framework for agricultural development in Pakistan. It is going a step ahead and sharing the cost of many of the proposed interventions with the provinces. The Prime Minister is taking a keen interest in its implementation and taking regular follow-up meetings on its implementation.

The buck stops at the provincial governments. The more interest they take in uplifting the agriculture sector, the more food secure Pakistan would be. We hope to hear some good news on the agricultural front in Pakistan in 2022. ■



# Dispatches from Chundrigar

**By Aqeel Karim Dhedhi**

The author is the founder and chairman of the AKD Group, one of Pakistan's largest business conglomerates and a major player in its capital markets.



# Prospects for Growth

With the removal of obstacles and provision of incentives, business and the economy should flourish in the year ahead

**I**nterventions on the directives of the IMF, like a significant hike in the benchmark interest rate and steep rupee depreciation hindered high growth during July-December 2021, but the year 2022 is expected to herald expansion in business and economic activities.

The rate hike and rupee depreciation are close to peak out. An expected reversal in the rate and likely return of stability in the domestic currency would decelerate inflation readings during 2022. Besides, the twin trade and current account deficits are set to narrow down from February 2022 and onwards. These developments would reset the economy on a high growth path from the point where it came under pressure due to the interventions.

To recall, the central bank increased the benchmark interest rate by a huge 275 basis points during September-December 2021 to 9.75 percent at present. The rupee has cumulatively depreciated 37 percent to around Rs. 178 against the US dollar in the last days of December 2021, compared to Rs. 130 when Prime Minister Imran Khan formed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government in August 2018.

The rupee devaluation alone contributed 65-70 percent to inflation in the country. Accordingly, inflation readings hit a 21-month high, in double digits at 11.5 percent in November 2021; import bills soared to a record high at \$8 billion in the month. The current account deficit soared to a 40-month high at \$1.9 billion.

The price of global commodities including food and petroleum products shot sky high. This was a major cause of the rise in the import bill and higher current account deficit. The surge in the import bill was not demand driven. Therefore, the massive hike in the interest rate was unjustified to tame imports and stood negative for the economy and business growth.

In the preceding fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, the economy unexpectedly saw a jump of 4 percent in its growth, against contraction of 0.5 percent in the prior fiscal year 2020. The contraction was witnessed after seven decades amid

the COVID-19 outbreak. The economy is projected to grow slightly higher than 5 percent in the current fiscal year 2022 and further boom in the second half of 2022 as well, despite all odds.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently put tough conditions to resume its \$6 billion loan programme for Pakistan. It asked the government to impose new taxes worth Rs. 350 billion

*The IMF conditions may contribute towards a business and economic slowdown. The PTI government is, however, expected to offset the negative impact of the IMF conditions through prudent policymaking and help the economy to maintain a growth trajectory during 2022.*

through presentation of a mini-budget and directed an increase in the power tariff. The stringent conditions are unwarranted. They will not solve problems, but would multiply hardships for business and the economy. Imposition of new taxes will increase the cost of doing business. Similarly, the increase in power tariff will not end circular debt, but further accumulate debt and surge the cost of doing business as well. The circular debt would end through tariff reduction rather than increasing the tariff.

The IMF has directed to impose new taxes despite the fact that the govern-

ment has continued to collect tax revenues higher than the set targets for the past year or so. The IMF conditions are politically motivated rather than based on justified grounds. It did so after Prime Minister Imran Khan's brave big NO to the US to provide air bases on our soil to let the Western ally continue its war in Afghanistan.

Four years ago, when Pakistan went to the IMF for the ongoing loan programme, the domestic currency was overvalued and revenue collection was low, but the IMF did not mandate stringent conditions. Today, Pakistan is collecting revenue over and above the target, its business activities have improved significantly, trade volumes are on the rise, exports are on the rise, the agriculture sector is performing well, people are provided job opportunities, but the IMF is considering none of this and acting against the interests of Pakistan only because the PM said no to the US.

The IMF is part of the problem rather than part of the solution in the case of Pakistan. Its conditions may contribute towards a business and economic slowdown. The PTI government is, however, expected to offset the negative impact of the IMF conditions through prudent policymaking and help businesses and the economy to maintain a growth trajectory during 2022.

Completion of the IMF loan programme in September 2022 (as per original schedule) would allow authorities concerned, like economic managers, to take pro-growth and pro-business measures smoothly. The central bank is expected to cut the benchmark interest rate by 150 basis points during the second half of 2022.

The private sector has maintained its growth trend in 2021 and is expected to expand activities during 2022 as well, despite the IMF's mini-budget.

The companies listed at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) are estimated to report record high total profit-after-tax of Rs. 1 trillion in 2021. They have already reported a profit of Rs. 750 billion in the first nine months (January-September) of 2021 that is 58 percent higher than Rs. 474 bil-

lion earned in the same nine months during the previous calendar year, 2020.

Housing, construction and allied industries (cement and steel), textiles, IT and telecom, travel and tourism and mining are some of the high potential sectors to attract significant investment from both domestic and foreign investors during 2022.

The construction and tourism sectors are very close to the hearts and minds of incumbent rulers. They have given a number of incentives, as both sectors have the potential to attract high foreign investment and help the government build up the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Startups, mostly the technology-driven ones, are already high on the radar of global investors. They have attracted record high foreign investment of \$310 million during 2021 and have the potential to attract another \$1 billion in 2022.

Besides, traditional sectors like oil and gas exploration, IT and telecoms, mining, power production and financial sectors (including fintech) are estimated to attract another \$2 billion under the head of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the current fiscal year (July-June) 2022, compared to \$1.8 billion fetched during the previous fiscal year 2021.

The textile sector remained a major beneficiary of the central bank's low cost loan scheme for industrialisation in the name of temporary economic refinance facility (TERF). Banks have approved a whopping Rs. 436 billion under the time-barred scheme for setting up new businesses and expanding the existing production setup. The new investment would start coming online during 2022 and will contribute towards generating higher economic activities and directly support growth in exports.

The private sector would be offered higher loans by domestic banks for new businesses, expansion and to meet requirements for working capital as well. The government has informed financial institutions that if their advance (credit to private sector) to deposit ratio (ADR) remains below 40 percent then they would become subject to pay additional tax of 5 percent. Those banks, whose ADR stands between 40-50 percent, would be liable to pay additional tax of 2.5 percent. But those banks whose ADR stands over and above 50 percent would pay no such additional tax, with effect from July 1, 2021.

Banks, being business entities in the private sector, would also continue to enjoy lucrative profits during 2022, as they remain a major source of finance to the government for budgetary support and to the private sector for businesses.

The sale of cars may witness a nominal slowdown, but would remain largely unaffected due to the central bank's restrictions on new car financing and increase in the benchmark interest rate by 275 basis points to 9.75 percent. The automobile sector is set to mark a new history of growth during 2022.

The petroleum refinery sector may continue to face hardship due to continuous production of outdated furnace oil, as the government has switched power



production to gas from oil. The absence of buyers for furnace oil results in topping the storage capacities of refineries, compelling them to produce less or shut down production from time to time to wait to offload furnace oil inventories. Refineries have rolled out their upgradation plans to get rid of furnace oil production. However, the upgradation is a time consuming exercise that may be completed over the next four to five years.

Oil and gas exploration and production companies (E&Ps) are expected to grow with return of stability in international oil prices and measures being taken to address circular debt.

The cement sector is expected to grow with higher allocations of the public sector development programme (PSDP), private construction, and an expected reversal in international coal price that remains a basic raw material for cement.

The steel sector is expected to remain a major beneficiary of infrastructure, housing and construction activities.

Oil marketing companies (OMCs) are expected to grow with a significant rise in profit margins granted by the government recently and likely resolution of circular debt.

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) is also expected to enter growth mode with higher economic activities, an expected cut in the benchmark interest rate and rupee stabilisation during 2022. Since PSX has become part of MSCI Frontier Indexes recently, the development is expected to attract foreign investment as well.

Major agricultural produce like wheat, sugarcane (sugar), rice (paddy) and maize are expected to report record high output this year as well, while cotton production would revive compared to the multi-decade low last year.

The incumbent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has spent more than half of its elected tenure of five years in office since August 2018, but it is yet to hire the right people at top posts in the majority of state institutions. The rulers cannot achieve their major milestone of cleansing the state and society from corrupt elements without appointing honest people at higher positions. They have to do it in 2022. Otherwise, there will be almost no time left to do so during the last year of their elected rule in 2023.

Moreover, the government should withdraw subsidy from textiles, agriculture and other sectors as they are now minting profits. However, the government should directly pay poor people to bring down their cost of living.

The problem with the PTI government is that there is only PM Imran Khan and a handful of people like him who are sincerely working day and night for the betterment of masses and for the country. Otherwise, there are people in the government who are apparently with PM Khan, but they work against the interest of the people and party agenda of ending corruption.

PM Khan has done a wonderful job of formulating a prudent foreign policy. He is the leader who declared at the UN global summit that it is the world that is Islamophobic, and there is nothing wrong with the Muslim community. He got the Kashmir issue highlighted more than previous leaders did. He urged the international community to pledge financial aid worth a couple of billions of dollars for Afghanistan to address hunger and end the humanitarian crisis there. However, the opposition parties and media refuse to acknowledge these achievements and continue to criticise the premier and his government. ■



# Brighter Days

After a challenging 2021, PSX is expected to rebound in 2022



**By Arif Habib**

*The author is a business magnate, stockbroker and founder and chief executive of the Arif Habib Group.*

**A**rif Habib Limited's (AHL) recently released Pakistan Investment Strategy Report for 2022 gives a message of hope for the next year, in spite of the troubles witnessed by the bourse in 2021.

The KSE-100 Index had a particularly challenging outgoing year (2021). This was led by a spectrum of reasons, including political uncertainty following the Senate elections coupled with political marches, the US exit from Afghanistan and subsequent geopolitical tensions, and the FATF's retention of Pakistan on the Grey List. Delays in approval of the IMF review and its stringent conditions made it hard to enforce growth inducing policies, while an exceptional rally in international commodities injured the external account position and raised red flags over Consumer Price Index readings. Added to these factors was the reclassification from Morgan Stanley Capital Index Emerging to Frontier Market, causing sharp foreign selling. The dampening effect of the third and fourth waves of the novel coronavirus contributed to the volatility of the market.

However, the market is expected to witness an inflection point next year with the index expected to generate a total return of 25 percent and reach 55,000 points by December 2022. Proactive measures undertaken by the incumbent government and the State Bank of Pakistan to avoid another boom and bust cycle and ensure economic growth remains sustainable in upcoming years, should keep demand cushioned. AHL's projected GDP growth is set at 5.17 percent during FY22 against 3.94 percent last year. Clarity on the economic front coupled with cheap market valuations and profitability prospects of the stocks is likely to rejuvenate the investors' interest, while a raft of positive macro-economic developments are likely to emerge once the full impact of macro-economic policies starts to kick in.

Earnings growth is expected at 12.4 percent during Calendar Year (CY) 2022. The jump in corporate profitability is expected to be broad-based with contributions expected from all sectors, including Banks, Electricity & Power, Cement, Automobile Assemblers, Textiles, Technology and Oil Marketing. Moreover, with inflation expected in single digits from the second half of CY22 owing

to the high base of last year, currency stabilisation, monetary easing and slowdown in global commodity prices, team AHL projects the quantum of the Current Account deficit to decrease. Therefore, with interest rates to have almost peaked out, investors are likely to rotate money into the stock market in a quest for higher yields, which will provide opportunities for more companies to get listed on the exchange in 2022.



It was also highlighted that although there could be some friction created by the opposition, the continuity of the government is not under threat and that should keep market sentiment afloat. Furthermore, the government's efforts to comply with the Know Your Customer-Anti-Money Laundering requirements laid down by the FATF also signal a positive outcome in CY22. Furthermore the government's successful vaccination drive and measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, allowed Pakistan to emerge at the top of the Economist's World Normalcy Index, given its rapid recovery from the pandemic spillovers. With over 40 percent of the population already vaccinated, we believe risks of another fatal wave and a complete lockdown remain contained.

Currently, valuations in the bourse are at attractive levels. The KSE-100 Index is trading at a price-to-earnings ratio of 4.9x – a 38 percent discount to the historic average multiple of 8.1x – while trading at a price-to-book ratio of 0.8x – a 53 percent discount to the historic average of 1.7x. Moreover, the index valuations are highly attractive when compared to the region as well, at a 67 percent discount to regional markets against the average historic discount of 38 percent. ■

# *Balance* Sheet

## Dollar Rules





# Rupee Shrinks

Today it costs Rs. 180 to buy a dollar. What would the rupee be worth in 2022?



**By Ali Mahmood**

*The writer is a businessman and the author of three books including Muslims: The Real History.*

**T**he external value of the rupee has fallen 30 times over the last 50 years (from Rs. 5 to a dollar in 1970 to Rs. 180 to a dollar by end 2021). During the same period, the internal value of the rupee, in terms of buying power, has fallen by 300-400 times. A domestic worker earned Rs. 60 a month in 1970, but today earns over Rs. 24,000 per month. The falling domestic value of the rupee is the result of the political opportunism of our respective governments, who attempt to win over the voters by putting more and more money into circulation without a corresponding increase in productivity or production.

Mansoor, a friend of mine, is a skilful investor in the Pakistani stock market. The other day I congratulated him on the rising value of his portfolio, but to my surprise he replied, "Yes the value of my shares keeps going up, but my wealth, in dollars, keeps going down." Over the last three years, the average wealth of Pakistanis has halved due to the falling value of the rupee. Whereas, traditionally, Pakistanis have invested in shares, real estate and gold, now the dollar has become Pakistan's favourite investment. Pakistanis now hold a lot of dollars. The



An 11 percent inflation rate in 2021 left many Pakistanis struggling to put food on the table.

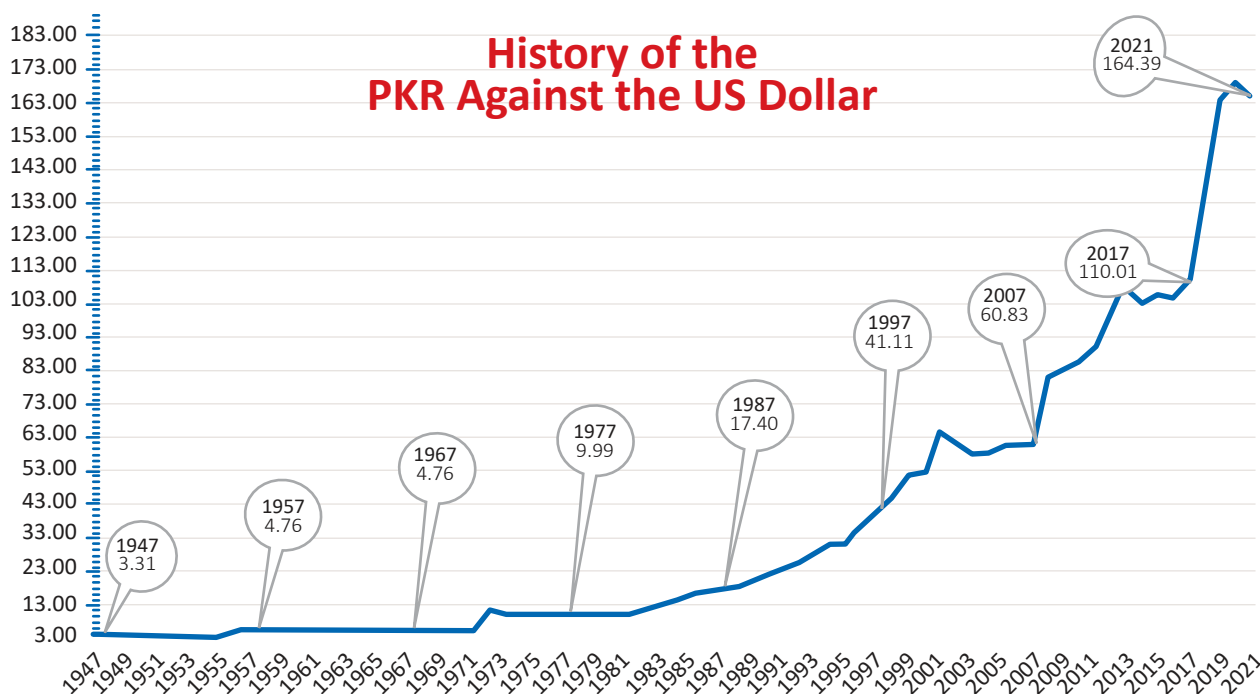
government's clampdown on dollar investment has not restored confidence in the falling rupee, nor have futile interventions that waste scarce dollar reserves by selling dollars to shore up the price of the rupee. The flight from the rupee has been inventive in finding new havens. Besides, the sophisticated buy Bitcoin, the majority buy cars and motorcycles. The buyer of a new car boasts that its price has risen by

50 percent in the last 12 to 18 months proving how smart an investor he is. He will not accept the fact that it is not the value of the car that has risen, it is the value of the rupee that has fallen.

In 2021, Pakistan with 11 percent inflation had the fourth highest inflation rate in the world, with Argentina being the highest at 51 percent. The hardship imposed by inflation is small when compared with hyperinflation, which has been defined as an inflation rate over 50 percent per month. The five highest examples of hyperinflation in the 20th century are Hungary in 1946, Zimbabwe in 2008, Yugoslavia in 1994, Germany in 1923, and Greece in 1944. The worst cases of inflation in 2020 were, Venezuela at 2,355 percent (down from a peak of 65,000 percent), Zimbabwe at 557 percent (down from its 2007 peak of 100 percent per day with prices doubling every 24 hours), Sudan at 163 percent, and Lebanon at 84 percent. In Hungary, in July 1946, prices tripled each day as the monthly inflation topped 41.9 quadrillion percent and the highest currency bill was 100,000,000,000,000,000 pengo. In all these countries the cause was the same: an increasing money supply not supported by a growing economy with higher productivity.

Inflation results from the opportu-

*The rupee will continue to lose value domestically for as long as the creation of rupees is not matched by the creation of goods and services, and as long as bad governance, corruption and leakages bleed and dilute government spending.*



ism of political leaders, who, under pressure from the demands of voters and institutions, increase wages, spending, and money supply without a corresponding increase in production. This short term opportunism, common before elections in democratic nations, or after disastrous wars, has long-term economic consequences. Political leaders, often more attuned to political expediency than an understanding of economics, are led astray by careerist advisors or bureaucrats who misinterpret the great economist, John Maynard Keynes, by quoting increased government spending as the solution, disregarding the context or qualifying principle.

The rupee will continue to lose value domestically for as long as the creation of rupees is not matched by the creation of goods and services, and as long as bad governance, corruption and leakages bleed and dilute government spending.

The rupee will continue to fall against the dollar for as long as the demand for dollars exceeds the demand for rupees. Dollars are needed to pay for imports. Unfortunately, Pakistan has a consistent current account deficit. The combined value of exports, together with worker's remittances, falls short of the dollars required for imports and debt-servicing. A second, but no less important demand for dollars, comes from speculators who buy dollars and sell rupees to profit from expected devaluation. So far, the consist-

*The PTI priority on house construction certainly gives employment, but produces inflation instead of exports or import substitution, forcing Pakistan to borrow new loans to repay old, unsustainable debt driving Pakistan towards bankruptcy.*

ently falling rupee has proved them right as they make good profit, year after year. These 'speculators,' or as Imran Khan calls them 'money launderers,' comprise not only corrupt government officials who hide their ill-gotten gains overseas, but also include legitimate citizens such as the nine million Pakistanis working overseas in 115 countries, who every month make decisions regarding whether to send more or less dollars back home. When these overseas Pakistanis anticipate a fall in the value of the rupee, they defer their

remittances.

Pakistan is afflicted by a high and unsustainable level of debt, and the twin deficits, current account and fiscal, as its imports grow while its exports do not, and it continues to spend more than it earns. The PTI government claims three major successes in their management of the economy – rising remittances, the EHSAAS program, and its housing policy. The rise in workers remittances of 27 percent in FY 2021 is miraculous at a time when Covid has reduced overseas employment. Pakistan's Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment states that manpower export fell from 625,000 in 2019 to 223,000 in the current year while remittances grew. Has the increased volume of money inflow come from worker's remittances or some other source, disguised as worker's remittances? The EHSAAS programme that gives hundreds of billions of rupees yearly to poor Pakistanis clearly does not agree with the old proverb: 'Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach a man to fish and he eats for the rest of his life.' The revolutionary housing policy of the Imran Khan government has boosted employment and inflation.

Successful developing economies such as China and Vietnam, started their growth journey by prioritising agriculture. Increased agricultural productivity reduces imports, creates exports, and feeds the domestic demand for *roti* and *kapra*. The extra wages paid to agricultur-



al labour are absorbed by the extra production of food and clothing, keeping inflation low. The PTI government followed a revolutionary policy of promoting housing rather than agriculture, which certainly gave employment, but when the newly employed construction workers spent their wages, it was not on housing but on *roti* and *kapra*, the supply of which did not increase. Pakistan fell into the classic inflation trap of more money chasing a constant or reduced supply of goods. Inflation was inevitable. Furthermore, whereas increased agricultural production reduces imports and even creates exports, you can't export houses. The PTI priority on house construction certainly gives employment, but produces inflation instead of exports or import substitution, forcing Pakistan to borrow new loans to repay old, unsustainable debt, driving Pakistan towards bankruptcy.

The factors that influence the value of currency are inflation, interest rates, public debt, political stability, economic health, balance of trade, current account deficit and confidence. A tug-of-war for the value of the domestic currency pits the speculators against the State Bank, with the commercial banks in between. The main tools of the State Bank are money supply, interest rates and intervention, when the State Bank spends its scarce reserves on selling dollars and buying the weak rupee. Intervention has more often than not, resulted in reserves drying up before the currency collapse is turned around. Usually, a short-term upswing of the rupee on intervention soon falls back into its downward journey, and the only difference is that State Bank reserves have been eroded.

When central banks try to support the domestic currency against both fundamentals and sentiment, they usually lose out to reality, as finally the forces of gravity drive the domestic currency down. These situations create great profits for those who are not fooled by optimistic statements from government propaganda. The most famous currency speculator was George Soros, known as 'The Man who broke the Bank of England,' whose attacks laid low the currencies of UK (1991), Thailand (1997), and Japan (2013). In each case, Soros earned a billion dollars and in his attack on the British Pound, he is reputed to have made a billion dollars profit in one day. An investment of \$1000 in 1969



*By prioritising housing over domestic output, PM Imran Khan has only exacerbated Pakistan's currency mess.*

*Direct Foreign Investment (DFI), which has proved to be a real solution for countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and even China, has been frightened off by the growing religious extremism, political instability and lack of pro-business policies or environment in Pakistan.*

with Soros, would have grown into \$4 million by 2000. Economies are vulnerable to attacks when the exchange rate is overvalued and reserves are low. Central banks are frequently tempted to increase interest rates as a defence against attacks, despite conventional wisdom that it is futile to try to defend a highly overvalued currency by high interest rates.

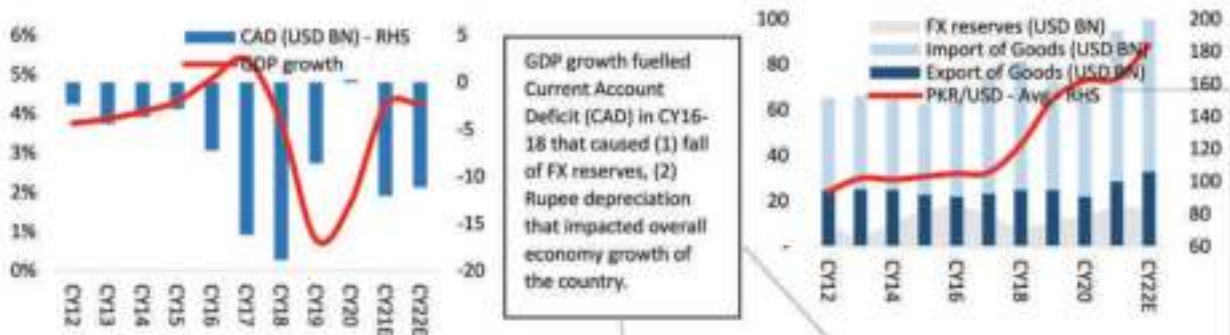
The PTI government promises that the fall of the rupee will be reversed when the IMF programme is restored. But the \$1 billion expected from the IMF, and even

the additional borrowing that Pakistan may be able to access on the confidence created by the restoration of the IMF programme, will not solve the \$26 billion external financing requirements of the current year, when our monthly deficit is over \$2 billion. If we can secure the extra debt required, it will only bury us deeper in the hole. It is not a solution, only a postponement of reality. The weak fundamentals of our economy remain unaltered – stagnant exports, growing imports, a growing illiterate and unskilled population, bad governance with bad policies followed by bad implementation, populist politics with payout way beyond productivity increases, a foreign policy that only creates a greater requirement for defence expenditures, and an ever-growing debt. Direct Foreign Investment (DFI), which has proved to be a real solution for countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and even China, has been frightened off by the growing religious extremism that increases political instability in Pakistan. Additionally, investors are warned off by the example of Reko Diq and the lack of pro-business policies or environment.

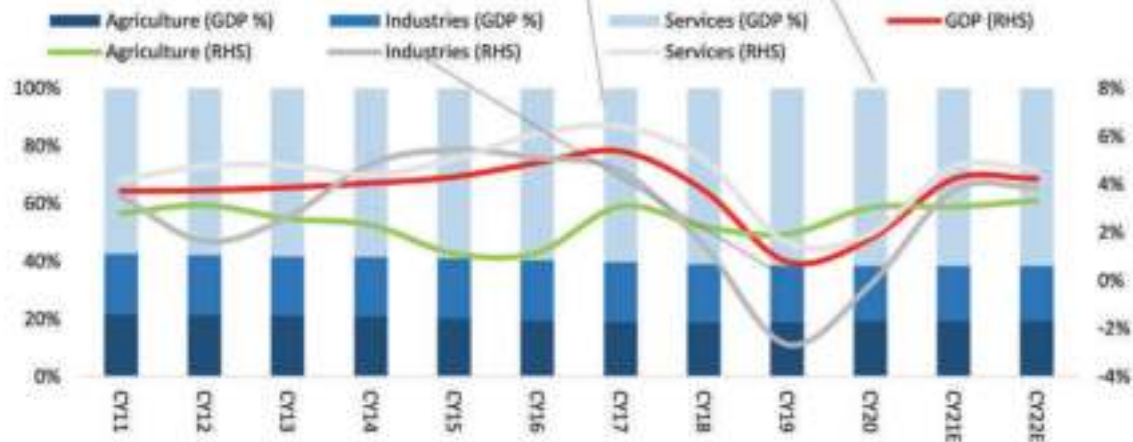
Today it takes 180 rupees to buy a dollar, what will the rupee be worth in 2022? Conservative forecasters expect Rupees 200 to a dollar by the year end, but if the government's economic policy continues to disappoint, the rupee could even dip to a range of 220-240 to a dollar. Meanwhile the domestic purchasing power of the rupee will continue to erode, with the current inflation rate of 12 percent, perhaps rising to 15 percent. National debt, both foreign and domestic, would mount as we borrow from Peter to pay Paul. ■

## The Number Game

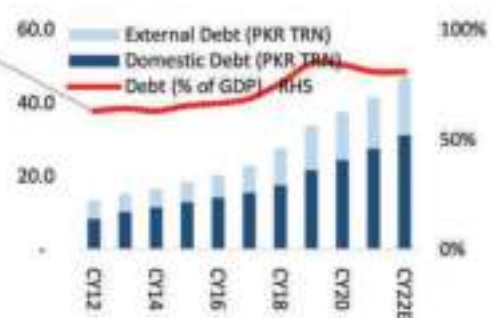
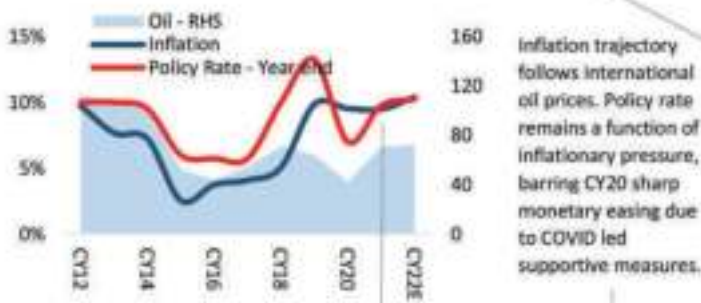
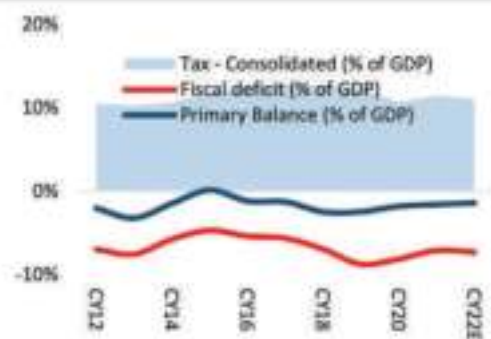
### A Decade & Pakistan's Economy



Service sector weight has been expanding amid higher constant growth achieved over agriculture and industries sectors.



Fiscal deficit recorded at elevated levels that is largely an outcome of low tax to GDP ratio and higher non-primary deficit. Government continued raising debt (domestic + external) to fund fiscal operations that has escalated Debt to GDP ratio to over 80% mark.



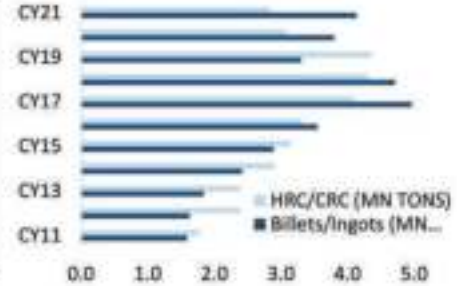
Source: SBP, MoF, Bloomberg, PBS, APCMA, PAMA, NEPRA, NFDC, COAC, OCM Research



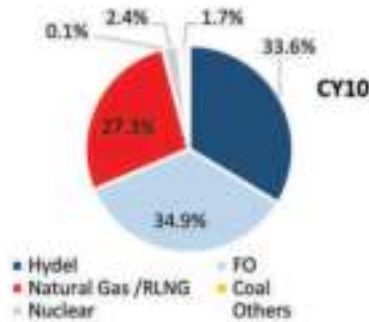
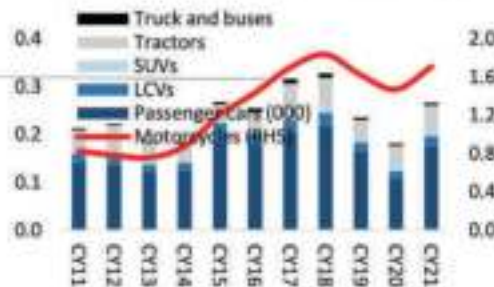
## Performance of Major Industries CY 11 - 21



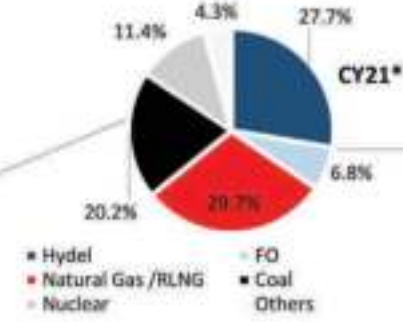
Cyclical sectors moved in tandem with economy. Cements and steel market demand kept increasing amid development of real estate market.



Automobile demand peaked in CY18 when economy was growing at a higher pace with lower interest rates. However, it is rebounding sharply again.



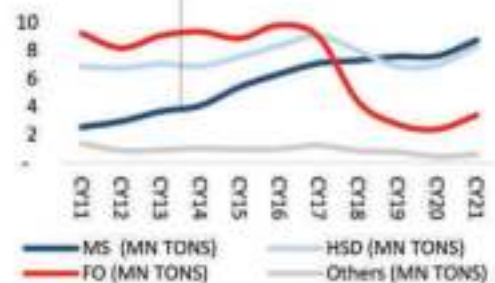
Pakistan power generation mix changed significantly from CY10 to CY21. Currently, Coal based generation constitutes 20% of the mix now.



Pakistan deposit grew with a CAGR of double digit in past decade. Banks mostly deployed this in Investment and had lower reliance on advances.

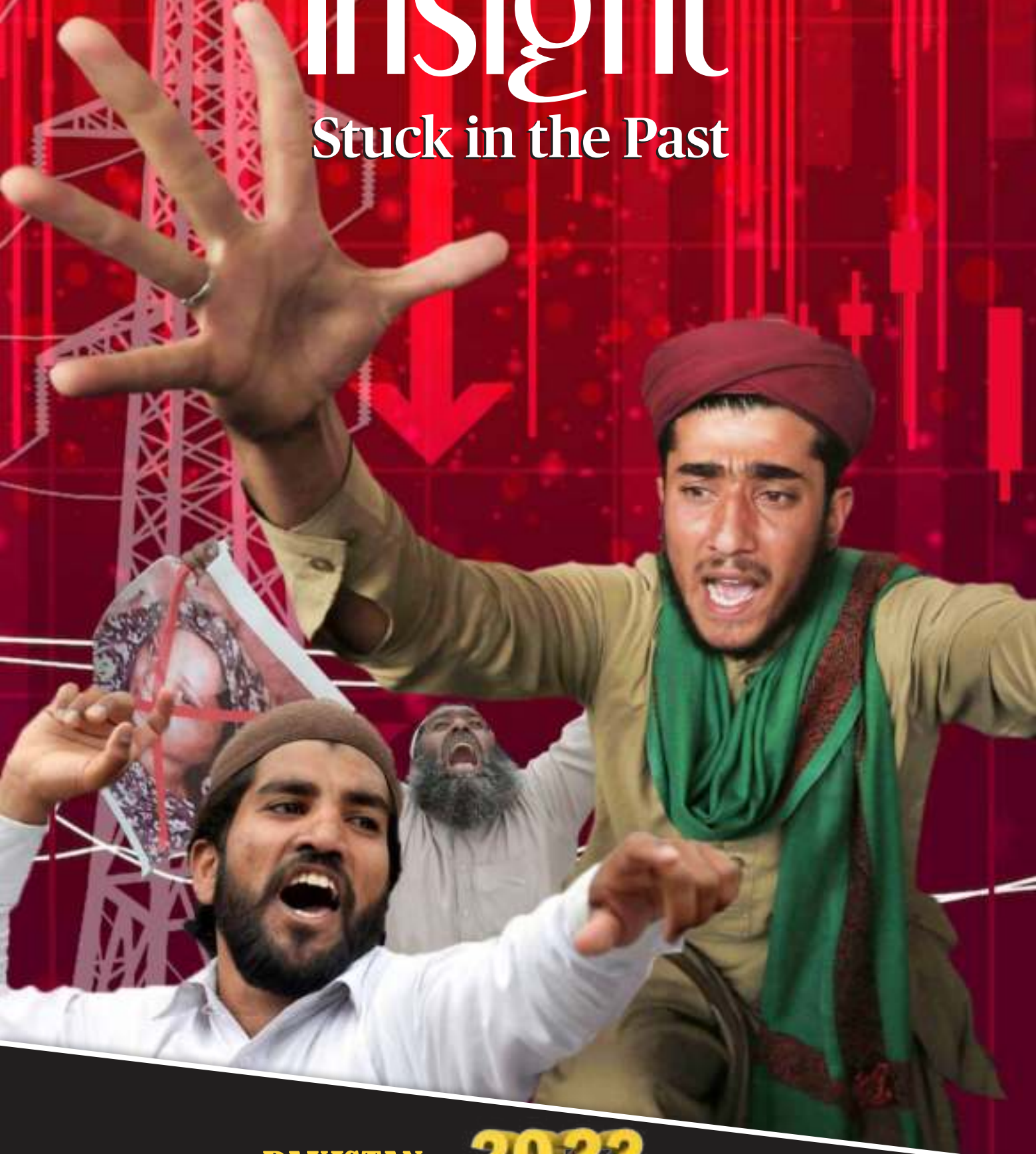


Demand of Motor Spirit (MS) has constantly increased to ~8MN Tons while sharp slump in FO volumes resulted from power generation mix change.



# Insight

Stuck in the Past





# Living in Denial

It is high time to take a reality check and acknowledge our failures in the economic sphere



**By Syed Shabbar Zaidi**

**The writer is one of Pakistan's best-known chartered accountants and a senior partner in A.F. Ferguson. He served as the 26th chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue.**



*The emergence of the TLP is a symptom of Pakistan's contradictions and confusions regarding religion and modernity.*

**T**he Muslims of the subcontinent have been in complete denial mode since 1857. Despite continuous deterioration in their socio-economic status, they are not mentally ready to accept that they have lost the race and are not ready to face the new world after the industrial and technological revolution. In 1947, a compromise was made to favour the Muslim majority provinces in the east and north-west part of the subcontinent at the cost of Muslims in other minority provinces. Additional space was provided to the areas of the northwestern parts of the subcontinent. Then, another compromise was made in 1971 when the Eastern wing decided to replace this particular brand

of ideology with Bengali nationalism. Resultantly, the 'brand' of Muslim nationalism has presumably been limited to people of the northwestern part of the subcontinent.

'Muslim nationalism,' as envisaged by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the form of the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College in Aligarh, was supposed to convert a feudal mindset heavily reliant on theological education into a society aware of the need for economic self-sufficiency and improvement of the knowledge and technological base.

The decision made in 1947 to favour the northwestern parts of subcontinent that was supposed to be based on economic and technological sovereignty relied upon theology and illusions based on a wrong understanding of history. It was

wrongly presumed that this economic and technological identity had to be transformed into an illusory model related to some periods in history when Muslims were rulers in Baghdad and Cordoba. Even learned persons like Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, whilst praising the Muslim rule in Spain, ignored the fact that knowledge and technology is now possessed by Western societies with a Christian faith that overruled the Muslims in Spain. There is no point in lamenting some innovations made in the past by persons in the totalitarian rules in Baghdad and Cordoba. This disturbed and confused mindset has been diligently ingrained in the minds of people of the northwestern part of the subcontinent, politically known as Pakistan. They consider themselves custodians of the Muslim 'Ummah,'



*Unwillingness to reconcile religion with human intellect is holding back Pakistan's development.*

not realising that in knowledge and technology they are at least 300 years behind the rest of the world, and rank 164th in per capita income among 174 countries.

There is a constant and complete denial of two fundamental ground realities. Firstly, the fact that, at least after 1970, as a state we are constantly on a downward trend as far as the welfare of the common man and human development is concerned. This is reflected by constant current and fiscal account deficits that result in loans for current expenditure instead of the development side. Secondly, there is a denial that western societies have achieved good for the common man using the human intellect, instead of misinterpreted divine revelations. The second notion is followed by a perception that

some rule-based model is available in the form of a society that flourished in Arabia around 1400 years ago.

It is an undeniable fact that the best principles for relationship with other humans and the divine are laid down in the book revealed in Arabia around 1400 years ago. However, it is intentionally overlooked that these guidelines are universal principles not limited to a particular society. They allow complete freedom to human beings in applying human intellect in deciding the manner of living together in this world and do not prescribe rule based totalitarian dictates for society. As a result of these denials and contradictions, society in Pakistan is totally confused. Whenever there are discussions on any matter relating to economics or tech-

nology, even highly qualified people are not open to accepting the fact that whatever little success we have in the field of medicine, engineering, accounting, finance, banking and other such subjects is the product of borrowed systems developed in the West. These are the results of human endeavours, not divine revelations. The framework laid down by our religion relates to the bigger issue of universal goodwill and peace and is not sup-

*Society in Pakistan is totally confused. Whenever there are discussions on any matter relating to economics or technology, even highly qualified people are not open to accepting the fact that whatever little success we have is the product of borrowed systems developed in the west.*



*Despite the Taliban's victory over the US, their government has now become dependant on Western aid.*

posed to lay down the rules, for example, for the manner of electing a mayor for the city. The latter job has been destined for human intellect, even if we adopt a divine framework. The principal issue is the misunderstanding of the conceptual balance between human intellect and divine revelations. If I do something good for others, the response now is not 'thank you' but 'jazakallah.' Even this is a misunderstanding of the divine revelation, as there is explicit direction to be thankful to the one who has done you a favour.

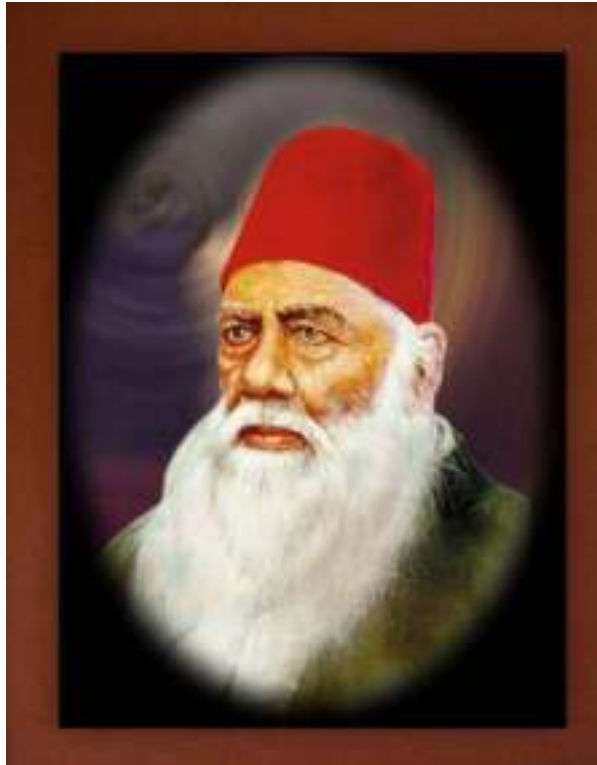
In the recent past we have seen the emergence of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and the takeover by arms of Kabul by the Taliban. There are complete contradictions in these narratives. The Taliban, whose main slogan is reli-



ance on 'divine' support for all worldly affairs are seeking help from the US and their allies for the economic catastrophe they are facing in Afghanistan. TLP leaders say that there is no need to repay Pakistan's debt, as it is based on interest, which is not allowed in religion. The question is whether as a society we can live with these contradictions. On a lighter note, it will be good for Pakistan if it is not required to repay its debts. However, this foolishness does not prevail whilst sitting in the 'Q' Block in Islamabad, where you share the floor with the IMF office and the lady in charge of the IMF office, despite being a very junior person, is supposed to approve all our economic plans. There is nothing wrong in the saying 'beggars can't be choosers.'

The Pakistani establishment and politicians are facing misery when they face the real world. On the one hand, very rightly, they want to position the country as a modern, democratic, welfare state applying universal principles of human rights and rule of law and on the other, they are forced politically to take decisions that alienate them from the modern club of democratic welfare states with rule of law. These contradictions are destroying the very fabric of society.

A close analysis of the socio-economic factors reveals that the pseudo fundamentalists are an abject minority in the country. This reality has been demonstrated in every general election held in Pakistan since 1947. Except in KPK, which represents only 15 percent of Pakistan, such people have never been able to get more than 15 percent to a maximum of 20 percent of the vote. Their vote bank is constantly diluting. There is nothing wrong in having this percentage of fundamentalists, as long as they do not destroy the fabric of society. In Israel, the orthodox Jews are even more in number. The same is the case with 'skinheads' in the UK. Our problem is the undue importance given to these ignorable elements by the media. The problem lies with the so-called educated right wing people who have not been able to understand Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The political



*'Muslim nationalism,' as envisaged by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the form of the Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College in Aligarh, was supposed to convert a feudal mindset heavily reliant on theological education into a society aware of the need for economic self sufficiency and improvement of the knowledge and technological base.*

and economic independence of Muslim majority provinces, as laid down by Mr. Jinnah, has been completely destroyed by the abuse and misinterpretation of

the Objectives Resolution of the Constitution. The Objectives Resolution, like all other frameworks, is not a rules-based framework. The universal principles of human rights and rule of law as enunciated in any books and also by our book, would remain the primary framework for law makers. However, it does not in any manner mean that rules-based regulations depending upon the interpretation of a particular theocratic mindset are to be adopted. There has to be an interpretation to be made with the mindset of Mr. Jinnah, not Mr. Zia-ul-Haq.

The confusion about the objectives of the state has prevailed upon economic decision-making. Nevertheless, in the recent past, there is in some academic quarters a rightful debate concerning a reality check about the economic degradation we have suffered in the past fifty years (1970-2020). After an initial reaction from the denial mentality, there is by and large a realisation that as a state our finances are not in good order. They cannot be corrected in the short term.

When we start the New Year 2022, we should abstain from the notion that there will be major positive change in the economic situation of the country during the year. The minor correction that will arise due to good actions by the government will be swallowed up by the heavy burden of errors made in the past. The three big burdens which have completely been ignored are (i) local and foreign debt, (ii) energy cost (in India the cost is Rs. 6.09 per kilowatt hour (kwh) and in Pakistan the cost is Rs 25.60 per kwh) and (iii) losses due to state owned enterprises. What I expect in 2022 is further reality checks on the economic situation of the country. The first meeting of the National Security Council with a declaration that economic insecurity may cause national security issues for the country is the first step out of the denial mentality. On the social front, there is a dire need to develop the correct narrative about the objectives of the state and dispel the impression that the model of a rules-based state will emerge from some divine revelation. The Divine has ordained this job to be done through human intellect. ■

# *Your Life* & **Health**

## Beating COVID-19



**By Dr. Zafar Mirza**

The writer is a former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Health and has also served as the Director of Health System Development at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.





# The Challenge Ahead

Pakistan has so far responded relatively well to the global pandemic, but we need to develop a system, not band aids and firefighting each time we are confronted by a medical emergency

**G**iven the national state of preparation to deal with a health emergency, let alone a global pandemic, Pakistan has generally done well in responding to COVID-19 and its changing face, the latest of these changes being Omicron. The next few months will be critical as Omicron is spreading like wildfire.

Omicron spreads faster than any other known variant of COVID-19. The time it took the Delta variant to double was up to two weeks, whereas Omicron can be found in double the number of people in just two to three days. This is based on the rate of cumulative increase in the number of cases, and it changes with an evolving epidemic. Given the, until now, known characteristics of Omicron, it spreads rapidly, but doesn't usually cause serious illness, and the existing vaccines are largely effective against it. Despite the scare it has created, this may mean the maximum number of people getting infected with no or very mild symptoms, and a great majority of them recovering. Most would not even know if they ever got infected. Those already vaccinated would be more protected and the unvaccinated will develop immunity (including the anti-vaxxers). Early evidence is also showing that there would thus be less pressure on hospitals. South Africa, from where it started, has already recovered from it. And this means that herd immunity will be hastened, which in the larger perspective is a silver lining for the downward course of COVID-19. The next variant around, it is hoped, the world will be better immune to dodge it.

Nobody can tell for how long Covid is going to last and how many other variants we will be seeing, but science would indicate that with each variant, the world will be able to offer greater resistance to its spread and gradually, hopefully, it will become similar to flu, and we and the virus will learn to co-exist – unless some such variant emerges that evades immunity altogether.

Vaccinations have indeed helped. Despite being a non-producer of vac-



*Pakistan met its vaccination target, preventing many unnecessary deaths.*

cines, Pakistan has also done quite well in procuring and administering vaccines, beginning with high-risk groups. The National Information Management System (NIMS), which comprises the national record-keeping data for vaccinations, is probably one of the best. In relative terms, the Government of Pakistan has, through the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) done exceptionally well. It had set the target of fully vaccinating 70 million people before the end of the year, and the figure achieved in this regard was 70,576,467 by the eve of December 31, 2021. This is a remarkable achievement given that we did not produce a single vaccine. We have worked hard to access vaccines in a highly competitive global market and have not allowed for any stockpiles during these months.

I mentioned a "state of preparation" at the outset, which is not just a random term, but rather a science. After a series of 14 International Sanitary Conferences over the last one-and-a-half centuries, under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), the world finally adopted International Health Regulations in 2005 (IHR). In essence, the purpose and scope of the International Health Regulations (2005) are "to prevent, pro-

tect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade." IHR-2005 is the hardest of the soft laws in global health, a binding of a sort, which has set the framework for emergency preparation and response among the 194 member states of the WHO. Had countries seriously fulfilled their responsibilities towards IHR-2005, the preparation and response to COVID-19 could have been different.

One of the responsibilities of WHO in the context of IHR is "supporting States Parties to assess their existing national public health structures and resources, and to build and strengthen their core public health capacities for surveillance and response." In order to support countries, the WHO has developed a system for countries to first self-assess the state of necessary public health functions. Then a very comprehensive Joint External Evaluation (JEE) is organised for the requesting countries. Pakistan was the first country to volunteer for JEE. A large group of international experts undertook a lengthy evaluation of 19 technical areas in the country in April and May of 2016 and concluded that Pakistan had



*Civil-Military cooperation via the NCOC was crucial to containing the impact of the pandemic.*

no National Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan. The JEE made detailed recommendations in this regard. Until the time COVID-19 hit us, Pakistan had not moved to develop this plan.

In the absence of any National Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, two factors have saved Pakistan from a large-scale disaster. One, civil-military cooperation in setting up and running the NCOC. Ideally, we should not have needed NCOC to begin with as we had a NDMA which came into being in 2010. This notwithstanding, the NCOC was erected in the face of the global pandemic, and it worked very well. It could make timely and consultative decisions on the basis of the available data and more importantly, organise efficient national coordination for the implementation of decisions across the country. The data is not entirely adequate, but it has served as a basis for making and enforcing timely decisions.

The second factor which has rescued us is the polio programme infrastructure. Pakistan tragically lacked a comprehensive integrated health information system in the country of which the disease surveillance system is an integral part. In the absence of a reliable real time disease surveillance system in the country, the polio programme was quickly repurposed and COVID-19 surveillance was piggybacked on it. This also worked very well. The combination of these two factors provided a good basis for generating a calculated and evidence-based national response.

However, although we managed to generate a relatively good response to

*Ideally, we should start thinking of setting up a commission to review Pakistan's response and based on this experience, this commission should suggest short, medium and long-term plans for strengthening our health system and its capacity to respond to public health emergencies.*

the pandemic, the institutional basis and hence, sustainability of the health security infrastructure and its ability to timely pick early warning signals of disease spread and the generation of an effective response to it, are weak. It is more a stop-gap arrangement that was put together as a knee-jerk response than a long-term, sustainable health system. It is no substitute for system-based resilience and resourcefulness. We are still far from that.

What can we learn from dealing with the COVID-19 experience? As we enter the

third year of the pandemic and as it will gradually recede, as I have argued above, will our interest in the health of the nation and health sector conditions also gradually diminish? Will it be business as usual? Or like mature people will we set up a formal process to review our experience and conduct an objective analysis of our strengths and weaknesses? Ideally, we should start thinking of setting up a commission to review Pakistan's response and based on this experience, this commission should suggest short, medium and long-term plans for strengthening our health system and its capacity to respond to public health emergencies. The 18th Constitutional Amendment and its impact on fragmenting the national health sector has felt like a bonfire through COVID-19. Now there must be some learning from this experience. The suggested Commission should recommend ways to deal with this impasse. There is already talk about a COVID-19 recovery plan in global health. The likes of a Marshall Plan needs to be developed which will transform post-Covid national health systems.

Pakistan has an official policy of advancing universal health coverage (UHC) in the country and has made good progress in developing the three dimensions of UHC: integrated delivery of prioritised quality essential health services; financial protection of those who cannot pay; and non-discrimination in healthcare. Health security is an integral component of UHC and it is ensured through robust preparation to respond to public health emergencies. It is time to set it right. We need systems rather than band aids and fire-fighting every time. ■



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# **SPECIAL REPORT**

## **Population Explosion**





# A Goal Too Far?

Pakistan needs to stem the tide of unchecked population growth in order to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goals in 2022



**By Dr. Mehtab S. Karim**

*The writer is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the School of Public Policy, George Mason University, United States.*

**A**ccording to Pakistan's last census, conducted in 2017, the country's total population was estimated to be 207.8 million people. However, since the release of the provisional results, the figure has remained disputed due to the alleged undercount of the population of Sindh, in general, and Karachi, in particular. All the political parties in Sindh, as well as the media and academia, have been critical of the way the census was conducted. Consequently, the Federal Government has decided to conduct a fresh census in July 2022, the results of which are expected to be announced before the end of the year. The results of the 2017 census indicated that since 1998, the population growth rate in Pakistan has barely declined from 2.6 to 2 percent per annum, with varying growth rates from the urban and rural areas, provinces and districts. The censuses conducted in most countries usually un-

dercount people. Therefore a post-census enumeration is conducted in most countries to determine the extent of undercount. For example, in the 2011 censuses, 2 percent of people in Australia, 2.5 percent in India and 4 percent in Bangladesh were undercounted. However, after Pakistan's last census, no such exercise was undertaken. Thus, in Pakistan if the undercount was to the tune of 2.5 percent, it is likely that about 5.2 million people were not counted, which could mean that in 2017, the population of Pakistan had already reached about 213 million.

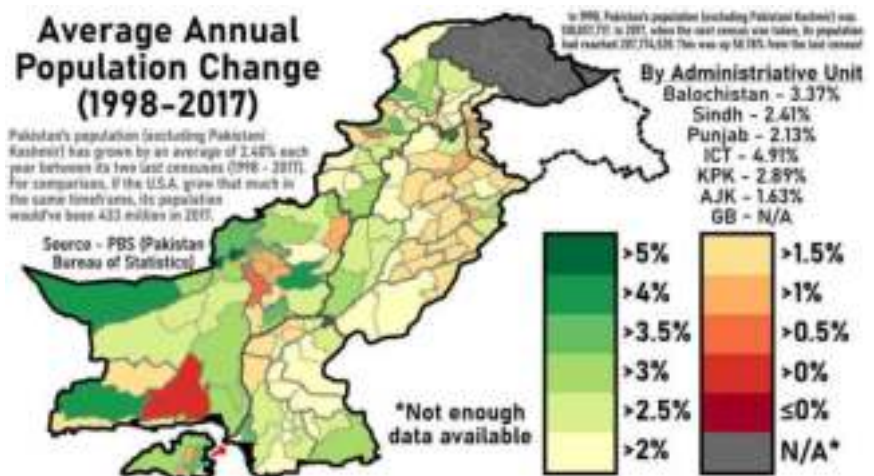
If the population of Pakistan had already reached 213 million in 2017, growing at the rate of 2 percent per annum, it means that during the last four years, about 4.25 million people have been added each year. Thus, the population of Pakistan at the beginning of 2022 has probably reached 230 million. This estimate is very close to 229.50 million in 2022, as estimated by Trading Economics global macro models, analysts and the United Nations. The United Nations estimates that, as in most other Asian countries, the population growth rate has declined to about 1 percent per annum. Pakistan's population growth is also expected to decline in the coming years.

However, even with the expected decline, according to the United Nations' estimates, by 2030 Pakistan's population will reach 263 million, as shown in table 1.

As we reach the end of 2022, Pakistan has to take care of an additional 4.5 million plus people. Within a year, the combined population of Rawalpindi and Peshawar; half the population of Lahore and one-third of the population of Karachi will be added to the population of Pakistan. This will result in multiple problems for an already overburdened country.

Thus, whether it is widespread illiteracy and poverty in the country, deteriorating civic amenities, poor health conditions, increasing crime rates in the cities, environmental pollution or water shortage for farming as well for household consumption, all have their roots in the rapid population growth. On the one hand, the average number of children born to illiterate women is one-third greater than those who are educated, on the other hand, most of the children born to illiterate mothers are also not enrolled in schools. Therefore, the number of illiterate persons has remained high. Nearly half of the population is classified as illiterate.

Similarly, several factors have been found to be associated with the dynamics



**As per the 2017 census, much of Pakistan registered population growth greater than 2 percent since 1998.**

Table 1

Population Growth in Pakistan: 1951-2030		
Year	Population (million)	Annual Growth Rate during the two periods (in percent)
1951	33.8	--
1961	42.9	2.5
1972	65.3	3.7
1981	84.2	3.1
1998	132.4	2.6
2017	207.8 (213*)	2.4
2022	229.5 **	2.0
2030	263.0 ***	1.7

Sources: 1951-2017 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

\* estimated by the author

\*\*estimated by <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/pakistan-population>

\*\*\*estimated by the United Nations

of poverty. For example, larger household sizes and/or dependency ratio are associated with chronic poverty. Rapid population growth, especially among the poor segments of society – where women have too many children and too frequently – creates a situation whereby only limited resources are available to the families and thus till these children start earning, without any additional income the family becomes poorer. In this respect, the most vulnerable, namely women in reproductive ages and children, suffer the most. Thus, on the one hand, poor families have limited disposable income and on the other hand, as a consequence of too many children the family size is large, resulting in members remaining trapped

*Since population dynamics affect all other sectors, efforts to promote sustainable development that do not address population dynamics would continue to fail.*

in poverty which breeds further poverty. As the poor have more children, it further aggravates their situation. For example, due to inadequate resources, children are denied any education and many end up as child labour, earning meagre amounts, while women are denied the opportunity to lead a healthy life, which deprives them of the ability to earn a livelihood. Thus, the phenomenal increase in Pakistan's population has had a highly adverse impact on the wellbeing of the people. Furthermore, due to a higher number of children in the family, the inheritance patterns have contributed to a decrease in the size of farm landholdings to the point where, according to the agriculture census, in the past two decades the number of farms under three acres – the minimum size for economic viability – has increased from 2.1 million to 4.8 million, resulting in an increase of farms under three acres from about 50 percent of all landholdings in the country to about 75 percent, leading to a widening gap in the incidence of poverty between the rural and urban areas of the country.

As shown in Figure 1, while the incidence of poverty in rural and urban areas till the mid-1990s was about the same, the latest information available indicates that the incidence has remained about the same in rural areas. However, it has declined substantially in the urban areas resulting in a wide gap in the incidence of poverty between the two areas. Furthermore, due to the increasing demand for food items, there is likely to be a shortage of eatables, which when imported, will result in a further increase in the prices of essential kitchen items. This will have a greater impact on the poor and vulnerable families.

Another consequence of high population growth is a youth bulge, usually defined as a high proportion of those aged 15 to 29 relative to the total population. Pakistan's population of youth has doubled from about 35 million in 1998 to nearly 66 million today. Besides, about 30 percent of the population comprising those in the age group 15-29, there is an additional 35 percent, consisting of children below 15 years. Due to the migration of young people in search of employment, about 40 percent of the population of large cities comprises youth. On the one hand, the young population has a high potential for population growth



*A quality education is incompatible with unchecked population growth.*



and on the other hand, too many young people is a contributing factor to economic instability and social upheavals, especially when they are illiterate. A combination of national demographic trends and youth movements to cities often creates an urban youth surge of considerable magnitude.

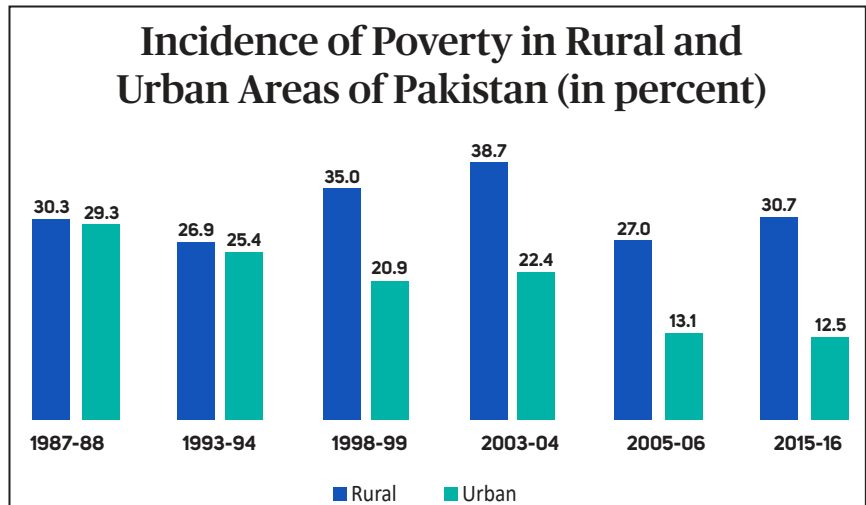
A rapid population growth in Pakistan would have several consequences:

- It would require expansion of infrastructure and services to serve a larger population.
- Further, more school-age population, would make it harder to achieve educational goals.
- It would mean a less favourable age structure for economic development, due to fewer people in working ages.
- Constant rural to urban migration, would lead to further deterioration in the urban infrastructure and civic amenities.
- A further increase in the number of people below the poverty line, particularly in rural areas and those living in urban slums, and one catastrophic illness can push them into extreme poverty.
- Increasing disparity in social, economic and health status between the poor and the affluent class in the cities and between regions, could lead to social upheavals.
- Due to the increasing demand for food items, there is likely to be a shortage of essential eatables and other kitchen items, affecting the poor families more.

Apparently, one of the main reasons

*One of the main reasons for the poor social indicators in Pakistan stems from unchecked population growth, which resulted in Pakistan meeting the targets of only 10 out of the 34 indicators of the Millennium Development Goals.*

Table 2



*Pakistan's booming population is pushing civic amenities to the breaking point.*

for the poor social indicators in Pakistan stems from unchecked population growth, which resulted in Pakistan meeting the targets of only 10 out of the 34 indicators of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Pakistan is a signatory to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 different targets, aimed at fighting poverty, reducing inequality and addressing climate change. They include goals such as quality primary and secondary education for all children, gender equality, and reduced child mortality, all of which have direct and indirect impacts on population growth. Population is not mentioned in any of the 169 targets, yet it is a decisive factor for global environmental change and future human wellbeing. However, there are SDGs which are directly relevant to population, such as good health

and well-being, quality education and gender equality. Since population dynamics affect all other sectors, efforts to promote sustainable development that do not address population dynamics would continue to fail. This can be achieved through a set of policies which respect freedom and provide access to sexual and reproductive health rights, which could then contribute to a reduction in fertility, and advance education and empowerment of women. According to one of the studies done by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Vienna and the Asian Demographic Research Institute at Shanghai University, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals would significantly slow population growth. Population growth and its consequences need to be immediately checked on a war-like footing. ■

# DEFENCELINE

No End in Sight





# Another Year of Living Dangerously?

As Pakistan enters 2022, the rising tide of extremism and terrorism does not seem to abate



**By Abdullah Khan**

*The writer is Managing Director at an Islamabad-based think tank, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).*

**T**he year 2021 has left some daunting challenges for the new year. The major challenge that Pakistan faces in 2022 is increasing terrorism and extremism. There had been a reduction in terrorism since June 2014, after the Zarb-e-Azb military operation was launched. The largest militant group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), faced serious rifts in September 2014; many senior commanders left the main group and formed a new one: Jamaat-ul-Ahrar. The Khan Saeed Sajna group had also defected from the group. Some other commanders had also started operating independently, including Shehryar Mehsud. In 2017, the Hizbul Ahrar had emerged from Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, putting the TTP almost on the back foot. However, the killing of Mullah Fazlullah in a US drone strike in June 2018 proved a blessing in disguise for the TTP, as the new Emir, Mufti Noor Wali, prioritised unity among the different factions and after a two-year effort, he managed to reconcile with the Hizb-ul-Ahrar and other factions



*TTP's new leader Noor Wali Mehsud (right) has managed to reunify the group leading to a resurgence in attacks against Pakistan's security forces.*

and smaller groups in August 2020. In 2019, the militant attacks in the country had gone down to the level of 2004, which was a historic improvement in the country's security situation. However, since the reintegration of the TTP in August 2020, the group stepped up its attacks, which further intensified in 2021.

According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) Annual Security Assessment Report, a substantial increase in militant attacks in Pakistan was observed in 2021 as the country witnessed more than a 57 percent increase in militant attacks, a 48 percent increase in the number of deaths and close to a six percent increase in the number of injured as 294 militant attacks were recorded in 2021 in which 395 people were killed and 629 others were injured. Balochistan witnessed 104 militant attacks in which 177 people were killed while 346 others were injured, as compared to 103 militant attacks in FATA that caused the death of 117 people besides injuring 103 others. As many as 58 militant attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

during the year suggest that the province is increasingly inching back to violence. Around 62 people were killed and 58 others were injured in KP. In Sindh and Punjab, 15 and 10 militant attacks respectively, were reported, and three militant attacks in the Islamabad Capital Territory indicate that militants have made consistent efforts to make their reach felt in urban centres. Improvised Explosive Device (IED)-based attacks, targeted killings and physical assaults were the three most lethal types of attacks. They constituted 84 percent of the total militant attacks (248 out of 294) in 2021. IED-based attacks were the most common, constituting 32 percent of the total attacks, followed by 30 percent incidents of targeted killings and 22 percent physical assaults. Grenade attacks formed nine percent, while suicide attacks were around two percent.

Interestingly, when attempts were being made to reintegrate the TTP, efforts to form a united front of Baloch militant groups fighting against the Pakistani state were also in progress. The Baloch Raaji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) was formed



Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has urged the TTP to cut a deal with Pakistan, but will his group be able to force the TTP to the negotiating table?

in November 2018, the same year that Mullah Fazlullah was killed.

In 2021, when the TTP halted its attacks for one month, from November 9 to December 9, the overall number of militant attacks still remained on the higher side because Baloch militants had stepped up their attacks. Not only did the unification of the Baloch militants and the TTP happen almost during the same period, but the intensification in the attacks also coincided. Interestingly, Baloch militants have also established contacts with the TTP and other anti-Pakistan groups. Pakistan is faced with an enemy that has many faces, but somewhere along the line their objectives are intertwined and, perhaps, also their resources. Pakistan has been blaming India for sponsoring both terror groups. However, just allegations or finger-pointing will not resolve the issue.

The year 2022 may see more attacks by all shades of militant groups. The Sindhu Desh Liberation Army is a new entrant, which has reportedly joined BRAS and claimed responsibility for the attacks in interior Sindh. While the tribal districts of KP and Balochistan are already facing serious challenges, interior Sindh will also prove to be another headache for the country.

Pakistan, in particular, will face increasing pressure in erstwhile FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), where the TTP will try to win back some territory to relocate its command and control structure as it faces pressure from the new Afghan government to either thrash out a deal with Pakistan or

*Pakistan is faced with an enemy that has many faces, but somewhere along the line their objectives are intertwined and, perhaps, so are their resources.*

stop using Afghan territory for mounting attacks on Pakistan. The local commanders and leaders of the new Afghan government, however, have very strong and deep-rooted ties with the TTP and its leadership. The latter had provided shelter and support to Taliban leaders and fighters, when it was facing severe US military pressure in Afghanistan. Although the Afghan Taliban never expressed any desire or intent to expand their military campaign outside Afghanistan, their strong bonding with the TTP leadership and fighters was perhaps underestimated in Islamabad. The general impression was that with the Taliban ruling Afghanistan, the TTP and all anti-Pakistan elements hiding in Afghanistan would have no room to stay. This impression was further strengthened with Pakistan's consistent diplomatic push to urge the international community to engage with the new Afghan government. The PTI government expected the new government to reciprocate

Pakistan's efforts, but it soon realised that the Taliban leadership no longer enjoyed full control over its local commanders, as it did in its previous tenure in power. Despite the amnesty announced by the Taliban's top leadership, the local commanders indulged in revenge killings and torture of members of the former security forces. Mullah Haibatullah has set up a commission to address the issue, but the problem persists. Some TTP members were also seen with fighters of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) when the fencing wire was stolen from the Pak-Afghan border and abuses were hurled at Pakistan. Interestingly, while members of the IEA were seen destroying and stealing the fencing wire and poles, in certain places, at another place a commander of the IEA was seen thanking Pakistan for its support during the war against foreign forces. The Taliban leadership is not on the same page regarding Pakistan and this is reflected in the rank and file of the new regime too.

Given the limited control of the top leadership of the Taliban, not only will Pakistan continue to face problems on the Durand Line, but the TTP and other elements will also use the situation in their favour and cross-border infiltration and attacks will continue.

Having said this, there are prospects of talks between TTP and the Pakistan government resuming soon. However, the outcome depends largely on the will and the intent of the Afghan Taliban. If the IEA puts serious and genuine pressure on the TTP, a deal is most likely. However, there is nothing Pakistan can offer to the TTP, except a general amnesty and reintegration of its fighters in society, with some safety valves in place after addressing the concerns of those who were directly affected by the TTP's violence. The TTP, on the other hand, believes that it can also win against Pakistan just as the Afghan Taliban did against the US. The group wants to exploit the positive public opinion of the Afghan Taliban and the negative feelings against Pakistan's security forces in the tribal belt to further its ingress in society and enhance its support base. The TTP is utilising anti-military sentiments fomented by the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) in the last few years in the tribal belt for new recruitments to its militant agenda. Utilising hard and soft measures, the TTP aims to win back some



territory before entering into any negotiations. However, it is highly unlikely that the Pakistan army will concede any territory to them in the ongoing battle. The Pashtun belt of the country will probably witness more violence.

Although the Baloch militants residing in Afghanistan have been facing problems since the Taliban takeover of Kabul, their militant activities on the ground are increasing. But 2022 is expected to spell more troubles for the Baloch militants as Pak-Iran ties are normalising gradually and Pakistan hopes that Iran will squeeze the space for Baloch militants on its soil.

Unfortunately, intolerance and extremism continue to grow in Pakistani society; incidents of communal tension were witnessed in the country and these will continue to pose a serious challenge for the state.

A recap of the recent incidents shows that on December 30, 2020, a mob vandalised the temple of a Hindu saint and subsequently set it on fire in the Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as more than a thousand people, led by some local elders of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), held a protest, delivered speeches inciting people and then attacked the temple. Subsequently, the Karak police arrested 31 people, including the district leaders of the JUI-F, Rehmat Salam Khattak, for vandalising and demolishing the temple. The temple was subsequently reconstructed by the KP government. In May 2021, a mob attacked the Golra Police Station in Islamabad in an attempt to lynch a man who was detained on the charge of blasphemy. In August 2021, hundreds of people vandalised a temple in the Bhong area of Rahim Yar Khan after a nine-year-old Hindu boy – who allegedly urinated in a local seminary – was granted bail by a local court. In late November, a mob in Charsadda, ransacked a police station and burnt it down on similar allegations. The KP police had reportedly refused to hand over a man detained over alleged blasphemy to the mob. In another shocking incident on December 3, a Sri-Lankan national Priyantha Kumara, working in a private factory in Sialkot, was tortured to death and his body was set on fire on blasphemy allegations by an angry mob. According to initial reports, the Sri Lankan national was accused by the factory workers of “tearing down the Durood Sharif” (words in praise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad).



*A mob of JUI-F members burnt down a Hindu temple in Karak on December 31, 2020; a symbol of Pakistan's ongoing struggles against extremism.*

However, some media reports claimed that he had removed a banner of the TLP from the factory walls and supporters of the TLP in the factory accused him of blasphemy. The TLP leadership subsequently denied their involvement and condemned the incident.

It seems that a consensus is developing in Pakistan's official circles that the issue of extremism can be addressed only through revamping Pakistan's judicial system and that a strict application of the law will avert or deter issues such as the lynching of people like the Sri Lankan national, Priyantha Kumara. The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) on December 20, 2021 observed that a serious issue facing the country was the non-implementation of laws and that the judicial system needed improvements in order to stop a recurrence of the Sialkot-like incident. Similarly, on December 24, PTI leader Dr Babar Awan tabled a resolution in the National Assembly for holding a debate on the Sialkot tragedy. He was of the view that the penal system needed to be improved so that those guilty of violent crimes could not take advantage of loopholes or flaws in the system to escape punishment. In the Senate the same day, following Kumara's slaying, the government and the opposition also discussed the need to revamp the criminal justice system.

There is no denying the fact that an effective judicial system and rule of law will go a long way in deterring people from indulging in such inhuman acts but whether it will solve the problem in its entirety is something that could be contested. The government as well as other stake-

holders, including civil society, need to focus on the kind of thinking that incites people to indulge in such heinous crimes and not even spare foreign nationals, fellow Muslims, members of other minority communities, and even the mentally challenged. Without understanding the actual causes of this extremism, any effort to address it will have a limited impact. In December, NACTA (National Counter-Terrorism Authority) presented for approval to the Interior Ministry, a draft policy for addressing the issue of extremism.

Lately, the federal government has also approved the National Security Policy, which has yet to be made public, and how much attention has been given to this aspect of growing intolerance and extremism in it, remains to be seen. The mob attacks on people, as well as police stations, are quite alarming and highlight two important aspects: One, intolerance in society is increasing and people resort to violence mainly on religious issues; two, the citizens are increasingly losing confidence in the law enforcement agencies' capabilities of investigation and prosecution, as well as the courts serving justice. Both these aspects are quite alarming, warranting states and institutions to look into factors that are contributing to this intolerance and extremism.

With TLP being made a legal entity again, its influence in society and politics will further increase in the coming months and years. In the absence of a proper counter radicalisation and rehabilitation policy framework, one cannot expect lasting results from just firefighting. ■



**By Hunaid Lakhani**

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## The COVID Curriculum

The pandemic may render a lesson for the evolution of education

### 2022

will be an exciting year for educational institutions in Pakistan.

We have lived through extraordinary times over the last two years, maybe the most trying in our generation. The pandemic-related catastrophe has put our resilience, leadership, and ability to manage organisations through radical, ever-changing uncertainty to the test.

In Pakistan, private and public universities can play a critical role in our country's development in the post-pandemic era. Our mission as educators of tomorrow's leaders must be linked to several objectives: Rebuilding a global governance system capable of effective integration and swift response to threats such as pandemics, trade wars, and populism; Adopting norms and practices that promote sustainable economic activity; Achieving freedom, equality, and standards of justice; And enabling environmentally sustainable development on all continents.

The education business has seen dramatic changes over the last few decades due to irreversible globalisation, the impact of technology, and social developments. These shifts have been more pronounced during the current crisis since lockdowns have increased virtual connection and online instruction. Indeed, the epidemic has accelerated the adoption of numerous educational reforms that would have occurred considerably more slowly if they had occurred naturally.

Permit me to share with you some of the areas in which I feel the positive change will occur in higher education:

The future of education is liquid learning. Education, like labour, will increasingly be hybridised, blended. Face-to-face classroom instruction will be supplemented with various synchronous and asynchronous educational materials to allow for better adaptability and customisation to the learner's personality and circumstances. Education will significantly impact developing global citizens and boost employability in this changing educational environment.

Another important lesson to be drawn



from the pandemic is this: Contrary to expectations that robots would eventually take over humanity, lockdowns worldwide have emphasised the importance of technology in bringing us closer together by creating robust platforms for collaborative work, virtual meetings, and successful education initiatives.

Indeed, the post-pandemic world fosters adaptive and transformative capacity. Professionals will have hybrid lifestyles, and the workplace will become increasingly fluid and hybrid. Professionals will collaborate face-to-face and via social platforms, from their homes or corporate offices, in a continuum that blurs space and time and boosts productivity. They will increasingly interact online with co-workers from various hemispheres and time zones, forming friendships with people from diverse cultures and worldviews.

Although students have expressed a preference for on-campus classes, hybrid formats and diverse online modes of delivery are here to stay. Not only because social distancing and cross-border mobility may still pose barriers to regular attendance at face-to-face classes, but also because they produce greater results than traditional presential learning alone. This adaptability will also be reflected in creating and disseminating knowledge, instructional methods, and other university activities, including extracurricular experiences that may become partially virtual.

Naturally, the primary force behind the change to a more adaptable and flexible learning environment must be the teachers and staff at business schools and executive education centres. The key to educational achievement in any format is neither technology nor content. While these are critical components of online education, they quickly become commodities. What makes the difference is the experience choreographed by faculty, instructors, and coaches, whether in-person or remotely.

Achieving a balance of diversity, inclusivity, and intellectual freedom is another prerequisite for new-age education.

Within the educational community, we are witnessing the emergence of a new relationship contract founded on a growing awareness of diversity. Though significant progress has been made in recent decades toward promoting and embracing diversity, there is still plenty of growth potential.



*Going into the new year, digital education is here to stay – and grow.*

Embracing diversity entails more than achieving a more equitable composition of various stakeholder groups, from the student body to the faculty and administration. It also entails demonstrating mutual concern and respect for others, particularly with gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, culture, religion, nationality, and, more broadly, worldviews on what constitutes the good life.

We should remember that the term university derives from the word 'universal,' which refers to a location that all may enjoy. This perspective adds depth to research, teaching, and the overall learning experience.

I am optimistic that the progress made in accepting diversity as a value is irreversible in our global society, despite efforts by some to restrict access to higher education and immigration restrictions, and other forms of discrimination, which I am sure will be temporary.

Integrating the humanities, science, technology, and mathematics, as well as data sciences will also be core to the direction education will take in the coming years.

Higher education should strive to educate the next generation of global citizens holistically. This involves studying the humanities, which connect disparate areas of knowledge, develop depth and critical thinking abilities, and connect us

to people of various ages and cultures.

Simultaneously, recruiters and would-be entrepreneurs alike require a strong foundation in digital skills, data sciences, and technology.

Any illusions regarding a perceived contradiction between the humanities and STEM should have been eliminated

by now, both via academic study and the simple fact that a large number of successful entrepreneurs and CEOs hold humanities degrees.

There is also the need for a stronger emphasis on applied learning.

Students increasingly desire hands-on work experience as part of their studies, allowing them to begin working the day following graduation.

By including work assignments, consulting projects, internships, and other efforts that are connected to real-world difficulties, we can help students acquire critical practical skills.

There is no alternative text for this new envisaged educational order.

In an ideal world, practical learning projects would take place in various nations, fostering cross-cultural adaptation and a greater appreciation for diversity. Additionally, students' involvement in socially responsible projects develops their sense of identity and commitment as global citizens.

And finally education must be a process of life-long learning

Given that most of us will work longer than past generations, this is a large area of promise for higher education. Still, I'm not sure if Pakistani universities are taking it seriously. For non-traditional learners, additional innovation is needed in formats, teaching styles, coaching, and integrating learning with health and personal care.

Without question, education, if chosen as a career, will continue to be one of the most exciting and challenging. Perhaps a more pressing concern is whether our universities can adapt to address stakeholders' fast-changing needs and whether regulators will allow our universities the flexibility and autonomy necessary to fulfil their mission. ■



# MEDIAMATTERS

2022 – A Better Year



# Saving the Silver Screen

There may be speed-breakers ahead, but it's not the end of the road for Pakistani cinema



**By Satish Anand**

*The writer is the CEO of Eveready Group of Companies, one of Pakistan's leading distributors and producers of films over more than 75 years.*

**T**he year 2022 will certainly be better for Pakistan's film industry than the pandemic-hit 2021, in which just one or two major local movies and two minor ones hit the cinema screens, and that towards the end of the year. We expect that in 2022, at least 20 local movies are likely to be released. Apparently, this is a good number, but way too short to keep Pakistani cinemas running all through the year. Therefore, along with the Hollywood movies, we will also need to import foreign-made Punjabi movies - as per government policy - to ensure that the cinema business remains afloat.

The shortage of local films and the small number of operational screens in the country are two facets of basically one challenge that feed each other. Let me explain a little; for instance, if we start producing 50 plus local films, the new movies won't find screens. And if the number of new cinemas suddenly explodes, they won't find movies to attract the crowds. Therefore, the number of both locally produced movies and cinemas will have to grow in tandem and in a gradual manner.



*Pakistani cinema is set for a big comeback in 2022.*

But perhaps, I am moving too fast. Let's just focus on what is in store for the local film industry in 2022 with the current situation and the challenges we are expected to face. I can safely say that despite being a better year compared to the last, there will be a number of speed-breakers that will prevent a smooth drive on the industry's road to recovery. Overall, there will be more losers than winners.

The biggest challenge that will continue to cast its long shadow on the film business is the fear of a new wave of the pandemic and some new variant of the corona virus, such as Omicron. This may disrupt the entire film business chain - from the production of new movies to keeping cinemas open. Let's sincerely hope that we do not see a repeat of the initial days of the pandemic as witnessed in 2020, when the entire cinema business had to be shuttered for at least nine long months.

This forced cinema owners to fire most of their employees and yet book millions of rupees in losses every month just to keep their cinemas in an operational condition, with the help of skeleton staff.

The second challenge remains that of the great economic squeeze that Pakistan faces these days. The interest rate has gone up, inflation is rising; the fast depreciating rupee is unstable and volatile against the US dollar, while economic activity in many sectors has taken a hit. We have also seen that due to inflation and

the slowdown in economic activity, most Pakistanis are tightening their belts. The lower and middle classes have little spare money at their disposal for fun and recreation in an environment where going to the movies has become an elitist activity, rather than a pastime of the masses as it was in yesteryears.

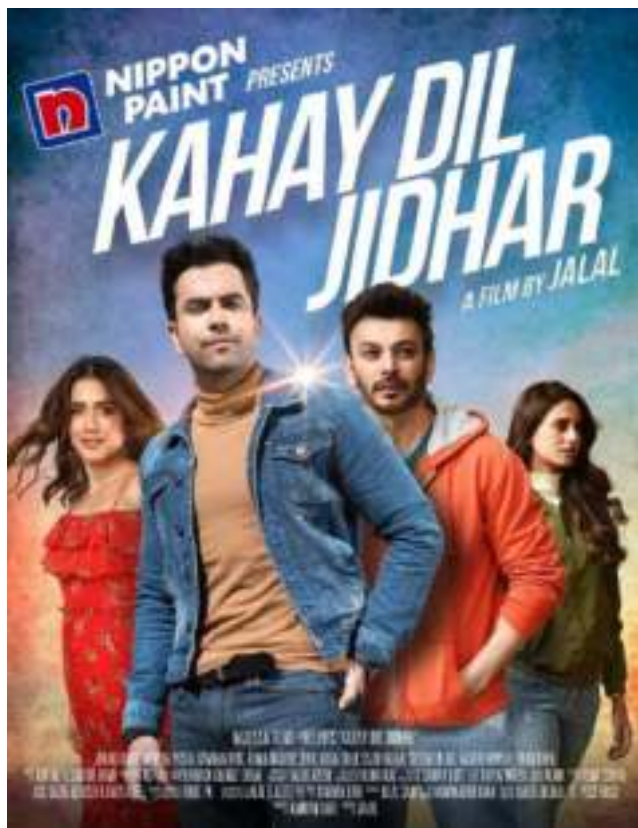
Why? Because the cinema culture has changed. In the past there used to be cinemas, but now there are multiplexes inside the shopping malls, where there are fast food courts etc. Now this activity has become expensive, as a lot of paraphernalia is attached to it.

Previously, there were cinema owners, but now there are malls. In malls, multiplexes are usually outsourced and those running them are responsible for arranging movies.

An important factor we cannot overlook is that after the reopening of cinemas in the Covid-19 environment, the younger generation is coming out to watch movies, but older people are reluctant to come to crowded places, which is understandable. Now many people have installed home theatres and even digital cinemas of their own.

We have also to take into account the fact that with inflation, currency depreciation, and higher electricity tariffs, the cost of production of movies and operating cinemas has gone up tremendously.

In a nutshell, there are many speed-



breakers, but this does not mean that the curtain will fall on the local film industry. Despite these challenges, the show will go on as it did in the past.

Let's examine a brief historical context. In 1971, we witnessed the dismemberment of Pakistan. We lost territory. Half the country was gone, which means half the market. But the show went on and the industry kept churning out films that were eagerly snapped up by 800 plus cinemas across Pakistan. Imagine, we had more than 80 cinemas in Karachi alone. Small stations like Tando Allah Yar had three cinemas. A place like Badin had two. I can quote number after number. Now our network of cinemas has been blown away. We are rebuilding block by block and we have to be patient.

Then, remember the era of General Mohammed Ziaul Haq, which was very tough for the film industry. Firstly, under the initiative of registration of producers, film production remained closed for nine months in that period. Secondly, the industry had to face regressive censor policies. But the industry bounced back and gave one mega hit after another, thanks to strong content. Movies like *Qurbani*, *Hong Kong kay sholay*, *Miss Colombo*, *Bandish*, *Zindagi*, *Amber*, to name just a few, were

*To revive Pakistani cinema to its full potential, not just the industry players, but the government must show vision and help create a conducive environment in which the movie production and cinema business can expand with the joining of new players.*

smash hits.

This shows that our film industry has a lot of resilience. It always fights back. But the challenges are enormous. For example, take the number of operational screens these days.

The last movie released in pre-COV-

ID-19 days was *Avengers*. It was shown simultaneously on 64 cinemas and 160 plus screens. Now, when cinemas reopened and the first local movie – *Khel Khel Mein* – was released on November 19, it got space in 50 cinemas and 112 screens.

Given this state of affairs, many people ask, will the cinema business become non-existent? My answer: have the good restaurants closed down because we have kitchens at home? There is still an appetite for fine dining. Similarly, there is appetite for the great cinema experience as well.

But to revive Pakistani cinema to its full potential, not just the industry players, but the government must show vision and help create a conducive environment in which the base of the movie production and cinema business can expand with the joining of new players. These players can create the great new-age cinema of Pakistan by venturing into uncharted themes and territories, tell new stories and use modern technology. Pakistanis are very talented people. Today's young generation is smart and intelligent. They can help revive and build our industry in line with 21st century demands and aspirations.

After the Independence of the country, the decision-makers showed greater



vision, as they allowed Indian cinema to play its role in the growth of the film industry in Pakistan.

Initially, imported Indian films were allowed and they did roaring business, giving liquidity to the importers, who in turn used the money to produce movies in Pakistan. As our industry strengthened, rather than banning Indian movies, they were allowed to run no more than eight weeks in Pakistan. This allowed Pakistani movies to compete with Indian movies, yet they enjoyed certain protection.

When Pakistan had 800 plus cinemas, new movies were released every week. We had mega or superstars. Many

*If we are serious about reviving the film industry, we need a national vision. The industry cannot be revived in fits and starts. We have to keep up a certain momentum. By this, I mean coming up with new local movies on a regular basis and gradually increasing their number.*

successful movies celebrated their silver, golden and even platinum jubilees.

If we are serious about reviving the film industry, we need a national vision. The industry cannot be revived in fits and starts. We have to keep up a certain momentum. By this, I mean coming up with new local movies on a regular basis and gradually increasing their number.

Hollywood movies are a great help. But more than 90 per cent of their profits are repatriated to their studios. The government should consider slapping a 10 to 15 per cent levy on their profits which can be transferred to a film development fund to promote local films.

If there are conducive conditions, my



*Covid was a mere bump in the road, given the right support, Pakistan's film industry will continue to attract audiences across the country.*

own company can annually produce 10 movies. There are other players who can do the same. At the same time, we should encourage new players to join in.

The government needs to come up with incentives. It needs a more relaxed censor policy, if we have to compete with foreign content. The government should consider a centralised censor board under the federal government, so that we no longer have to run from pillar to post to get censorship certificates.

Similarly, as a one-point policy decision, the government should announce a Tax Holiday for the film industry for at least five years, if not 10. This will help the industry to attract both local and foreign

investment and bounce back in a short span of time.

The revival of the film industry will not just create thousands of jobs, but Pakistani films can also be foreign exchange earners. What the industry needs is government support.

Pakistan has all the capacity. We have all the seedlings. They need to be nurtured. In the end, we have just to keep in mind that in our line of business, content remains the king. I am looking forward to 2022 with optimism, knowing that there will be speed bumps, but we will overcome them. This faith in the Pakistani industry has kept myself and many other going despite all the odds. ■

# ENVIRONMENT

Saving the World





# Sustainable Solutions

Action taken at the local level can solve the environmental problems that have become a potent threat to our lives and livelihoods



**By Seema Faruqui**

*The writer is a Kuwait-based Pakistani educationist, who has passed on her love for science to generations of youth and inspired many to take up the study of environmental science.*

**P**lastic bottling companies have executed a racket that spans the world, and everyone has bought into it. Both tap water and bottled water require energy to process in order to reach the end customer. According to environmental researchers Gleick and Cooley, the sum total of all energy inputs for bottled water requires anywhere between 5.6 to 10.2 million joules of energy per litre of water, depending on various factors, including transportation. What is nothing short of horrifying is that the same amount of water, when pumped through infrastructure, requires only 0.005 million joules; just add a filtration unit at the end. This 2,000 times factor is never brought up when discussing the topic of the environmental costs of bottled water.

Generally, we recognise and have almost accepted that the plastic required for the bottle is harmful as it requires anywhere between 450 to 1000 years to decompose, but we justify our use by saying we will recycle it. However, even as recently as 2020, less than 10 percent of the plas-



*Plastic bottles are exacting a heavy toll on our environment.*

tic bottles produced were being recycled globally. Most of us recognise the damage and harm of such actions, are aware of the dangers, but we still 'pass the buck' when it comes to environmental action and jus-

tify our own passiveness by hoping or expecting that others will come up with a solution to the problem. Many assume that the issue will not affect their lives directly, and that repercussions are way down the road.

But this is merely wishful thinking and the bitter truth is that climate change is already here and is impacting humanity as a whole. Those who are impoverished are inequitably facing more severe consequences, and we see more and more climate refugees around the globe, including Pakistan. However, the point of this article is not to raise awareness of the environmental crises, nor is it a list of 'dos and don'ts,' repeating 'Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.' The aim here is to reframe the discussion on the approach to environmental action, and engage people to take the next step – locally and personally.

According to Global Climate Risk Index 2020, Pakistan is the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change due to its geographic location, high dependence on agriculture plus water resources, the low adaptive capacity of its people, and a weak system of emergency preparedness. With a population approximately 25 per-

*The bitter truth is that climate change is already here and is impacting humanity as a whole. Those who are impoverished are inequitably facing more severe consequences, and we see more and more climate refugees around the globe, including Pakistan.*



*The rural poor bear the brunt of our lethargy towards environmental issues as they are left more exposed to extreme weather phenomena such as droughts.*

cent under the national poverty line, it is no wonder that the environment is not always at the forefront of action. And yet, it is the impoverished that are most vulnerable to the negative repercussions that spring from climate change. Everyone, regardless of their social rank, is affected by it e.g., when there is urban flooding in Karachi, and unbearable heat waves; or when certain crops fail due to pestilence or drought. However, the majority of decision makers on climate action, those who are in charge of what happens, when it happens and how, are safeguarded against the calamities of nature, and therefore their 'inaction' is not felt equitably by them.

The majority affected by such events does not have the resources, neither the knowledge of what to do, nor the political and social clout that will afford them the means to actually solve the problem and better their situation. This whole situation is compounded by the fact that most in Pakistan wholeheartedly believe that the onus of environmental action should be on the government. The intellectuals of Pakistan need to step up and be actively involved in addressing the issues, via local, small measures, so that change can then be expected on a grander scale from the government. This segment of society will continue to be the self-appointed critics of the authorities; however, some of these critics with megaphones in hand have nothing concrete to add when it

*The majority affected by climate change does not have the resources, neither the knowledge of what to do, nor the political and social clout that will afford them the means to actually solve the problem and better their situation.*

comes to solving the problem. The Greta Thunbergs of the world are shouting from the sidelines, highlighting our inaction and its likely consequences, but many adults continue to remain passive.

Generally speaking, social issues and environmental issues have been considered two different spheres that have some overlap. However, for a country like Pakistan, in order to exact significant environmental change, we should approach the two together, and the lead should be taken by the "haves" of our society; whether in resources or in knowledge, or both.

In order to frame this new approach,

the following needs to be understood. Given that:

- The first Billion Tree Tsunami Initiative started in 2014 in Pakistan and was achieved successfully in 2017 at a cost of US\$ 169 million (World Economic Forum, 2017) – a massive collective of small initiatives where different groups planted trees throughout Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- The Environmental Restoration Fund was launched by the government in 2019 and its major goal now is the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme, with the objective of creating 100,000 green jobs in the process; using a similar blueprint.

This means that such types of solutions, where we invest in small environmental cottage industry level solutions directed towards massive environmental change work and work well. Here we align the incentives of those without means and our overall environmental goals, such that their livelihoods are then dependent on keeping eco-friendly solutions sustainable.

This article sets out to reframe the solution to the environmental challenge by having the educated masses of Pakistan, both local and abroad, be at the forefront of solutions, directly overseeing the impact. We continue to get together at dinner and kitty parties, family gatherings, and at the club, therefore:

- Part of such socialising should include our coming together in groups, where we find partners to invest and organise with. We keep it local and thus we focus on people within the network of people we know (from domestic help in our homes and offices, to those whom we encounter on a somewhat regular basis).
- We get information about them, where they are originally from (i.e. what village etc.), what trees or sustainable source for energy is possible in that area or what sustainable green business could be set up.
- We secure resources and funds to help microfinance such endeavours.
- We take the time to go and educate the people in that village or area on how to keep green while sustaining incomes.
- We focus on empowering women specially to have green sustainable businesses, who then help elevate the status of a whole family and the trick-



le-down effects then mean more children going to school and less welfare required.

- And, most importantly, we continue to be a sustained source of support for these people – in terms of knowledge and problem solving.

Projects that we should look into vary in specialities and overall project size; and may be scaled up or down. These include investing in sustained forestry initiatives, where people cut down a percentage of trees to sell, while ensuring they plant a larger percentage in order to sustain the forests. They could include looking into various agricultural products from bamboo and hemp, to amaranths. These could include investing in bee keeping initiatives, or to recycling centres that source, sort, and cut plastics into various pellets and then melt them down to create products like chairs, tables, and benches that may be used in schools or homes. Other eco materials could include the fabrication of eco bricks that can then be used anywhere along the roads, to building small structures, to structures built in people's gardens. We can communally buy land or 'donate' small parcels of our own gardens towards building 'foodscapes' or food focused agriculture so that we are growing food in our gardens for people, instead of having them buy. We can connect solar panels or wind turbines in villages and connect a business venture to the energy such that everyone is incentivised to keep the system running, rather than have it become a valuable to steal. The list of ideas is long, and each idea is able to be adapted to the local needs of the people and the environment, be it a village, a slum, or empty spaces in the communities that we already live in.

We all give sadqa, zakat, and all of us help other families we know. Part of what we give can now be organised to help generate sustainable income that comes from eco-friendly solutions. If this approach snowballs, so many social and environmental challenges in Pakistan can be overcome and we will have provided the initiation energy for this.

We are not reinventing the wheel here. These successful, local, initiatives have been taking place across the world for some time, and yet have not picked up enough momentum to become a truly global movement. Similar to the Billion



**Urban flooding in Karachi after unusually heavy August rains in 2021 underscore Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change.**

*We all give sadqa, zakat, and all of us help other families we know. Part of what we give can now be organised to help generate sustainable income that comes from eco-friendly solutions.*

Tree Initiative, one of the most successful ventures has been the Green Belt Movement (GBM) initiated by Wangari Mathai in Kenya, where her programmes focused on grassroots level sustained change and action. Her Community Empowerment and Education programme (CEE), educated scores of women about the linkages between human

activity and the environment, and empowered them to unite, take action, and stand up for their rights. When communities understand the linkage between their actions, environment and their livelihood situations (poverty, water scarcity and soil loss and food insecurity) they are more likely to muster their energies and take action for change. Our providing resources to those who are indirectly connected to ourselves and our families allows them to undertake such business ventures that can actively help solve the problem.

The aim of this article is simple – it is to make people uncomfortable, but then focus their emotions towards solving the problem. The brilliance and resourcefulness of the Pakistani people, both in the country and abroad, as well as their patriotism and love for their country have never been in question, and are frankly admired by many across the globe. The question now is how each one of us can involve ourselves in actively changing the 'scape' of the land while helping its people grow. ■



# OutField

The Highs and  
the Lows



# On The Comeback Trail?

Cricket will continue to remain king in sports, but will other games like hockey and squash, in which Pakistan excelled at one time, stage a comeback?



**By Qamar Ahmed**

*The writer is a sports journalist. He covered 450 Tests, 740 ODIs, including 9 World Cups, for local and international papers. He has also played first class cricket for Hyderabad, Sindh, including as captain.*

**P**akistan, as a nation, stood centre-stage as World Champions in major sports such as field hockey and squash for decades as they remained unbeatable. After winning their first gold medal in hockey at the Rome Olympics in 1960, uncrowning India with the help of Naseer Bunda's solitary goal, Pakistan continued its run of successes no matter where they played.

For almost three decades, they clinched every world title, including the World Cup, the Asia Cup and the Olympics with unflinching determination, till their last gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 and a bronze at Barcelona in 1992.

Players such as Habib Kiddie, Brig. Hameedi, Naseer Bunda, Anwar Khan, Abdul Waheed, Islahuddin, Samiullah, Shahnaz, Hasan Sardar, Sohail Abbas, Munawar-uz-Zaman, Shahbaz Sr, Hanif Khan and Rasheed Jnr. all became house-



*Pakistan's hockey team is held to a draw by the Netherlands, as they failed to qualify for the 2019 Hockey World Cup.*

hold names.

In the game of squash too, Pakistan produced world champions like Hashim Khan, his brothers Azam Khan and Roshan Khan, and in later years, Qamar Zaman, Jansher Khan and the greatest of them all, Jahangir Khan, ten-time British Open Champion and six-time World Champion. Following his retirement, he was also honoured by World Squash Federation (WSF); he served as WSF President from 2002-2008, and continues to be its Emeritus President – a position he has held for 12 years now.

For almost five decades, Pakistan dominated the squash scene. Be it Johanna Barrington of England or Geoff Hunt of Australia, Pakistan's squash legends conquered them all. Interestingly, while they pulverised their opponents at hockey and squash, the game of charming unpredictably, cricket, remained on the back-benches as we won a series here at home but rarely any on a foreign tour.

But then the rot set in. From being world champions in hockey and squash, we were reduced to zilch. And now we have reached a stage where a comeback seems impossible.

What brought about our downfall in these two sports? The answer is simple: both these sports were mishandled by non-professionals and incompetent managements who, over the years, failed to lift the game or its players to the previous

heights.

The plight of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) and the Pakistan Squash Federation (PSF) continues to remain pathetic even now. It was even more humiliating to see hockey being funded by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) at times and even by the owner of Quetta Gladiators, Nadeem Omar, who paid for the team's tour of India.

The Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has nothing to show for itself; it has failed to groom Pakistani sportsmen to bring laurels and medals for the country. As a consequence, Pakistan's national game, hockey, does not enjoy its earlier status anymore. That position has been taken over by cricket which, in a way, has become the national game of Pakistan. It has continued to flourish at every stage, be it at ICC (International Cricket Council) World events or on cricket tours.

It is the only sport in Pakistan now which has a future asset management plan at both the domestic and international level and, despite the PCB's own shortcomings, politics and management crisis at times, it has remained a lucrative sports body financially, with the advent of limited overs cricket, such as the recent T20 matches, and the funds that they receive as their share from the ICC funds for TV rights, advertising and sponsorships.

A former cricketer Rameez Raja is now Chairman of the PCB; he has been



*Pakistan's women's cricket team has taken impressive strides in recent years.*

appointed by none other than the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan – the 1992 World Cup winning captain.

Having recovered from the shocking terrorist attack on the visiting Sri Lankans cricket team in 2009 during a Lahore Test, Pakistan cricket entered a nomadic phase as international teams refused to tour Pakistan and preferred to play in the UAE, Pakistan's adopted home ground during the crisis. Security fear was always cited as the reason for refusing to play in the country.

Having faced all those heart-breaking years, Pakistan cricket is now revving up to host foreign teams on home patches and has a hectic schedule in 2022.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF), despite being in dispute on assorted issues with FIFA (Federation of International Football Association), the international body which runs the game, have their own schedule, namely the Pakistan Premier League, the National Women Football Championship and the Football Federation League in 2022.

Similarly, in hockey, the team is set for a busy domestic and international schedule in the coming year. The Asian Games in China, the Commonwealth Games, the Asia Cup and the World Cup at the end of the year 2022, are all on the cards.

At the domestic level, like the PSL (Pakistan Super League) in cricket, they have the PHSL (Pakistan Hockey Super League) to be played between six domestic teams: Islamabad Vikings, Peshawar Zalmi, Quetta Defenders, Faisalabad Spartans, Karachi Kangaroos and Lahore Badshah. Whether this will help them improve their game, both at the domes-

*From being world champions in hockey and squash, we were reduced to zilch. And now we have reached a stage where a comeback seems impossible.*

tic and international level, remains to be seen.

Various tournaments at the domestic level in squash are also pencilled for both men and women. The present top players like Amir Atlas Khan and Maria Toorpakai, among others, would obviously be looking forward to these events in 2022.

Golf and snooker, two sports which do not enjoy popular appeal in Pakistan nor get any publicity, will also have a busy outing at home on the prime golf courses of the country and on the snooker tables of various venues, the most popular being the Karachi Gymkhana. The latter will hold the National Bank of Pakistan Snooker tournament. Over the years, the Pakistan Billiard and Snooker Board has produced amateur world champions such as Mohammad Yusuf and Mohammad Asif.

However, what really will be the most awaited schedule of 2022 would of course be that of the game of cricket, where swooning fans will be found both

at home and abroad to cheer a rejuvenated Pakistan team, now led by their classy batsman Babar Azam, with Mohammad Rizwan, Abid Ali, Azhar Ali, Fakhar Zaman and experienced cricketers like Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib Malik, who would be featuring alongside youngsters like Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Haider Ali and the rest.

If the recent performance of the Pakistan cricket team in their T20 World Cup is taken as the benchmark, along with both their Test and T20 series triumphs against Bangladesh in Bangladesh and in the recent series against the West Indies at home, then one will not be wrong in predicting that the present lot would be vying to hold their reign and ranking in the game in the future cricket series in 2022.

However, one look at their mind-boggling schedule for 2022, makes one fear for the players running out of steam or keeping their fitness in order.

As soon as Pakistan's premier first-class tournament, The Quaid-e-Azam Trophy, ends, the Pakistan Super League (PSL) – the lifeline of Pakistan's domestic season in which even foreign players participate – will come into action. This is to be followed by the much-awaited visit by the Australians, who will play three Tests, three ODIs and one T20 around March and April.

Pakistan then tours Sri Lanka in July-August for two Tests and three ODIs. It will also play three ODIs in Afghanistan immediately after Sri Lanka.

In September, Pakistan hosts the Asia Cup. Following this, England are scheduled to play five ODIs in Pakistan. They were, supposed to be in Pakistan in October, but backed out after New Zealand cancelled their tour here for security reasons.

In October, Pakistan will visit Australia for the T20 World Cup and later New Zealand arrives in Pakistan. With the year coming to a near end in November-December, Pakistan will host England again for three Tests, if the situation remains normal.

The country's women's cricket team may also have some matches scheduled, both at the junior and senior level.

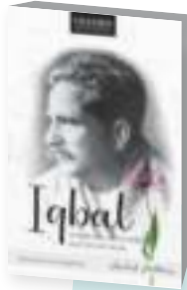
Hopefully, the year 2022 brings good news not just in cricket, but sees the revival of other sports, especially squash and hockey, in Pakistan. One misses the glory years of these games in Pakistan. ■



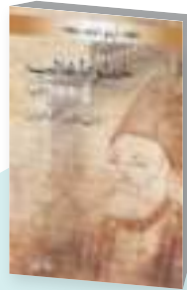


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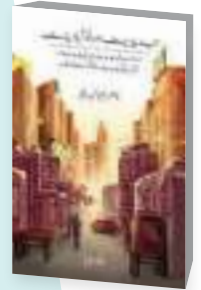
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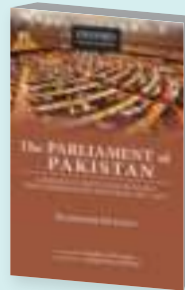
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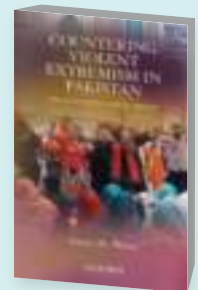
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