

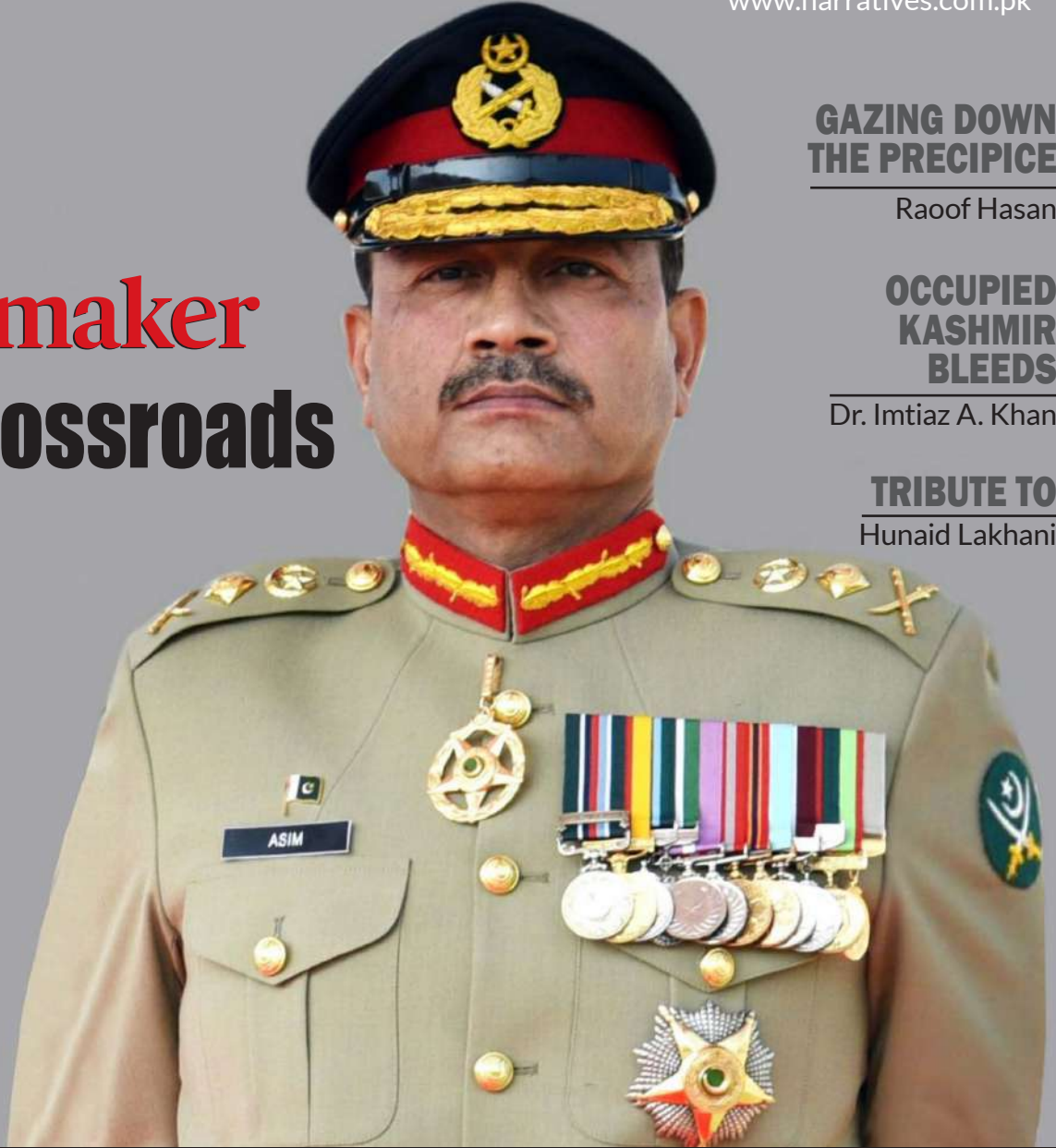
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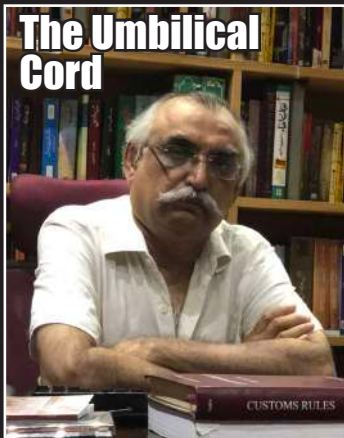
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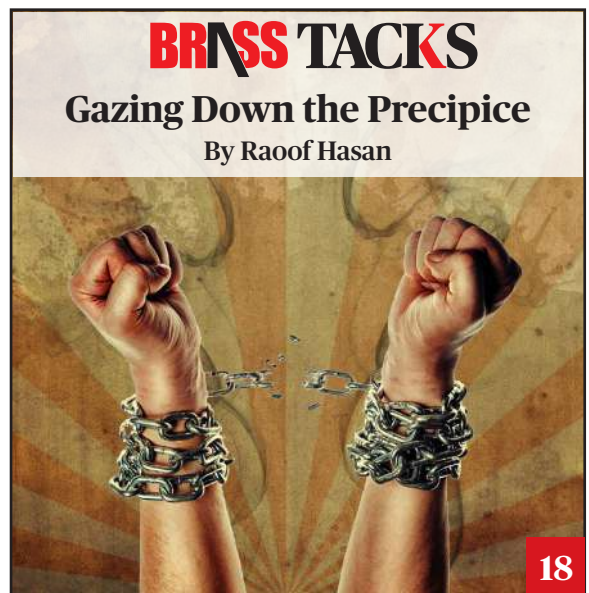
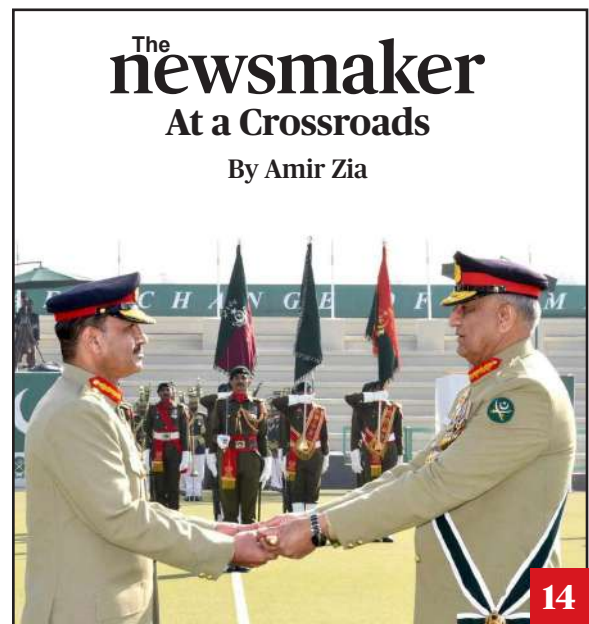
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Saving Pakistan

By all accounts 2022 was a bad year for Pakistan against the backdrop of unprecedented political instability and a steep economic downturn. The mega political mess created by the country's lords and masters has left many educated and professional Pakistanis disillusioned with politics and their country's future. No wonder, an estimated 765,000 Pakistanis, most of them educated and professional youngsters, left Pakistan to seek employment abroad in the first 11 months of 2022. This is nearly thrice the number who left Pakistan in 2021.

Those who migrated for greener pastures abroad, included some 92,000 highly educated individuals, including information technology experts, doctors, engineers, and accountants. This reflects the mood of the moment in Pakistan where many college and university going students want to leave the country at the first given opportunity. They see no hope for themselves in the country where the system forgives, condones and supports the corrupt and their corruption and the oppressive and

exploitative arm of the law exists only for the weak and the poor. The cesspool of the ruling elite keeps bringing the same old faces, their offspring, friends and lackeys into the corridors of power, who have been running and ruining the country decade after decade. The system exists only for them and does not allow a change. Any talented lower or middle class person gets entry into the corridors of power only as a henchman and yes man type aide of dynastic politicians. Even the economic managers of the country do not change - whether it is under military rule or the so-called elected government. The same old faces - Hafiz Shaikhs, Shaukat Tareens, Ishaq Dars and their likes -- keep going in and out of the revolving doors of the Finance Ministry under this or that ruling regime.

Should we expect that 2023 will change all this? There are hardly any chances. Given the kind of political and economic challenges Pakistan faces, the New Year will prove much tougher than 2022. Our civilian political players - the parties in the ruling coalition of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and opposition the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) - have demonstrated once again that they are unable to settle their disputes or find a middle ground within or outside the Parliament. The Pakistan Military, which is still seen by many as the last fallback, seems to

have lost the plot since its high command under the former Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa raised the banner of neutrality and of being apolitical in early 2022. Since then, the country has been caught in the never-ending vortex of political uncertainty and chaos. This shows that politically-correct jargon borrowed from the West fails to deliver when applied in a developing country like Pakistan where institutions cannot and should not abandon their traditional role all of a sudden. In Pakistan, where

civilian institutions are weak and under-developed, the armed forces have always played a stabilizing role. They cannot abandon this role. Here, this publication is not advocating that the Pakistan Army should grab power, but rather, it should act as mediator to break this grinding political impasse. If the current military leadership continues with the course set by General Bajwa, the crisis would only aggravate. The reason: General Bajwa helped restore those corruption-tainted

If the current military leadership continues with the course set by General Bajwa, the crisis would only aggravate.

politicians who not long ago were painted black and even declared a security risk by his own institution. And the institution was not wrong when it exposed their corruption. It was only reflecting reality. Pakistan Army's anti-corruption narrative won applause and enhanced its respect among an overwhelming number of Pakistanis. This role should continue and the armed forces being the most disciplined and powerful institution of the country, should help civilian institutions to transform themselves into pro-people entities.

If the Army fails to act now, the rot will only grow and become an existential threat for Pakistan. Yes, Pakistan needs democracy, but not the democracy of the elite and corrupt, but a pro-people one. Corruption should not be taken as a premium that Pakistanis must always pay to sustain democracy. Therefore, reviving the accountability process should be the part and parcel of the solution aimed to pull the country out of its political blind alley. Early elections and accountability is the only way forward for Pakistan. Anything short of that would not be able to end the country's political turmoil. Pakistan Army's new leadership can "nudge and coax" the civilians to take this route in the larger national interests. This is a must to save Pakistan from a collapse and total failure.

Amir Zia

Managing Editor, *Narratives*

ZEROING IN



The Narratives' editorial team takes a look at three stories that made the headlines...

No Exit Plan

Pakistan's political and economic crisis continues to aggravate as the Shehbaz Sharif-led government and the PTI fail to break the deadlock

Former premier Imran Khan tried to take another route to get the general elections he so desperately wants since his ouster from power in April this year. Rather than besieging Islamabad or launching street protests, as most of his followers and opponents expected him to do, Imran Khan decided to dissolve the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-led Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assemblies on December 23, and ask his MPAs to resign from the remaining two - Sindh and Balochistan - where his party is in the opposition.

But the plan that Imran Khan supposed was democratic, peaceful and simple hit snags, too, as the Shehbaz Sharif government went out of the way to prevent the dissolution of the Punjab assembly. Governor Punjab Balighur Rehman was used to stall the dissolution of the provincial assembly, which he achieved by de-notifying the elected chief minister. Constitutional and legal experts described the governor's de-notification move as well his earlier demand that the chief minister take a vote of confidence as illegal and technically flawed. And as predicted, the matter landed in the Lahore High Court which restored the chief minister, but on the condition that he won't dissolve the provincial assembly till the next hearing, scheduled on January 11.

This is not the first time that a political matter landed in the court due to the inability of politicians to settle their political disputes inside or outside the house through dialogues. Politicians should not now mourn about their shrinking space when they themselves fail to play by the book and resort to unconstitutional tactics to prevent the rival a fair chance of moving ahead. Thanks to the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government's obstinate and inflexible attitude,



the country faces its worst political and constitutional crisis. And there appears no way out of this blind alley in which Pakistan has been stuck since earlier this year.

By abdicating all the powers and walking out of the system, which Imran Khan calls "corrupt", he will be placing himself totally at the mercy of his rivals, who appear to go to any length to eject him from power politics altogether.

The nervousness in the government camp can also be seen from the fact that their hawks even got the local government elections in the federal territory of Islamabad postponed through legislation done in a house which even lacked quorum. The PTI and all those Pakistanis who want to see the rule of law in the country are justified in expressing their anger and aghast over these developments which are transforming the country into a banana republic.

Had Imran Khan succeeded in his plans to dissolve the two provincial assemblies and walking out of the remaining two and the National Assembly, it

would have meant that out of the total 849 general seats in the country's parliamentary system, comprising the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies, at least 567, or nearly 67 per cent, would have fallen vacant.

This would have created an atmosphere of general elections in the country. The Shehbaz Sharif-led government, instead of allowing the vote to decide the matters, ensured that by hook or by crook the dissolution of provincial assemblies gets prevented. It means that in 2023, Pakistani politics would be messier, more polarized and confrontationist.

By dissolving the provincial assemblies, Imran Khan hoped to build enough pressure on the PDM government that it yielded to his main demand of holding fresh elections across the country. Therefore, demanding elections on 67 percent of general seats was in fact his fallback plan. Even this secondary option makes sense for the PTI as if provincial elections are held in KP and Punjab first, this would mean at the time of general elections, at least in these two provinces, instead of caretaker governments, the PTI's provincial governments would be in place. It would give a lot of advantage to the PTI during polls.

But dissolving Punjab and KP assemblies and quitting the other two also involves risks. Imran Khan and his team would be deprived of the protection of two provincial governments at a time when the federal government, or at least the hawks in it, yearn to arrest some of the top-guns in the PTI, including the former premier in this or that case.

Pakistan's history shows that when powers that be want to stop the march





	Total Number of Seats	Total General Seats
National Assembly	342	272
Punjab Assembly	371	297
Sindh Assembly	168	130
Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	124	99
Balochistan Assembly	65	51

of popular force, they have many tricks in their bag to do so. So, by abdicating all the powers and walking out of the system, which Imran Khan calls “corrupt”, he will be placing himself totally at the mercy of his rivals, who appear to go to any length to eject him from power politics altogether. Therefore, skepticism in the PTI camp over this move is natural. The situation looks more ominous following the gun-attack on Imran Khan in Wazirabad, which left him and at least a dozen wounded and one person dead. It shows that at least some of Imran Khan’s opponents are ready to go to any extent to get rid of him politically and even physically.

Another big concern for the PTI camp is whether its main and only ally in Punjab - the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) of Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elhai - is as reliable as it claims to be.

Despite Elhai’s and his son Moonis’ repeated public announcements that they would dissolve the Punjab Assembly at Imran Khan’s bidding, the veteran pro-establishment politician has openly said that he was not in favour of dissolving the provincial assembly. And the PDM is helping him in delaying the dissolution. Given Elhai’s close ties with the military establishment, there are concerns in the PTI



camp that he may swing to the other side at the last minute.

Yet, for Imran Khan, the waiting game is also not an option. He has to keep the government under pressure and relentlessly keep pushing for the acceptance of his demands. Because even if he stops attacking, his rivals, especially the vengeful Sharif family, would come after him with full force. There are already many cases filed against the former premier and if the PML-N insiders, many are in the pipeline.

So despite all the risks, Imran Khan would try to win general elections by giving up 67 per cent of the general seats in the system to get what he wants. In a way, it is a much more prudent strategy than besieging Islamabad, staging dramatic sit-ins and protests, which will cost Pakistan much more than exercising this constitutional and democratic option. Against the

backdrop of Pakistan’s peculiar law and order challenges, going for the street protests poses inherent dangers - from terrorism to protests getting out of control of the organisers and even failing to take-off.

As the political players remain unable to sort out their differences or chalk-out a way forward for the country, Imran Khan’s critics say that he wants the institutions, especially the new military leadership, to step in to help resolve the political crisis. The country’s continued political instability since early 2022 is compounding the economic crisis and offsetting efforts to put it back on track. If the political logjam continues, it would be disastrous for Pakistan.

Analysts say that the PDM’s dismal performance on the economic front and growing public discontent should also be a cause of concern for the new military leadership. .

Indeed, Imran Khan is the most popu-

Imran Khan’s critics say that he wants the institutions, especially the new military leadership, to step in to help resolve the political crisis.

lar leader, having support in all the federating units of Pakistan, but he faces heavy odds as all the entrenched political forces have ganged up against him. However, the civil and military establishment can act as a decider in favour of any one of the political side or help find a middle ground. So far, the establishment under the command of its new leadership, has not shown its cards - at least in the public, though the sources claim that covert efforts to find a solution continues with fits and starts.

But one thing is for sure that Pakistan continues to remain in stormy waters in the coming weeks and months. And unfortunately, no safe exit plans appear in sight against the backdrop of a grinding political deadlock. Yes, it is time for all of us to start worrying about the country’s future. ■

The Western Extremism

To pass the acid test of being 'civilized', the Western media wanted Qatar to legalize homosexuality and allow gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender to unfurl their rainbow flag in this Muslim country.

Argentina walked away with the FIFA World Cup and Qatar won all the kudos for holding the grand international sports event in style in which the tiny Arab country managed to showcase its culture and religion, winning the hearts of the people across the world.

But the biased Western media launched a harsh propaganda blitz against the first-ever mega sports event held in an Arab country even before it started, exposing its double-standards and hypocrisy. A sports event that drew elite players and a million fans together from across the world got under attack simply because the host country, Qatar, adhered to its cultural and religious values, which the Western media think are 'uncivilized'.

To pass the acid test of being 'civilized', the Western media wanted Qatar to legalize homosexuality and allow gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender to unfurl their rainbow flag in this Muslim country. The West also wants to impose its concepts of human and women rights and worldview on Qatar just as it is trying to do this in every other non-western country and society.

How the so-called 'free, balanced, fair and objective' Western media covered the FIFA World Cup is an eye opener. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) decided not to air the FIFA World Cup's opening ceremony live from Qatar. Instead, its transmission focused on condemning the LGBT restrictions, the alleged human rights violations, and the environmental impact of the game. It also accused Qatar of bribing various stakeholders to bring the mega event home.

A leading British newspaper, The Times, wrote that Qataris were not used



to seeing women dressed in Western-style clothing. The captions, which were false, were later amended.

For a French magazine, the Qatari football team was a bunch of terrorists. And they were dressed as such in one of its cartoons. A French reporter said he was surprised by the number of mosques in Qatar, underlining lack of understanding about the region.

The Western media called Qatar conservative for the Bedouin-themed beginning of the opening ceremony in which a female singer performed wearing a burqa that remains banned in many European countries. They also did not like the citation of a verse from the Holy Quran in the opening ceremony.

In a highly condemnable move, the German players covered their mouths with their hands in a group photo ahead of a match against Japan, protesting restrictions to wearing rainbow-coloured "OneLove" armbands, which is a symbol of the LGBT movement. On social media, many critics joked that had the German team paid more attention to football than the LGBT rights, they might not have lost to Japan in their match.

In a nutshell, the highly biased, myopic and one-sided Western journalism and the mindset of some of the European teams attempted to portray that the FIFA World Cup remains more about imposing Western values on the soccer-loving Arab-Muslim country rather than playing football.

One of Qatari ministers was absolutely justified in saying that his country's laws "won't change for the visitors, even for this game".

It seems that many Europeans and

the Western media are as extremist in imposing their worldview on others, especially the so-called LGBT rights, as any extremist religious group.

Noël Le Graët, president French Football Federation, was among those saner people who defended Qatar as the host of the 2022 World Cup, saying there has been "an excessive campaign" against the country. The FIFA president also requested participant countries to "focus on football" instead of anything else.

For Qatar, hosting the World Cup once seemed impossible. Its neighbours – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – had imposed restrictions on the tiny country just a year-and-a-half ago. The two countries and their allies cut off the border and air routes as part of the political dispute. The UAE and Bahrain still didn't join the event expressing scepticism about its success.

However, despite all these difficulties, the smallest country in Asia turned its sprawling desert into an ultra-modern, high-tech venue. It built seven new stadiums ahead of the tournament, and constructed new hotels. Qatar also carried out major expansions to its airport, rail networks and highways over the last 12 years. But all its efforts failed to impress its West critics, who want to dictate Qatar and for that matter all the Muslim nations as well as China and Russia to accept the so-called new-normal of LGBT rights like the Western countries.

But for the same Western media thousands of deaths in the Indian-occupied Kashmir, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan do not count or be seen as human rights violations. ■

Our abhorrent justice system

The system in Pakistan is designed to save the elite overlooking the rights of the poor

When in 2012 the Shahzeb Khan murder case came to the forefront, people were aghast at the blatant use of power and the sheer audacity of the culprits to take pride in one of the most heinous crimes against mankind. There was great debate over whether the country's most powerful elite could ever be held accountable for their injustices.

Having lived in a country where every common citizen has at some point suffered through the VIP culture or has felt threatened from a person in a more powerful position, the murder of a 20-year-old in cold blood over a petty issue hit home differently.

Shahzeb, the son of a police official, had been gunned down in Karachi's Defence Housing Authority in December 2012 by Shahrukh Jatoi for picking a fight with one of the suspects' servants, who had verbally threatened and harassed his sister. The then chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry had taken a suo motu notice of the case giving people hope that the culprits would be brought to justice.

In this decade-long battle, there have been many instances when people have lost hope from Jatoi being given VIP treatment in the jail to him being kept in a hospital on medical grounds nothing was less than a blatant mockery of the justice system. But when in 2013 an anti-terrorism court sentenced Shahrukh Jatoi and his friend Nawab Siraj Ali Talpur to death the notion was that justice had been upheld.

The judgment ended the years-long belief that the elites were above the rule of law or could not be held accountable for their sins. When in 2017, the victim's parents decided to pardon the accused, there was outrage. People once again called out the power the elite held to manipulate the



weak and pressurizing them to giving in. But the courts upheld their decision and commuted the death sentences to life imprisonment.



The court's latest decision to allow the culprits to go scot-free in the Shahzeb Khan murder case has ended what little trust the people had in the country's justice system.

The court's latest decision to allow the culprits to go scot-free has ended what little trust the people had in the country's justice system. The decision reinforces that the elite can get off the hook no matter what the gravity of the crime they commit. It proves that only those who cannot 'afford' are sent off to the gallows everyone else can just play about the justice system. The decision brings in more reasons to lose hope in the country where your men, women and children are not safe, where justice is only for the powerful and the poor only suffer.

The Qisas and Diyat laws have time and again been used by the country's murderers, rapists and honour killers. Be it Nazim Jochio's poor family that caved into the feudal lords to save the remaining members of their family, or Qandeel Baloch's old father who saved his son despite confession of killing his sister for honour or Shahzeb's parents pardoning the culprits because they were tired of living their lives in fear the system has continued to fail us all.

This is not the failure of a system, the system in Pakistan is designed to save the elite overlooking the rights of the poor. Who does one look towards when the state and its institutions are bent on saving the culprits.

Every injustice that takes place in this country makes you lose some trust in the idea of Pakistan and it doesn't seem too long before the trust ends and we lose the country we've all strived for. ■



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The newsmaker



By Amir Zia

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

At a Crossroads

Only the military leadership can help end the political impasse and coax rival politicians to agree on a future roadmap for the country

On December 1, just two days after assuming the command of the Pakistan Army, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir visited the frontline troops in the Rakhchikri Sector of the Line of Control in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir. This was the new army chief's first official activity, which was shared by the Inter-Services Public

Relations (ISPR) along with the usual television footage and a photograph.

"We have noticed highly irresponsible statements from the Indian leadership on Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir recently," the ISPR quoted him as saying. "Let me make it categorically clear ... Pakistan's armed forces are ever ready, not only to defend every inch of our motherland, but to take the fight back to the

enemy, if ever war is imposed on us,” said General Munir.

The symbolism of General Munir’s visit to Kashmir and his choice of words as he warned India could not have been more crystal clear for friends and foes alike. Unlike his predecessor, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, who failed to even mention Kashmir in his last address at the passing-out parade of the 146th PMA Long Course at the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul, on October 8, in which he called for regional peace, General Munir said that any misconception resulting in a misadventure will always be met “with (the) full might of our armed forces, backed by a resilient nation.” The COAS added, “The Indian state will never be able to achieve her nefarious designs. The world must ensure justice and deliver what is promised to the Kashmiri people as per UN resolutions.”

Many defence analysts concur with the assessment that the approach of the two generals in regard to India is visibly different.

General Bajwa’s tone had remained overwhelmingly conciliatory throughout his six-year term in office, despite India’s belligerence towards Pakistan, which included the Indian Air Force’s failed strike on Balakot on February 26, 2019, following which Pakistan retaliated and downed two Indian aircraft.

According to Lt. General (retired) Asif Yasin Malik, the new COAS is trying to distance himself from General Bajwa’s soft approach on India. “His statement was in line with national aspirations and Pakistan’s longstanding position on Kashmir,” said Malik, who has in the past served as the country’s Defence Secretary. “General Bajwa wanted to portray himself as a peacenik - perhaps to please the western world. But peace and normal relations with India are possible only on equal terms and remain linked to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute,” said the General. “Pakistan is not a warmonger... we may be one-fifth the size of India, but we cannot compromise on Kashmir. General Bajwa should have kept in mind that peace efforts cannot be unilateral, only reciprocal.”

However, while echoing the same sentiments on the issue, political analyst and commentator Huma Baqai contended that Pakistan’s hard talk on Kashmir will have zero impact on India. “India has



COAS Syed Asim Munir with frontline troops in Rakhchikri Sector, Azad Jammu & Kashmir

General Bajwa’s tone had remained overwhelmingly conciliatory throughout his six-year term in office, despite India’s belligerence towards Pakistan.

changed the status of Kashmir, making it part of its union territory on August 5, 2019. And they have sustained the impact of the change... Imran Khan raised the issue at the UN General Assembly and Gen. Bajwa did all his soft-talk, but nothing happened. It will be interesting to see what strategy General Asim Munir will adopt on Kashmir,” she said. Baqai added that Pakistan faces a greater threat on its western frontier from Afghanistan than it does on the eastern front from India. “With the surge in terrorism as well as the aggressive attitude of the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan needs to do all its hard talk on the western frontier rather than on the eastern one - at least for now.”

General Munir’s hardline stance notwithstanding, Pakistan’s traditional rivalry with India or the challenges on the western frontier might, in fact, not be the top item on the army chief’s agenda.

Keeping in view the overall national security paradigm, it is the continuing political instability in the country, which emerges as the biggest internal threat for Pakistan -- far graver than the external one. Without political stability and a strong government, the country is neither in a position to fix its economy, nor manage defence and foreign relations effectively.

According to Baqai, the political and constitutional crisis is aggravating. “Pakistan needs a triangular consensus involving the judiciary, the army and the political forces on how to get out of this nonsense.” So, despite the previous chief’s much-propagated position that the Pakistan Army is now “apolitical” and “neutral,” there appears no option for the COAS but to intervene in political matters to put the house in order. “Where does the buck stop?” asked Huma Baqai. “Of course, at the GHQ. The role of the army in resolving political crises is inevitable ... either they do it quietly, or otherwise. But visibly or invisibly, this role is now a must.”

In a developing country like Pakistan, which has a history of the military having a dominant role in the country’s politi-



The corruption cases against Sharifs continue to haunt them even when in power.

cal and foreign relations' spheres due to its flawed and weak civil institutions, it acts as a stabilising factor. Therefore, the Pakistan Army has to stick to its traditional role rather than suddenly pull itself out of the political turf, where civilian leaders have shown umpteen times that they lack the capacity and ability to sort out matters on their own, in Parliament or outside.

For ordinary Pakistanis, the country has further slid into the continuing political crisis generated since the Pakistan Army announced its decision to remain apolitical in February 2022. Critics say that General Bajwa did no service to his institution or the country by undermining the stabilising role of the army and accusing his predecessors of "unconstitutional political interventions," ignoring the objective conditions of those times which necessitated them. By General Bajwa's own admission, he and his colleagues had also remained directly involved in politics, but ironically, that role, rather than being consistent, swung from one extreme to another.

General Bajwa's so-called "politically correct" stance might have won him some applause in the west and among the tiny class of Pakistani liberals and sub-nationalist forces wanting to weaken this institution, but for a vast majority of Pakistanis, it proved disappointing. This remains why not just General Bajwa, but the institution itself has increasingly faced unprecedented criticism from the people. They - rightly or wrongly -- see the Pakistan Army's new position as supporting and patronising some of the country's most corrupt politicians. Even many of the most ardent supporters of the Pakistan Armed Forces

For ordinary Pakistanis, the country has slid into the continuing political crisis generated since the Pakistan Army announced its decision to remain apolitical in Feb. 2022.

have been seen criticising the country's most powerful, disciplined and hitherto most respected institution, as they believe it has compromised not just its anti-corruption narrative, as once articulated by General Raheel Sharif, but that it has also compromised on Kashmir under General Bajwa's watch.

This negative perception about the army and the country's political turmoil is the legacy General Bajwa has left the new COAS General Asim Munir, who faces a challenging situation on both the external and the internal fronts.

When General Raheel Sharif left and General Bajwa took over command, the Pakistan Army was at the zenith of its popularity due to its success in the war against terrorism, its strong anti-corruption narrative, and its unyielding stance on Kashmir. That momentum was present

and visible in the initial years of General Bajwa's six-year command, but towards the end, he was seen climbing down on all three fronts. In recent months, there has been a big surge in terrorism, all the politicians tainted with corruption are not just back in power but have even diluted the anti-corruption laws, and the Kashmir issue has been pushed to the back-burner of the national agenda.

Against the backdrop of growing public discontent, frustration and anger on all these issues, along with the ongoing economic downturn, COAS General Asim Munir will literally have to walk through a minefield not just to restore the image of the Pakistan Army, but to try and steer the country out of the current crises it is riven by.

The choices for General Munir are limited, stark and difficult. The biggest question is how to restore political normality in the country when the Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government and its nemesis, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have taken maximalist positions.

The government -- nervous because of Imran Khan's massive popularity and its own inability to deliver on the economic front -- does not want elections in the country at any cost. The fear of the resumption of the accountability process if Imran Khan returns to power is giving the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) leaders sleepless nights, although despite the history of distrust with the Pakistan Army, their relations at this point appear on the right track - at least for now. Imran Khan and his followers are, for their part, not ready to settle on anything less than general elections - and the sooner the better.

The real irony of the situation is that the Army's current key allies - the component parties of the ruling PDM - are, in their essence, the institution's biggest critics. The PML-N leadership has a history of trying to weaken and divide the institution. Nawaz Sharif, the disgraced convicted former premier, not only had a confrontation with each and every army chief he himself appointed, but he even tried to bribe its officials in an attempt to buy their loyalties. According to one retired major general, who asked not to be named, Nawaz Sharif always wanted to transform the Pakistan Army into the Punjab Police, but his attempts were foiled by the past

military leadership. “Now again he is up to his antics as General Bajwa not just helped revive Sharif’s politics, but his flawed policies also damaged the institution’s popular support base in mainstream Pakistan.”

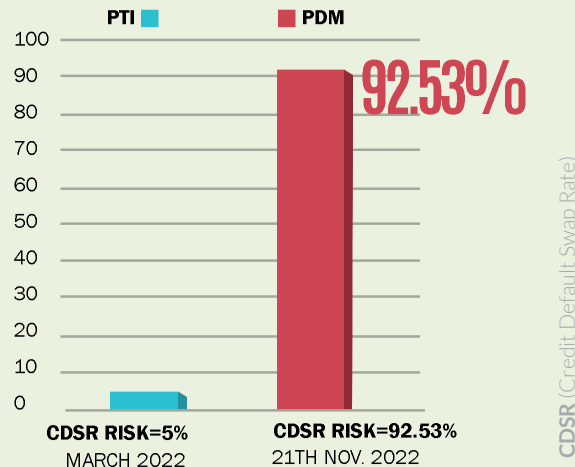
It is also an irony that the popular support which the PTI enjoys today, comprises for the large part, those who had always been the ardent backers of the army. General Bajwa’s support and patronage of the corruption-tainted politicians alienated those supporters’ affections for the force. Analysts agree that the massive criticism the Pakistan Army faced

under General Bajwa’s command was more due to the massive public disdain for the corrupt dynastic politicians who had once again emerged in leadership roles, than for the love of Imran Khan. And the way Imran Khan has stood against all odds has raised his stature before the people, who feel that all the traditional political forces, the establishment and even the mainstream media are now ganging up against him and his party.

The main problem for the discredited PDM government is that unlike the PTI, it has no narrative to catch the imagination of the masses. For the general public, the PTI appears as a natural partner of the armed forces rather than the Sharifs, Zardaris and Fazal-ur Rehman. If the Pakistan Army’s new leadership continues with the policy laid down by General Bajwa, it too, will be going against popular sentiment, which is not prepared to accept the tried, tested and failed politicians as rulers of the country, either now or in the days to come. The very idea of thrusting 1990s politics on 21st Century Pakistan is unworkable as people, especially the educated middle- and lower-middle classes and professional Pakistanis, despise the political oligarchies and their offspring.

General Munir will have to work hard and fast to ensure that his institution does not appear subservient to these deeply entrenched and powerful corrupt politicians, or as their sponsor and backer. But this is easier said than done.

PAKISTAN IS NOW OVER 92% MORE LIKELY TO DEFAULT ON ITS DEBT



Gen. Munir will have to work hard & fast to ensure that his institution does not appear subservient to these deeply entrenched politicians, or as their sponsor and backer.

The PDM government is exploiting the country’s economic woes in its favour, and giving an impression that a change of guard, or even general elections at this stage, would push the country towards default on its foreign loan payments. The problem is, that the longer this set-up stays in power, the more Pakistan’s economy will suffer in the absence of any long-term reforms, requiring difficult decisions, which only a popular government with a long-term mandate can take. The PDM – fearful of the next elections whenever they are held -- will refrain from reforms as it has done during its first eight months in power. As a matter of fact, PDM’s financial wizard, Ishaq Dar, has never been seen as a reformist finance minister. He

is known more for short-term, firefighting measures which always hurt the country in the mid- to long-term, as happened during the PML-N’s third stint in power (2013-18).

As the tussle between the PDM and the PTI has pushed the country into its worst political, constitutional and economic crisis, only the military leadership can help end this political impasse and coax these parties to agree on a future roadmap for the country in which holding fresh elections remains crucial. Anything less than that would keep Pakistan’s political pot on the boil. However, the military

needs to ensure that in the name of giving a level-playing field to the rival set of politicians, it does not in any way agree to condone corruption. Any way forward for Pakistan, while ensuring free and fair polls, should also guarantee that the accountability process will be revived and all the self-serving amendments made by the PDM in the accountability law to bail out its leadership will be rolled back.

The army needs to fall in line with the aspirations of the people, who want democracy and Parliament working in their favour, rather than making laws benefiting a few political families. The people also want to see the army as the ultimate guardian and defender of the country’s core national interests, including Kashmir, which were compromised by the Sharifs in the past when they were at the helm. But for this, General Munir will have to undo the damaging policies of his predecessor General Bajwa. This in no way means favouring Imran Khan and his party. Rather, it means not supporting or patronising the corrupt, no matter which family or party they belong to. This is the least Pakistanis want from the country’s most powerful institution. General Munir stands at a historic crossroads. He can either bring the barracks and the people on one page, or, if he follows in his predecessor’s footsteps, widen the distrust between his institution and the people even further. The ball is definitely in General Munir’s court. ■

BRASS TACKS



By Raouf Hasan

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

*The night is almost gone
And the caravan of stars has scattered
Arrayed along the sprawling porticos
The sleepy glims are flickering
Waiting for someone to come by
Every pathway has lapsed into slumber
And buried under the weight of billow-
ing dust
The footprints can no longer be traced*

— Adapted from Faiz Ahmad Faiz

Gazing Down the Precipice

In spite of palpable loss of hope, one does not want to give in

Faiz's rendering above, and so much else in the poet's anthology, are reflective of a sombre mood which reflects a state of disappointment, but it is never denuded of hope. One can easily find a connection with the existent state of the country. This story of misery is long and grim, making one virtually lose faith in humanity, more particularly those who are at the helm and in whose hands resides the fate of the country and its people.

It is difficult to decide where to begin. Do we begin with the Quaid's message of 11th August and the hope it ignited only to be cruelly extinguished within weeks with the speech itself not finding a mention in the national parlance for a number of years.

It is like that these words were never spoken as leaders following him had a

different vision of how Pakistan should be administered. From a liberal and progressive country as envisioned by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, it was turned into a regressive society where human beings gloated in sitting on judgement on others' faith; where crime and corruption became the favourite sports of the leaders; where functioning of the courts was shorn of justice; where the bureaucracy kept reigniting its deep penchant for them being the masters of all they surveyed and others their servants; where politics became a means for accumulating pelf; where power was misused to eliminate adversaries; where subjecting the weak to humiliation and torture became favourite sports; where rape and arson became symbols of chauvinistic pride; where nobody cared about any of this except ensuring that they remained

secure even when a bulk of the population was dying of starvation.

Should we begin with the loss of morality and the fogging of the line that differentiates the good from ugly, honesty from dishonesty, greed from contentment, righteous from fraudulent, and just from unjust? Or should we begin when the extremes of right and wrong are merged to ensure that none of these would remain discernible and things would be administered just as they would be in a crime land? It is this grave travesty which has ultimately removed the foundations from under the edifice of the country which, having become wobblier with time, is practically on the verge of collapsing. The state is now completely in the control of a cabal of convicts, criminals and absconders who are making use of every power vested in their offices to ensure that their crimes do not remain punishable under self-serving enactments they have incorporated in the relevant laws. Together with support from their patrons, every institution of the state has been rendered dysfunctional and forfeited to the control of crooks.

These acts are guided by an insatiable stock of shamelessness. The ones guilty of having brought the country to the edge of the precipice feel as if it is their inherent right to do as may please their fancy and, in doing so, they would not be accountable before anyone, not even the state institutions. They believe that they have a prerogative to amend the laws even if it would be for their own exclusive benefit. They believe that they can continue with a parliament which is without the country's largest political party and, by far, the most popular, and still call it democracy. They believe that violating the constitution is no crime because it is but a stack of papers which can be torn away. They believe that use of brutal, barbaric and fascist tactics to humiliate and torture the opposition into submission is part of their (non)electoral mandate. They believe that the judiciary is there to serve their interests and its judges can be ordered on phone and their chief justice and his court attacked if he would try to deviate from their commands. They believe that bureaucracy is a group of handpicked cronies and sycophants who are fed on pelf and who would always be at their beck and call, with their tails wagging.

They believe that, just like the politi-

cal parties they operate as private limited companies, the country is their personal fiefdom reflecting their dynastic ambitions, and they are the anointed leaders who are beyond committing a fault. They believe that they are within their right to use every conceivable lurid and immoral tactic to keep the voice of conscience at bay. Quite simply, they believe that they are here to rule and they shall do so no matter what may be the cost to the state and its stature and standing in the world.

In spite of palpable loss of hope, one does not want to give in. One wants to fight as, indeed, one should because there is no other option. One cannot desert

They believe that they can continue with a parliament which is without the country's largest political party and, by far, the most popular, and still call it democracy.

of fate to the vultures to tear it apart as they are wont to. This is that time in history when the country is calling out for its people to step out and rescue it from a bunch of wicked plunderers. This is that time in history when the country is calling out that its dignity and self-respect may be restored. This is that time in history when the country is calling out that it may be empowered to claim its status as the mother of its people, committed to rescuing them from the tentacles of those who have indulged in remorseless pillaging of its resources and its promise. This is that time in history where a choice is to be made: a choice between living as enslaved people and continuing to sink further into depths of degeneration, and extricating ourselves from the pit and starting afresh on a journey of revival and renewal. This is that time in history which is not going to wait. Every moment matters, every step is important and every move pivotal to the final destiny that would be chiselled.

There are people out there who are trying, but they cannot do it alone.

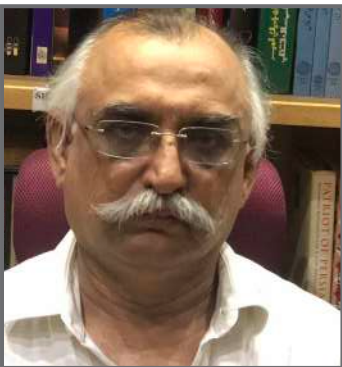
Everyone has to contribute their bit. That will not happen by remaining detached from what is going on as people are out on the roads, fully charged with the passion of bringing about a change in the country by burying a putrid past and raising the edifice of a new charter which would be embedded in the enshrining principles of the country's creation - shaping a welfare state, devoted to the wellbeing of its people and based on the enduring principles of justice, equity and equality.

The existent system has lived its life. It is rotting and its stink can be felt a million miles away. This must go without any further loss of time as its continuation can only bring damage and destruction for the country and its people. The national assets have already been mortgaged for securing further pelf for the cabal of criminals who have been handed over the charge of managing the country in grave violation of every living principle, every living streak of morality. Like in the past, they set about skinning the country further. The fear is that, by the time they leave, there may be no country left to guard for such has been the gruesome complicity among like-minded actors and players who believe that corruption is unimportant.

The country has been split apart by conflicts and contradictions which have been wilfully fabricated to keep people occupied with the struggle for their continued survival. For a while it seemed that this wicked stratagem may be working, but the afflicted people are out fighting for their rights. Their voice is gaining traction with every day that passes. They look unstoppable, but they need the support of everyone who cares about this country and who wants to save it from going down eternally. It is now, or it is never.

As Charles Dickens said, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times". Let us try to bury the worst of times in a past that Pakistan and its people have endured with pain and suffering and which has brought us to the verge where we are gazing down the precipice. Let the best of times reflect a future that spells a change from a putrid and decayed system that has been the cause of uninterrupted torture.

Right now, this future is being scripted on the streets and roads of the country. It is the duty of us all to put in our bit to make the miracle happen. ■



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 Umbilical Cord

The United States remains the last fallback for Pakistan in times of every economic crisis

Since 1947, Pakistan has been facing one crisis after another. Indeed, there are governance problems, but in my view certain issues lie in its genesis. The history of the North Western part of the Sub-continent, which comprises Pakistan, should be reviewed in its correct perspective. This state, like any other state, can only have sustainable development when it adopts internationally accepted practices while managing its economy, politics, governance, justice and legal systems and all the other important spheres of life. But diversions and aberrations occur routinely, systematically and frequently here, especially relating to certain fundamental perspectives, which are often not taken into account while analysing the problems and their solution for Pakistan.

Since its inception, the state created

for the political and economic rights of the Muslims striving for development, progress and modernity, has been bracketed with a very narrow definition of the religion by certain quarters. Grand concepts and slogans of pan-Islamism were promoted - such as Pakistan Islam ka Qila hai - without objectively taking into account whether there are any takers for it in the other parts of the Muslim world.

Only time will decide whether this diversion and aberration proved an asset or a liability. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that the political history of Pakistan -- from 1947 to 2022 -- demonstrates that unlike the general perception, there is no effective effort or even desire for the implementation of any kind of theocracy in the country.

People want a simple life without changing their regular and traditional

course of living and work. This is Indus Valley Civilization, which always welcomed intruders. This side of the picture is at times disturbed in the name of religion, but in the end, sanity has always prevailed. There has been a correct, but limited implementation of the strict fundamentalist interpretation of religion in the politico-socio-economic spheres of this state.

Pakistan, as a state, is an amalgam of four distinct civilizational attributes.

Majority of the people and their origin is Hindustani, now being defined as Indian, who converted to Islam. Their language, food, and culture are highly influenced by the sub-continental civilization. The literature of the area is a derivative of Persian influence as Persian had been the official language of this area for over 1,000 years. Anyone conversant with Persian was considered educated. No wonder Pakistan's national anthem is all in Persian except one line, but then all these Persian-origin words are also part of the Urdu-language. The religion is Arabic and the source of religion being the Quran is in pure classical Arabic. Over 95 per cent of the population do not have any knowledge of classical Arabic language. Even more than 70 per cent of religious scholars of the present day do not have basic knowledge of Arabic grammar. Islamic calendar months are in Arabic as 'Rabiul Awwal' without people knowing the 'Rabi' relates to summer months. However, the official language and culture is English. Nobody can get any reasonable employment unless their medium of education is in English. The country is faced with serious administrative issues and dichotomy in relation to the use of language.

For example, the First Investigation Report (FIR) being a primary document for any legal proceeding is in Urdu or Sindhi, whereas all subsequent judgments and proceedings till the Supreme Court of Pakistan are in legal English, which is alien to over 80 per cent of the population.

Pakistan as a state came into being just after the end of the Second World War in an economically chaotic time when its British rulers were facing a serious economic crisis. The British were not in a position to finance the huge military they had created to fight the war. So they, being shrewd businessmen, made a good com-



Pakistan and the United States attempt to restore ties that were strained under Islamabad's previous government.

First Investigation Report being a primary document for any legal proceeding is in Urdu or Sindhi, whereas all subsequent judgments and proceedings till the Supreme Court of Pakistan are in legal English, which is alien to over 80 per cent of the population.

promise, which is summarily described in the following paragraphs.

The newly created Pakistan, located close to the new emerging communist regimes of the USSR and China, became politically and militarily important for the non-communist part of the world led by the United States. Our religious sentiment in 1947 was fully exploited against the perceived 'atheist' regimes in Moscow and Beijing. The dissent, on the matter of any tilt towards left in the society, was brutally crushed as its doctrine was 'rightwing'.

However, the state was never economically strong enough to overcome its initial problems. And ironically, each new regime in Pakistan multiplied these challenges for the people.

The world's dominant power, the United States, played a vital role in the politics and economics of Pakistan. On an overall basis, I have not found any primary error in the US approach. It must be clearly realised that the United States is not a benevolent benefactor. It is a lender of the last resort. There was no colonialism during the British Empire days. It was neo-colonialism and the neo-colonialists have no responsibility. They had their own interests to safeguard.

The problem lies with us:

(a) We did not try to establish strong institutions thinking that the military would remain the dominant force.

(b) We did not ask for sustainable concessions from the United States for our economic developments. Instead, we strived for the military and cash support.

The results are obvious as in 2022 we are exactly in the same position from where we started.

Britain had won the war but they became extremely weak due to its expenditures. They had to rely on the United States to win it. In that 'compromise,' they 'handed over' the reins of the economic world to the United States, which included the 'destiny' of this new state Pakistan. As colonialism became a politically incorrect word, therefore its new form



Record high-inflation has all the potential to trigger social and political unrest.

'neo-colonialism' was adopted. This term has been aptly described by Nkrumah Kwame, the famous Ghanaian scholar as under:

"Neo-Colonialism is.....is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility, and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power at least looked to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With Neo-Colonialism neither is the case."

It is to be admitted that a shrewd person like Sir Winston Churchill accepted, in principle, the demand of a separate state for the reason that Muslims of India, especially those who represented a large part of the British Indian Army at that time. Those Muslims were not ready to live under the supremacy of Hindus. Same is the position in 2022, which is correct. There is either a military conflict on the eastern borders or a standoff.

There is another side to be examined that is the Hindu perception of Muslim military in undivided India. The book Pakistan or the Partition of India was written by Dr BR Ambedkar, chairman of a

The most important point we must acknowledge is that the US Aid rescues us whenever we are at the edge of collapse.

committee appointed at the behest of the Executive Council of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). At the entreaty of the said committee was to prepare a report on Pakistan. The objective was to decide what attitude the ILP should adopt towards the project of Pakistan envisioned in the Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League. They supported the partition of India on the ground that the united India will not be able to control the mighty Muslim army in undivided India.

Sir Winston Churchill said to US President Franklin Roosevelt:

"We are considering whether any declaration can be made which will strengthen the defence of India against approaching invasion. Danger is of ending Muslims who besides being a hundred million strong, constitute the main fighting part of the army. They will not allow them-

selves to be governed by majority produced by the Congress caucus and the Hindus priesthood"

Since 1947, our economic survival depends upon assistance and support from the United States. Famous historian Stanley Wolpert in the book 'Shameful Flight' refers to the discussion between Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt in 1942 as under;

The question of the Armed Forces is another concern. The Indian Army (in Ambedkar's time) is largely Punjabi Muslim, raised by the tax mostly paid by Hindus. They are docile under the British but are most likely not to remain so under the Hindus whom they consider as and are unlikely to repel any Muslim invasion on India from the West. The Hindus have a difficult choice to make: to have a safe army, or a safe border and the former being more important, thinking prudently, the Hindu should agree to the demand of Pakistan and upon being independent, raise its army from other parts of India which, by no means, wield inferior soldiers. That the British today recruits the Punjabis to the Army is no testament to the martial inferiority of other races of Hindustan, taking cognizance of the fact that the British used to recruit heavily from them at other times.

In the year 2022, nothing has changed for the state of Pakistan from 1947. It is facing two existential realities:

- (a) The military influences and
- (b) The necessity of support from the United States.

Now it is being substantiated by many notable persons including Mr Jaswant Singh that all the three main characters of politics of India at that time -- MK Gandhi, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and J L Nehru -- were fully apprised of this situation by Lord Wavell -- the then Viceroy of India. They all agreed to provide autonomy to the Muslim dominated areas. Whatever was said or written, in between is either a smoke screen or lack of knowledge as all the three players - the British, Muslims and Hindus -- agreed to divide India on communal basis. This basis was as indicated by Churchill in summary as referred above being disagreement of Muslim dominated military to accept the democratic dominance of the Hindu majority.

There was nothing wrong in peaceful Partition, but the exact post-Partition

landscape did not emerge before a 'mess' was created by Lord Mountbatten with the help of Redcliffe with the connivance of Krishna Menon whilst working in the Boundary Commission which cost over 200,000 lives and perpetual lack of trust between two communities living here for more than a 1,000 years.

The Jinnah Papers page 646 (Zaidi) referred to the discussion on April 19, 1947 between Quaid-e-Azam and Lord Ismay as under:

On the Pakistan side, an idea of alliance with the United States did not begin to take firm shape till partition. Earlier during a meeting with Lord Ismay, Mr Jinnah had examined the possibility of Pakistan after the British left and determined, according to Ismay, that 'Pakistan could not stand alone'. It would need to be friends with a superpower. Russia had no appeal for them. France was weak and divided; there remained only England and America, and of these the former was the natural friend. According to Ismay, Jinnah 'jokingly' added: "Apart from anything else, the devil you know is better than the devil you don't"

Muhammed Ali Jinnah was aware of the economic weaknesses of the newly formed state. Pakistan was born a weak state. Soon after independence, Pakistan's founder asked the United States, in a letter sent with his emissary, for \$2 billion in military and financial aid, including \$170 million for the army, \$75 million for the air force, \$60 million for the navy, and \$700 million each for industrial and agricultural development. He had made a cultural choice. As per reports this request was not accepted. However, it started the age of neo-colonialism which still persists. This raises the question about the kind of independence the people of this part of North West India got in 1947. From one viewpoint, it was the transfer of a colonial state by Churchill to Roosevelt in the form of a 'neo-colonial' state.

Nothing changed. Nevertheless, unlike Britain, Americans were not interested in taking any responsibility. They demonstrated the same in 1965, 1971, 1979, 2001 and as late as 2021. In my view they were right on their part. It is the duty of the neo-colonial state to derive best advantage from the neo-colonial ruler. Pakistan has miserably failed in handling that aspect. In my view the politicians in Pakistan including Mr. Jinnah were not

conceiving what emerged after August 14, 1947.

The United States was the major state that participated in the inaugural ceremonies at the time of creation of Pakistan. The United States as a superpower tacitly supported the division of India may be for the reason that the rulers of Pakistan



Ishaq Dar came, he made tall claims & he failed.

were absolutely clear about their relations with the other world being the 'atheists' in Moscow and Beijing. Nehru with his socialist politics was not a person to be relied upon. This was a compromise marriage. The story moves ahead as under:

A statement from the US Press in 1952 observed:

"By October 1952, the US was re-evaluating the role of Pakistan in the light of its review of the communist threat. It noted the "large number of excellent airfields and air base sites (notably in West Pakistan) with medium and heavy bomber range of major industrial and governmental centres in Soviet Central Asia and the interior of communist China and the presence of major ports and other facilities that would support communication between Western Europe and the Far East" "Pakistan is a country I would like to do everything for. The people have less complexes than Indians.....it will be disastrous if the

This statement of the US President Harry Truman made in 1952 explains the history of US-Pakistan relations and how we handled the matters of this state in relation to the superpower of this world. The earlier statement of Mr Jinnah is the

prelude. As rightly observed by Mr Jinnah, a small and weak state like Pakistan cannot survive without the support of one of the superpowers of the world. The manner in which Pakistan dealt with this subject is the cause of the present state of affairs of the country. Mr Jinnah was seeking economic support only whereas

Harry Truman for his own interest and our rulers for their political interests were asking for military support. This is a simple story of Pakistan's economic reliance on the United States.

The US President Harry Truman was always tilted towards India. The US writer Dean Aitchison quoted him saying:

[The Pakistanis] were always asking us for arms and I was always holding them if Pakistan aid does not go through. This may force out the prime minister [of Pakistan] but it is not going to force the people towards communism." "Interestingly, during each engagement or 'honeymoon' period, Pakistan had either a military or military-controlled government, whereas in Washington, the policy direction on Pakistan was in the hands of a Republican White House with the Pentagon and CIA playing a central role. Most of the 'estrangements' phases of the US Pakistan

President Dwight D Eisenhower who had seen the destruction of war, but had a completely different perception. In 1963 he said:

"Every gun that is made, Every Warship launched, Every Rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from

those who are hungry and not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in Arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children. This is not the way of life in any true sense. Under the clouds of war it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.”

John Foster Dulles was an American diplomat, lawyer, and Republican Party politician. He served as United States Secretary of State under President Dwight D Eisenhower from 1953 to 1959 and was briefly a Republican US Senator for New York in 1949. Dulles gave an interview to Walter Lippmann, American newspaper commentator and author, who in a 60-year career made himself one of the most widely respected political columnists in the world.

“Look Walter! I have got to get real fighting men into the South of Asia. The only Asians who can really fight are Pakistanis that is why we need them in the Alliance”

Whether we agree or not all the decisions for the fate of the people in Delhi were made in London after 1857. The location changed in 1947 for the people living in North Western parts of India to Washington. The weather in Islamabad depends upon the weather in Washington.

The future US Presidents were not as magnanimous as Mr Eisenhower, however, it is to be recognized that there was no major war after 1945. In his book Mr Dennis Kux has made the following strange observation about US influence as under:

“Unofficially, however, Washington was less hesitant about passing on advice. The CIA managed political scientist Dr Charles Burton Marshall, to spend two years in Pakistan as a ‘constitutional advisor’. In addition to providing help to the Pakistanis in drafting their Constitution. Marshall’s mission was to ‘try by precept and examples to help Pakistani leaders settle down and establish a smoother government’. Marshall had easy access to the top leadership, which was aware that the CIA, not the Dearborn Foundation, a covert organization for which he ostensibly worked, was his true employer. US-Pakistan relations have been extraordinarily volatile, largely a function of the twists and turns of the Cold War. An intimate partnership prevailed in the

Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan years, and friction during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter presidencies. Since the Cold War ended, the partnership has shriveled. The blunt talking delivered by President Clinton to Pakistan’s military dictator during Clinton’s March 25, 2000, stopover in Pakistan highlighted US-Pakistani differences. But the Clinton visit also underscored important US interests in Pakistan.

Dennis H Kux (born August 11, 1931, in London) was a diplomat and former United States Ambassador to Côte d’Ivoire (1986-89). He authored ‘India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991’ and The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies.

Pakistan cannot afford to spoil its economic relationship with the United States in any sense.

Kux served in the US embassy in Karachi in Pakistan from 1957 to 1959, followed by a tour in India. He again served in Pakistan from 1969 to 1971.

From the date of Mr Muhammad Ali Jinnah request for aid from United States things have not changed substantially over the years. From 1947 to 2022 the total US support to Pakistan in different forms, including military, economic and coalition support fund is approximately \$90 to \$95 billion.

The exact figures from 2002 to 2020 are as under:

- a) Security \$8,284 million
- b) Economic \$11,326 million
- c) CSF Reimbursements \$14,573 million

These figures of direct overt USAid appropriations and reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002-FY2020 are from a report prepared by the Congressional Research Service for distribution to multiple congressional offices, March 12, 2019.

Around \$100 billion is not a very large sum of money in the present context where our home remittance exceeds around \$28 billion per year. However, the most important point we are unable to ac-

knowledge on a national level is that the US Aid rescues us whenever we are at the edge of collapse, for example now in 2022. In other words, the US is our lender of last resort.

Pakistan cannot afford to spoil its economic relationship with the United States in any sense. The US and its allies, the European Union, are the main customers of Pakistan’s exports. Out of the total exports of \$31 billion, around \$20 billion are to these countries. In the aforesaid discussion there is no reference of Pakistan’s ‘estranged’ relations with India. In my view, that is the result not the cause.

While the Indian National Congress’ top leadership had been imprisoned following the 1942 Quit India Movement, there was intense debate among Muslims over the creation of a separate homeland. The All India Azad Muslim Conference represented nationalist Muslims who, in April 1940, gathered in Delhi to voice their support for a united India. Its members included several Islamic organisations as well as 1,400 nationalist Muslim delegates. Muslims who were living in provinces where they were demographically a minority, such as the United Province where the Muslim League enjoyed popular support, were assured by Jinnah that they could remain in India.

Winston Churchill referred to Muslim military of undivided India in relationship to Hindus. He was by implication stating that this factor will continue to play a definite role in the new state that will emerge in North Western part of the sub-continent. Three wars and the issue of Kashmir has completely overtaken the subject of the relationship with India and ‘estrangements’ which were there before partition became solid like a rock.

This is what Dr Ambedkar wrote in his book when he argued that Hindus should agree for the partition of India. The North Eastern part of India [formerly East Pakistan now Bangladesh] was not so placed, therefore, they were aided to be separated in 1971. The ‘umbilical cord’ of this state were the ‘Muslim military of the undivided India’ and transfer of ‘ownership from London to Washington’. Their influence will always remain there in this state. In my view there is nothing wrong in both these inevitable influences. Now it is up to the civil society to take charge of this state, along with the aforesaid two constant dominant factors. ■

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A Borrowed System

There is a constant conflict between the old and new institutions. The anachronistic ones don't fit into the overall structure that modern political and social fabric demands



By Mujahid Khattak

The writer is a senior journalist and editor of Narratives Urdu website.

Daron Acemoglu, in his famous book, "Why Nations Fail", tells us that industrial revolution in England became possible because of two historic events. He states that a strong centralized power of the state is the first essential ingredient for nations to progress. For centuries, England remained mired in dark ages because the king who was the central authority depended on aristocracy and Church which weakened the state's power. In 1485, Henry VII demilitarised barons which increased state's power to exercise its will. The second historical step was taken when Henry VIII broke with Roman Catholic Church and confiscated all land and assets of the clergy. These two institutions were impediments to making progress and after the task was accomplished, it paved the way towards industrial revolution which ushered us into the modern era of human history.

Currently, our society is a hotchpotch of institutions, some of which are relics of our past which came into existence to solve certain challenges at a certain point in history. After societal evolution created new challenges, these institutions lost their relevance but somehow managed to linger on like parasites. Despite losing their efficacy for society, these institutions persist because they serve economic and political interests of a powerful elite. At the same time, modern, globalised world has superimposed on us some new institutions. Democracy and capitalism are two prime examples of modern packages we have borrowed from the West. There is a constant conflict between the old and the new. The anachronistic ones don't fit into the overall structure that modern political and social fabric demands.

A cursory look at the sitemap of our society will instantly catch two dilapidated institutions protruding above the relatively smooth social surface. The most prominent is the institution of feudalism which

is still alive in parts of Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan in different shapes. This institution played its part during evolutionary phase of different human societies in the past. But now it has become not only a liability but also spawns many social speed breakers that hamper every effort to initiate a smooth and progressive journey towards better future.

The economic cost of feudalism is out of our discourse. It is the social and political aspect that must be considered in detail. There are two important points in this regard.

The keyword to unlock the mystery of feudalism is "sense of possession" which starts with land and animals and like a viral disease, it gradually begins to engulf other areas of human life. Women are the prime target of this mindset as they are treated like animals in landlord's possession and safeguarded as the tract of land he occupies. It's a misconception that we can wipe out gender discrimination through constitutional or legal route. Feudalist mindset creates ripples that travel downwards and secretly creep into the deep recesses of collective social mind. This is the main reason honor killing is perpetrated across every section of our society. Forced marriages, defiance of traffic rules and disregard of standing in queue also spring from the same feudalistic mindset that deems itself above the law.

From political point of view, this group of landlords is a visible impediment in the way of creating a truly democratic political culture. Every progressive party faces the dilemma of being narrowed down to a small political entity or get sucked up by the monster itself. Basic flaw in our political system lies in the fact that it is a hostage of the so called "electables". These symbols of status quo gradually dominate the party and, in the end, all political entities look the same.

Religious seminaries or madarsas



come next in the list of those institutions that are relics of an old tradition. Its syllabus consists of knowledge created many centuries ago. At certain point in history, such views were radical, but time has changed now. Seminaries generate a mindset that deems itself out of synch with a world which it abhors because it can't find its place in it.

This institution of religious education is far more dangerous than feudalism due to multiple reasons. First unlike the dwindling fate of feudalism, mainly due to division of land through inheritance, religious seminaries are expanding and insinuating the minds of new generation with extreme ideas. Secondly, it has surrounded itself with a strong fort of religious sentiments that makes it impregnable. Let's explore the social cost that we must pay for the mushroom growth of these seminaries.

In his impressionable age, a madarsa student gets indoctrinated by centuries-old ideas. After going through a long process of education, he steps into the practical world only to face a shocking revelation that his skills have little value for the society. This bewildered and angry young man is equipped with a double-edged sword. All that is injected into his mind is hatred against the modern system and its supporters which is rein-

Seminaries generate a mindset that deems itself out of synch with a world which it abhors because it can't find its place in it.

forced when society accords him the lower status as, for example, Imam Masjid. At the same time, he is filled with a misguided belief in his moral superiority over those who possess higher social status. This dichotomy makes him a hurdle for society in different ways. He may be a likely candidate for a terrorist group. He may become a facilitator for such obnoxious activities. Even in political field, he guards everything which represent status quo. He instantly threatens to take to the streets whenever government tries to implement a progressive agenda.

On political level, this is the second example of a phenomenon that weakens state's authority. A three-year ban on YouTube was a classic example of a situation when government writ was compromised. For more than a decade, our politi-

cal class showed hesitation in launching an all-out war against terrorists because of this section of society. Government can't take bold decisions in foreign policy, economics, or education because of this mindset.

While feudalism must be destroyed, religious seminaries are a different case. These institutions are supporting millions of poor students and giving them education. Government needs to take two steps; first state should expropriate these seminaries, change the whole syllabus so as to adjust it in accordance with modern world. Secondly the current teaching staff must be replaced with young teachers who are well educated from modern institutions. Without taking this bold step, extremism can't be rooted out. It will rather continue prevailing at an alarming speed.

Historically both feudalism and religious seminaries have been in unison with each other. Both have always been supportive to each other, reciprocally protecting their interests. Religious thought process provided the legitimacy for feudalism which in return allowed the mushroom growth of religious academies in their areas.

We need to show some spine and take bold decisions to eradicate feudalism and reform religious seminaries to break the shackles of status quo. ■

SPECIAL REPORT

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The Failed Takover Bid

TRG Pakistan's former CEO & the influential JS Group's joint bid to control the company thwarted as the matter is brought before the SHC

By Amir Zia

The country's best known-international information technology company, The Resource Group (TRG) Pakistan Ltd has warded off a takeover bid led jointly by none other than its former CEO and co-founder Muhammad Ziaullah Khan Chishti and the influential JS Group.

As TRG Pakistan filed a petition in the Sindh High Court (SHC) in October against its former CEO, and Jahangir Siddiqui & Co Limited and 12 other individuals and entities allegedly involved in "surreptitiously" acquiring its shares to orchestrate taking over the company's board, many individual and institutional share-holders are disapproving of the former CEO's actions.

"I cannot think of why the former CEO or his proxies such as JS would even try to engineer a hostile takeover bid and attempt to harm TRG Pakistan shareholders, including themselves," said an individual investor, requesting anonymity. "The former CEO knows very well that his reputation is toxic following a sex scandal involving an ex-employee," he said. "We are really glad that his efforts have been blocked by the company".

Pakistani-American Muhammad Ziaullah Khan Chishti -- known more as Zia Chishti -- is a multimillionaire tech entrepreneur, who was once seen as a poster boy in the US and Pakistani tech world for his successful business ventures. His was a success story of a rare Pakistani venture, which transformed into an international player. To Zia's credit is also the establishment of a dental brace business which is now worth \$15 billion.

Chishti founded 'The Resource Group International Limited' (TRGIL) in 2001, which was initially funded with Pakistani capital raised through the TRG Pakistan listed vehicle which continues to hold a non-controlling stake in TRGIL. It transformed into a global technology holding company, employing around 8,000 peo-

ple in Pakistan out of nearly 35,000 worldwide. The company remits around 100 million dollars annually in export earnings to this dollar-starved country. TRGIL with its head-quarters in Washington, DC has eight subsidiaries, according to the company website.

1. Afiniti
2. TRG (Pvt) Limited
3. Etelequote Limited
4. Digital Globe Services, Ltd.
5. TRG Marketing Solutions Ltd
6. TRG Field Solutions
7. IBEX Global Solutions Limited
8. RRG Holdings LLC

However, after the sex scandal came to light, 51-year-old Chishti resigned from the management positions of TRG and all its subsidiaries, including Afiniti, which he was leading as its CEO.

The lawsuit

TRG Pakistan Limited, its Chairman of the Board of Directors Mohammed Khaishgi and Chief Executive Officer Hasnain Aslam in their joint lawsuit against Jahangir Siddiqui & Co Limited, Chishti, and others, alleged that they "surreptitiously" acquired the company's shares to attempt to orchestrate a takeover without making the required disclosures, attaining a joint shareholding of 34% which exceeds a statutory threshold of 30% beyond which they would have been required to make a public tender offer.

Subsequent to the filing of the lawsuit, TRG Pakistan has received a stay order from the Sindh High Court restraining the defendants from exercising voting control over any shares held by the defendants in excess of 30%.

TRG's lawsuit offers a captivating read. It highlights how in a developing country, influential businesses manage to dodge and evade regulators and sometimes even win them over on their side as well as find loopholes in the system to advance shady deals.

Besides Jahangir Siddiqui & Co.

Limited and Zia Chishti, the TRG Pakistan has made JS Bank Limited, JS Infocom Limited, Energy Infrastructure Holding (Pvt) Limited, JS Global Capital Limited, The Trustees of JS Bank Limited-Staff Gratuity Fund, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui, Asad Nasir, Suleman Lalani, Abid Hussain, Sarah Pobereskin, DJM Securities Limited and Al-Habib Capital Markets(Pvt.) Limited as parties to the case and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) as a proforma-party to the case.

The petition says that these individuals and entities, named as defendants, are allegedly working at the behest of TRGIL's former CEO Zia Chishti, "who was convicted in an arbitration in the United States of

The TRG's lawsuit offers a captivating read. It highlights how in a developing country influential businesses manage to dodge and evade regulators and sometimes even win them over on their side.

America of sexual assault of an employee of a portfolio company" where he was serving as the chairman and CEO at the time.

Zia Chishti's arbitration outcome was disclosed in sworn testimony by his victim, Tatiana Spottiswoode, in the United States Congress on November 16, 2021. (See box 'Sex Scandal' on page XXX for details)

The management of TRG alleged that after resigning from all his positions at TRGIL, TRG Pakistan and other subsidiaries in November 2021 following the public



Now it is the market talk that individuals and entities, including Zia Chishti, his wife Sarah Pobereskin and the JS Group and its subsidiaries accumulated shares of TRG Pakistan in violation of the provisions of the Securities Act, 2015 and Listed Companies Regulations, 2017.

disclosure of his sexual assault conviction, Zia Chishti tried to plot a comeback.

Now it is market talk that individuals and entities, including Zia Chishti, his wife Sarah Pobereskin and the JS Group and its subsidiaries accumulated shares of TRG Pakistan in violation of the provisions of the Securities Act, 2015 and Listed Companies Regulations, 2017. Under the law, they should have made public announcements and disclosed the purchase of shares in TRG, which now exceeds more than 30 per cent, market players say.

TRG's petition alleged that the information pertaining to the purchase of the company's shares by Chishti and his aides nominated as defendants was deliberately concealed with "ulterior motives" in an attempt to take over the company. "Defendants No. 1 to 7 (Jahangir Siddiqui

& Co Ltd, its subsidiaries and Ali Jahangir Siddiqui) have a history of attempting similar hostile takeovers, such as in the well-covered case of Hum TV in 2019-20."

TRG Pakistan also alleged that the accused "have been engaged in a continual exercise of disruption, distraction and interference (in the company affairs), dispatching a flurry of mostly frivolous complaints (against it) to the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan... who in turn has duly obliged" them by issuing a series of hasty notices, which display a bias in their favour. Such actions remain detrimental to TRG Pakistan's interest and its shareholders and stand in violation of the laws of Pakistan, the petitioner said.

A Pakistani success story

In the petition, TRG Pakistan - a pub-

lic limited company with a market capitalisation of 80 billion rupees as of 30 November 2022 -- argued that its association with a person of its former CEO's reputation would "cause massive destruction to its reputation and value" of shares. The company's main line of business, through the non-controlling shareholding in TRGIL, is to indirectly invest in a portfolio of companies in the technology and IT-enabled services. It has a 'Fortune 500' client-base mainly in the United States. These companies have annual revenue of approximately \$800 million.

Given their link to Pakistan -- both from the shareholder and operational perspective -- TRGIL and TRG Pakistan -- are veritable Pakistani success stories at the global level. TRG Pakistan's more than 10,000 shareholders include the general public -- both local and foreign

During his tenure as CEO of Afiniti, Chishti bought a private jet for the company in 2020, purportedly for business travel. However, in breach of basic corporate governance, he also allowed Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and his relatives and friends, and employees of the JS Group to use Afiniti's jet. After Zia Chishti himself, the most prolific users of the Afiniti's corporate jet were Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and his relatives and associates.



The Sex Scandal

Zia Chishti – born to a Pakistani mother and an American father in Maine, US, in 1971 – had a stellar career before the sex scandal took the wind out of his sails in November 2021.

All seemed to be going well for Chishti until a Columbia law student, Tatiana Spottiswoode, who was a former employee of his company Afiniti, made harrowing allegations against the multimillionaire tech entrepreneur of sex abuse, harassment and physical violence during a business trip to Brazil in 2017.

Spottiswoode, 23, had testified before a US Congressional Committee hearing, which was investigating arbitration clauses that companies write into contracts and their effects on victims of harassment and other crimes, international media reported, while covering the proceedings of the event.

In her testimony, Spottiswoode – the daughter of an Afiniti co-founder – alleged that Chishti had sexually assaulted her during a business trip to Brazil and filed for arbitration to silence her. Providing photographs of the alleged assault as part of her testimony, she described the encounter as “violent.”

“My body was covered with scratches, cuts and contusions. I had bruises around my neck that looked like I had been strangled, a large bump on my head, a black eye,” the media quoted her as saying.

She also said that during a visit to Dubai in 2016, Chishti groped her in front of co-workers and assaulted a colleague.

Spottiswoode narrated how she first met Chishti when she was barely 12 or 13. “He was a business associate and friend of my father’s,” she said.

“When I was in my senior year of college in December 2014, Chishti, who was 43, invited me on a ski trip ... but the trip



The victim: Tatiana Spottiswoode.

was disguised to groom me,” she told the committee.

Spottiswoode said that after Chishti pursued her for nine months, she agreed to date him but left him after spending some time together.

A few months later, Chishti asked her to join his company, presenting “a rosy picture of a great career opportunity. Naively, I believed him” after he promised that he did not expect any sexual favours in return.

In April 2016, Spottiswoode signed a contract with Afiniti that included an arbitration with a strong confidentiality clause, which she did not fully understand. As Spottiswoode started working for the company, she said she realised

After the sex assault scandal came to light, 51-year-old Chishti resigned from the management positions of TRG and all its subsidiaries, including Afiniti, which he was leading as its CEO.

that Chishti was “not willing to treat me as an employee.”

“Instead, over the next 18 months, he oscillated between pressuring me for sex and punishing me. When I rebuffed him, he humiliated me in front of co-workers and then ignored me completely, causing me to fear for my job,” she told the committee.

“I felt completely trapped and hopeless. ... I didn’t want to lose my job... I did not feel that anyone would protect me, and I was too tired to argue with him anymore. I went to his room where he beat me while having sex with me,” she alleged.

“I told him he was hurting me, he said: ‘Good.’ He told me he should have had sex with me when we first met, when I was 13 years old.”

Soon after this testimony appeared in the media, Afiniti’s Board of Directors announced that Zia Chishti had “stepped down from his role as Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and Director of Afiniti, effective immediately.

After Afiniti, Chishti also had to resign from TRG Pakistan Limited and TRGIL.

A TRG spokesman said at the time in November 2021: “The boards of directors of TRG Pakistan Ltd and The Resource Group International Limited announce that Zia Chishti has resigned from all his roles at TRG and its affiliates, including as the CEO and a director of TRGP, and as the chairman and a director of TRGI, effective immediately.

However, Chishti rejected the charges as false.

In March 2022, President Biden of the United States signed into law a bill banning the use of confidential arbitration by employers in situations of employee sexual harassment and sexual assault. As President Biden signed the bill at a White House signing ceremony, Ms Spottiswoode stood directly behind his shoulder. n

–By Narratives Research Desk

per cent shareholding in TRG Pakistan.

Attempted takeover bid

The JS Group collectively holds 13.8 per cent shares of TRG as on September 30, 2022, while Zia Chishti has 15.9 per cent holding, according to the company’s

-- as well as institutional investors. The issued, subscribed and paid-up share capital of TRG Pakistan is 545.4 million shares, valued at approximately 80.1 billion rupees as of end November 2022. For the year ended June 30, 2022, both local and foreign investors collectively own 44.2

2022 Annual Report. Zia Chishti's wife, Sarah Pobereskin, bought approximately 20.8 million TRG Pakistan shares in September 2022, reflecting 3.8 per cent shareholding of the company. TRG management says that this was done in violation of the 2015 Act and 2017 Regulations. Calling Zia Chishti and his wife as the "Chishti Group", TRG Pakistan petition said that it collectively holds 19.7 per cent shares of the company as of September 30, 2022.

DJM Securities, also named as defendant in the petition, owns 2.1 million shares, or 0.4 per cent shares of the company as of September 30, 2022. The brokerage house also acts as a 'Securities Manager' for Sarah Pobereskin. The petition alleged that DJM Securities provided

Sarah Pobereskin, bought approximately 20,773,500 TRG Pakistan shares in September 2022, reflecting 3.81 per cent shareholding of the company. The TRG management says that this was done in violation of the 2015 Act and 2017 Regulations.

finance to Pobereskin, "confirming their involvement in this illegal hostile takeover attempt."

Zia Chishti's wife also has Al-Habib Capital Markets (Pvt.) Limited as Securities Manager. This Karachi-based brokerage house owns 2.2 million, or 0.4 per cent, shares of TRG Pakistan as of September 30, 2022. The petition said that Al-Habib Capital Markets was "also an indirect provider of financing to" Chishti's wife through its banking-parent, Bank Al Habib, which confirms "their involvement in this illegal hostile takeover attempt."

TRG Pakistan maintains that the SECP, responsible for regulating the corporate sector and capital markets, ought to have taken cognizance of what it called "the illegal actions" of the Chishti Group, which violated the 2017 Act, 2015 Act and 2017 Regulations. The SECP, however, turned a blind eye to the blatant violations" and "effectively turned into an extension" of the Chishti Group, entertaining and amplifying baseless complaints against the company, the petition alleged.

Obligation to disclose shareholding in a listed company

TRG's petition underlined that under the law, it is the duty of directors and others, including substantial shareholders, to disclose shareholding in a listed company, including beneficial ownership. Quoting the law, the petition argued that "every person who becomes a director, executive director, or substantial shareholder of a listed company, shall give notice in writing to the company," giving details of the entire transaction of shares, including the amount and description and the date of acquisition in case of the beneficial ownership. Under the law, the reporting requirement "shall be fulfilled before the expiration of a period of seven days beginning with the day on which the requirement first arises."

The beneficial ownership of securities of any director, executive office or substantial shareholder -- in case of an individual -- includes securities owned or controlled by the spouse of a director of a company, not being herself/himself a director of the company; the minor son or daughter of a director, including step-son and step-daughter. The same information has to be shared with the SECP and the Pakistan Stock Exchange Limited.

Both the SECP and the Pakistan Stock Exchange have to ensure transparency in the trading of securities in a listed company to protect the interests of shareholders, the petition said.

According to the law, any acquirer who acquires voting shares, or more than 10 per cent voting shares in a listed company, shall disclose the aggregate of his shareholding to its management and the relevant authorities. This disclosure has to be made within two working days of the receipt of intimation of allotment of voting shares; or the acquisition of voting shares.

Failure to disclose shareholding

On June 12, 2015, the JS Group made an initial disclosure that it acquired 10.6 per cent shareholding in TRG Pakistan. After this, it was required under the law to disclose each time it bought the company shares. The JS Group, however, did not make any further disclosure until September 2, 2022.

The TRG management said that this was in violation of the law and the Stock Exchange rules as JS Group repeatedly acquired shares during this time, all while its shareholding was in excess of 10 per cent.

Summary of changes in shareholding at quarter end of the JS Group from time-to-time between June 30, 2016 and December 31, 2021 shown in Table A:

Table A

Sr. No.	Period (As on)	Shareholding (%)
1.	31.10.2016	19.14
2.	31.01.2018	18.87
3.	02.11.2018	18.87
4.	25.11.2019	19.48
5.	27.11.2020	20.22
6.	28.10.2021	18.14

TRG management says that on September 2, 2022, it received a letter from JS Infocom Ltd, informing that it bought 432,158 shares of the company, and that now the JS Group has a total of 12.75 per cent, or 69,548,822 shares of the company. But ironically, this disclosure, which the TRG called misleading, incomplete and incorrect, came five years too late. The company learnt through shareholders' record that the JS Group -- as of the September 30, 2022 records -- holds 16,643,842 of its shares instead of 11,000,000 as disclosed in the letter dated September 02, 2022 by the PSX Rule Book," the petition said. Chishti's wife also acquired approximately 20.8 million shares of TRG during September 2022, reflecting a 3.8 per cent shareholding, it said.

These shares were acquired by Sarah Pobereskin in concert with her husband Zia Chishti. Now the couple collectively

owns 107.6 million shares, or 19.7 per cent, shares of TRG Pakistan.

TRG Pakistan also stated that Sarah Pobereskin entered into futures contracts in September and October 2022 for the purchase of approximately 30 million shares of the company and based on their history of lack of disclosures, it would appear that they have had no intentions of doing so now. The petition said that the reason for the continued lack of disclosure is to avoid scrutiny of such purchases given the negative connotations of the purchase of shares by a person found guilty of sexual assault, and the parties acting in concert with him.

The aggressive purchasing pattern of shares by Zia Chishti's wife, without disclosures, abnormally affected the TRG Pakistan share prices, which abruptly went up. This violates the other market abuses provisions of the 2015 Act.

With the JS Group holding 13.8 per cent shares of TRG Pakistan, and the Chishti group 19.7 per cent, they both collectively hold 33.5 per cent shares of the company. Once the shareholding of DGM Securities Limited of 0.4 per cent and Al Habib Capital Markets' 0.4 per cent are added to the total shareholding held by all parties acting in concert, it comes to 34.3 per cent.

This is where the second charge in the suit comes in, and one that TRG Pakistan received a stay order on by the SHC: under Pakistani takeover rules, no party (whether acting alone or in concert with others) is allowed to exceed a 30% shareholding unless it makes a public tender offer for the remaining shares. This rule is in place to protect other minority shareholders from one party quietly building up a stake, as Zia Chishti appears to have attempted to have done.

The suit provides several examples for why TRG Pakistan believes the defendants are acting in concert, and these examples provide fascinating reading on the dealings between the powerful.

Zia Chishti obtains loans from JS Bank

In May 2019, Zia Chishti obtained a loan of around \$7 million from JS Bank Limited's branch in Bahrain. The finance facility was secured, inter alia, by pledging the shares of TRGIL and Afiniti (a portfolio company of the TRG Group). As far as the shares of the TRGIL pledged with

the Bank are concerned, those were released in 2022. But JS Bank continues to hold a pledge on Zia Chishti's shares of Afiniti.

At the time when this loan was obtained by Zia Chishti, he also opened a TRGIL bank account in JS Bank's Bahrain branch and deposited \$4 million from the company funds. This deposit earned zero interest for TRGIL during the three-year period.

This timeline reflects that the loan obtained by Zia Chishti from the JS Bank was effectively round-tripped and primarily funded through TRGIL's resources. At that time, Zia was serving as the CEO of TRG Pakistan as well as the Chairman of TRGIL. These actions also violate the fiduciary obligations of directors under the 2017 Act.

TRG petition said that the circumstances and timeline under which this

Table B

Sr. No.	Description	No. of Shares
JS Group		
1.	Defendant No. 1 (Jahangir Siddiqui & Co. Ltd)	26,949,561
2.	Defendant No.2 (JS Bank Limited)	24,583,760
3.	Defendant No.3 (JS Infocon Limited)	16,643,842
4.	Defendant No.4 (Energy Infrastructure Holding (Private) Limited)	3,500,000
5.	Defendant No.6 (The Trustees of JS Bank Limited-Staff Gratuity Fund)	3,500,000
6.	Defendant No.7 (Ali Jehangir Siddiqui)	5,000
7.	Defendant No.8 (Asad Nasir)	500
8.	Defendant No.9 (Suleman Lalani)	10,001
Total shares held by the JS Group		75,192,664 i.e., 13.79 %
Chishti Group		
9.	Defendant No.11 (Muhammad Ziaullah Khan Chishti)	86,808,289
10.	Defendant No.12 (Sarah Pobereskin)	20,773,500
Total shares held by the Chishti Group		107,581,789 i.e., 19.73 %
11.	Defendant No.13 (DJM Securities Limited)	2,125,000
12.	Defendant No.14 Al Habib Capital Markets (Private) Limited)	2,213,267
Total shares held by the Defendants No. 1 to 14		187,112,720 i.e., 34.31 %

loan was taken by Zia Chishti is of particular importance. During the same month of May 2019, Zia was found responsible in arbitration for sexual assault of a former female employee of Afiniti and was ordered to pay a substantial sum to the victim. As such, it is clear that the funds obtained by him through JS Bank were utilized to help fulfil the monetary judgment against him.

After the testimony of Afiniti's former employee, Zia obtained another loan worth \$8,000,000 from the JS Bank. This amount was utilized by Zia to pay off a loan that he had previously obtained from Afiniti.

TRG Pakistan also alleged that JS Bank provided financing to Chishti's wife for the purchase of additional shares or futures.

Other Links: Chishti & JS Group

For the past several years, JS Global Capital Ltd has been acting as a securities broker for Zia Chishti, who holds shareholding in TRG Pakistan through an account in this brokerage house. Chishti's wife also does her dealings through JS Global. "The foregoing clearly shows that the JS Group and Chishti Group are... acting in concert."

Both these groups have a common objective to acquire voting shares of TRG Pakistan to take over the company management. TRG management said that after Zia Chishti secured a loan from the JS Bank for the payment of his arbitration award, he appointed Ali Jahangir Siddiqui -- the founder of the JS Bank -- as a consultant/advisor of Afiniti. Siddiqui was paid a remuneration of \$0.5 million per year for the advisory position despite the fact he had no requirement to devote any minimum time to this part-time role and ended up delivering no quantifiable value to Afiniti. Siddiqui's remuneration was in excess of the market rate for such a limited position, and even in excess of most full-time employees, which highlights the conflict of interest as well as the fact that two acted in concert.

During his tenure as CEO of Afiniti, Chishti bought a private jet for the company in 2020, purportedly for business travel. However, in breach of basic corporate governance, he also allowed Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and his relatives and friends, and employees of the JS Group to use Afiniti's jet. After Zia Chishti himself, the most prolific users of the Afiniti's corporate jet

were Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and his relatives and associates.

In the late 2021 and early 2022, Zia Chishti's resignation and the board elections of TRG Pakistan were covered in the international media. A number of news reports highlighted links between Zia Chishti and the JS Group, the petition said.

Market analysts have mentioned that the primary interest of JS Group in teaming up with Zia Chishti to seek control of TRG was to try to gain offshore access to the proceeds from the eventual sale of TRGIL's global assets, which could fetch hundreds of millions of dollars. These analysts have mentioned that the blocking of this attempt has given comfort to shareholders that these valuable global assets belonging to TRGIL will stay protected for the benefit of all shareholders.

Insider trading

The TRG Pakistan petition said that Ali Jahangir Siddiqui, Asad Nasir and Suleman Lalani, being directors of JS Group, have access to information which is not available to the public. The fact that the JS Group and Chishti Group are acting in concert and purchasing shares of TRG Pakistan, all while not making disclosures to the company and the SECP and PSX, clearly shows that they are in possession of inside information about their trading activities. Further, the abnormal pattern of the purchase of shares of the company by Sarah Pobereskin led to unusual fluctuations in the company's share price. Hiding this information reflects that the three JS Group directors shared and acted on inside information with their other partners named in the petition.

Asad Nasir and Suleman Lalani had also been raising frivolous complaints before the SECP against the company "with an agenda to sabotage and tarnish the reputation" of TRG Pakistan, the suit mentioned. The SECP, instead of taking cognizance of the JS and Chishti groups' actions against the company, has been targeting the company, showing 'mala fide' intent.

The three JS Group directors, especially Asad Nasir, indulged in propaganda against TRG Pakistan publicly as well through Venus Entertainment Company (Pvt.) Limited. On this, the TRG Pakistan has already filed a separate case in the Sindh High Court and obtained ad-interim orders restraining the aforesaid company and its hosts/anchors from airing

programmes against the company.

Zia Chishti issued notices to TRG Pakistan on October 14, 2022 to appoint auditors and share registrar transfer agent of his choice. These are examples of his strategy to assert his influence within the company, with the ultimate aim of calling a meeting to change the Board of Directors, the company said. According to a market release by TRG Pakistan, the auditor that the ex-CEO had proposed subsequently withdrew its name from consideration,

TRG Pakistan had urged the SHC

Ali Jahangir Siddiqui, Asad Nasir and Suleman Lalani, being directors of JS Group, have access to information which is not available to the public.

to declare that the actions of JS and Chishti groups violate public policy and laws of Pakistan, particularly the provisions of the 2017 Act, 2015 Act and 2017 Regulations; declare that these groups acquired shares in TRG Pakistan in violation of the provisions of the 2015 Act, 201 Regulations and PSX Rule Book. The company also asked the Court to grant a permanent injunction restraining JS and Chishti groups - whether directly or indirectly - from acquiring any further shares in TRG Pakistan, and from exercising any rights or receive any benefits pursuant to the shares obtained by them in violation of the laws, including the right to receive dividends, bonus shares and voting at meetings of the shareholders or Board of Directors.

The SHC issued a stay order restraining the defendants from voting any shares that are in excess of a 30% shareholding. For market participants, this action has stopped this battle royale for now among some key business magnates of the country, and provided comfort to smaller investors. We will keep an eye on any further developments and keep our readership informed. ■

Fall from Grace

American CEOs who had to quit amidst allegations of sexual harassment

In western countries, sexual harassment cases are seen as red-flags in the corporate world and are taken seriously amidst greater awareness of the cultural shift in which more and more victims are coming out in the open to reveal their ordeal at the hands of their bosses or co-workers. In nearly all cases, companies are quick to get rid of their CEOs and other officials who are accused of sexual harassment and abuse to prevent any negative fallout on their businesses.

In recent years, many high-profile corporate gurus in the United States have been forced out of their jobs even upon allegations of sexual harassment by their juniors as campaigns like #Me Too and awareness and protests rallies gained momentum. In the case of Zia Chishti, his victim actually won an arbitration proceeding against him for sexual harassment and assault.

Here are examples of eight prominent CEOs who were forced out of their jobs following allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment or failing to take measures against it in their organisations.

Mike Cagney, the former CEO and co-founder of online lending start-up Social



Finance, was forced out after a series of damaging stories that detailed a workplace culture rife with alleged

misconduct and improper treatment of women. He had to step down from the company's board and CEO's position in September 2017.

Travis Kalanick, the CEO and founder of Uber - the ride-hailing



app - had to resign following months of pressure from shareholders in June

2017 when a blog post from a former engineer alleged of sexual harassment, which eventually led to the revelation of an oppressive and hostile work culture for women.

Lisa Borders, the president and CEO of Time's Up, which aims to combat work-



place sexual misconduct, had to resign in February 2019 - less than four months into the job, following sexual misconduct claims against her son.

Dan Price, CEO of Gravity Payments, had to resign in August 2022 from the



company he founded during his college days amidst allegations of misconduct and sexual assault, including several criminal charges

Leslie Moonves, the top executive at CBS Corp since 2006 and a major figure at the broadcast network and media



company for more than two decades, had to resign September 2018

amid a new wave of allegations against him of sexual assault and harassment.

Scott Blackmun, CEO of the U.S. Olympic Committee resigned had to resign in February 2018, after being under



fire for weeks in the wake of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal. Although the scandal did not directly taint his name, he faced criticism for perceived reluctance to intervene in a series of sex abuse scandals,

most recently the Larry Nassar case that has engulfed USA Gymnastics and prompted three congressional inquiries.

Sam Huskell, chief executive of the



Miss America Organisation had to quit his position in December 2018, after he was suspended and put under investigation for vulgar and offensive language.

Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood film producer had resigned from the board of directors and the chairmanship of the film production company in



October 2017 after facing a series of allegations of sexual misconduct. He was the co-founder of the company.

Shervin Pishevar, Hyperloop One co-founder and early Uber investor lost



his job in Sherpa Capital, the venture capital firm he co-founded in 2013, following sexual misconduct allegations.

The American citizen of Iranian descent also stepped down from the board at Hyperloop One.

Dave McClure, 500 Startups CEO, was another top executive who succumbed to media exposure of a sex scandal. In July 2017, McClure apologized, called himself a creep and quit the Mountain



View-based tech incubator he helped launch after the New York Times exposed him as a sexual harasser. ■

SCANDAL



White-Collar Crime Pays

The FIA drops money laundering inquiry against JS Group, its sponsors without sighting any reason

In Pakistan, white-collar crimes committed by those with money, power, and political connections seldom get punished. And this has been happening even before the Shehbaz Sharif-led government diluted the country's accountability law in June 2022, benefitting 90 percent of the accused named in massive corruption cases by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Yes, on August 13, 2021, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) -- which along with the NAB is also an ace anti-corruption watchdog of the country -- removed the names of JS Bank and its sponsors from an inquiry being conducted against them on the allegations of "fraud, corrupt practices and money laundering."

An FIA letter, dated July 06, 2021, -- a copy of which is available with "Narratives" -- had named JS Bank, Jahangir Siddiqui Company Ltd., Jahangir Siddiqui, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and others, in the inquiry. The letter asked the country's top banks "to conduct a complete search of bank accounts in the name" of 12 companies and individuals. These included, The Sun Trust, Akamoto Holdings Ltd, the Monte Bello SRL, the Riler Financial Corp, the Endowment Fund Trust for Preservation of the Heritage, the Agrow Limited, and Jahangir Siddiqui and Ali Jahangir Siddiqui. On July 14, 2021, the FIA issued a reminder to all the banks seeking information about the accounts of all the 12 companies and individuals named in the letter.

But barely a month later, on Aug. 13, 2021, the FIA's State Bank Circle, Karachi, "omitted" the names of the JS Bank and its sponsors from the inquiry. Soon after, the two main FIA officials working on this case -- Investigative Officer Ramesh Kumar and Bilal Aslam Khan -- were transferred to Gilgit and Quetta respectively.

An FIA official, privy to the way the inquiry was dropped against this powerful business group, said that the Siddiquis' connections within the former PTI government and the institutions helped

them get off the hook. "Although loads of information was available with the FIA, our top tier leadership asked us to remove their names from the inquiry."

The FIA inquiry was launched following the Confidential Financial Reporting Authority (CAYFIN) of the Cayman Islands named Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and his father, Jahangir Siddiqui, for "suspicious" money transfers. In a letter dated December 16, 2019 (a copy of which is also available with 'Narratives'), CAYFIN shared details of several suspicious transactions made by the Siddiquis and their companies with the Director General of Pakistan's Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU), which operates under the umbrella of the Finance Ministry. The CAYFIN letter, giving an overview of the case, said that this business family established 'The SUN Trust' and the Akamoto Holdings Limited in October 2011. "The (SUN) Trust was to be 'settled' by Jahangir Siddiqui for the benefit of himself and his son, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui (100 percent)."

Their Accounts were opened with the Deutsche Bank Cayman Island Branch in 2011. However, Deutsche Bank sold its global operations to Butterfield Bank (Cayman) Limited, which scrutinized all accounts. During the scrutiny, the Butterfield Bank found irregularities in accounts held by this Pakistani business family and alerted the CAYFIN about the dubious transactions in its Suspicious Activity Report.

The FMU forwarded all this information to the Chairman Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on January 31, 2020 in a confidential letter, saying that it had received intelligence from CAYFIN - the Financial Intelligence Unit of Cayman Island - on the accounts of 'The Sun Trust' and Akamoto Holdings Ltd maintained at Butterfield Bank, Cayman Island. "The settler and beneficiary of 'The Sun Trust' is Mr. Jahangir Siddiqui, however, his grandchildren are also the beneficiaries of this trust."

Earlier, Tariq Bakhtawar, a SECP director, was suddenly removed from the

organization after he tried to take up the same matter referred by CAYFIN just as the two FIA officials probing the damaging allegations against the Siddiquis and their business ventures got transferred.

And this happened despite the fact that CAYFIN provided loads of information about the dubious transactions and money trail of the Siddiquis and their offshore businesses. According to the information, the Trust was under Ali Jahangir Siddiqui's control till 2017. However, the same year, he was excluded and the three grandchildren of Jahangir Siddiqui were added as beneficiaries. The shareholding of Akamoto Holdings is with The Sun

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Trust. The reason for the exclusion of Ali Jahangir Siddiqui from 'The Sun Trust' on July 7, 2017 was that he planned to enter public life and hold public office. Therefore, his father appointed the three grandchildren aged between one- to two-year-old as beneficiaries.

In August 2017, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui joined the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government and served as a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister with the status of a Minister of

Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU)
Government of Pakistan
3rd Floor, 182 Main Building 13 Chaudhry Road, Karachi

No: FMU/INTEL/0035/2020
Date: 31st January, 2021
From: Financial Monitoring Unit
To: The Chairman, Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan, NIC Building, 69 Jahangir Avenue, Islamabad
Subject: Financial Intelligence
Annexure A and other relative documents

Handwritten: C. Karim, Approved, Strictly Confidential

RE: CAYFIN Disclosure No. 2019R164-01-FM (Case No. 20190627)

Name: Jahangir Siddiqui
DOB: July 29, 1963
Place of Birth: Hyderabad, Sindh
Nationality: Pakistani
Passport No.: BS549952 (Pakistan)
Address: Flat No. 550, Rizvi Carlton Residences, Dubai UAE

Name: Ali Jahangir Siddiqui
DOB: December 24, 1975
Place of Birth: Karachi, Pakistan
Nationality: Pakistan
Passport No.: AJ1460331 (Pakistan)
Address: Flat No. 550, Rizvi Carlton Residences, Dubai UAE

Name: The Sun Trust
Jurisdiction of Registration: Cayman Islands
Address: c/o Butterfield Trust (Cayman) Limited
Settler: Jahangir Siddiqui
Beneficiaries: Settlor, Settlor's grandchildren
Purpose: Investment holding

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Beneficiaries: Settlor, Settlor's grandchildren
Purpose: Investment holding

CONFIDENTIAL FINANCIAL REPORTING AUTHORITY (CAYFIN)

FEDERAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (FIA)

STATE BANK CIRCLE

Office of the Deputy Director

3rd Floor, Habib Square, M.A. Jinnah Road, (Opp. to M. K. Road), Karachi.

021-99202004 Fax No. 99204116

102/11

Dated: 13.08.2021

December 16, 2019

CORRIDGMENT

Sl. No.	Account Name	Branch	Address
1	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	1st Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
2	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	2nd Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
3	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	3rd Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
4	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	4th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
5	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	5th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
6	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	6th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
7	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	7th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
8	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	8th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
9	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	9th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
10	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	10th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi

THE HEAD OF COMPLIANCE

RE: CAYFIN Disclosure No. 2019R164-01-FM (Case No. 20190627)

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3	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	3rd Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
4	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	4th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
5	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	5th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
6	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	6th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
7	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	7th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
8	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	8th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
9	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	9th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi
10	Bank of China	Chaudhry Road Karachi	10th Floor, Same Trade Tower 11 Chaudhry Road Karachi

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN FEDERAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (FIA)

STATE BANK CIRCLE

Office of the Deputy Director

3rd Floor, Habib Square, M.A. Jinnah Road, (Opp. to M. K. Road), Karachi.

021-99202004 Fax No. 99204116

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State. A few months later, in March 2018, he was appointed Pakistan's ambassador to the United States by then premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi amidst concerns within the foreign office as well as sensitive institutions, including the top brass of Pakistan Army, over his inexperience and ability to hold this high-profile and sensitive position. Later, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui maneuvered effectively to become honorary ambassador-at-large under the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government as well as to cultivate con-

tacts in the country's mighty security establishment during the period of former Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. The journey from being a close confidant of Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to holding office in Prime Minister Imran Khan's camp is an astonishing story of political and business wheeling and dealing, which stunned many people even in the PTI camp.

received an amount of US\$1.2m from an account with Goldman Sachs, Zurich in the name of the Rileria Financial Corp. "These are the only assets of value to have been injected into the Trust, and a balance of approximately the same amount remains in cash in the Company as of date of filing this... Rileria was noted at the time of inception as being from the 'settler's' family foundation," the letter read.

According to the letter, Jahangir Siddiqui refused to divulge information to the Deutsche Bank about details of his foundation, citing confidentiality with Goldman Sachs. This refusal raised a red flag among the Deutsche Bank officials, who marked Siddiqui and his associated accounts for strict monitoring. Ali Jahangir Siddiqui controlled the family foundation at that time. "Notes on file suggest that the client was informed that no further amounts could be injected into the structure in this way in future as it was anticipated between US\$5-10m could be put into the trust," the CAYFIN letter said.

The FMU letter to SECP listed details of at least 10 suspicious transactions done by Ali Jahangir Siddiqui. Separate transactions of Endowment Fund Trust for the Preservation of Heritage, Pakistan International Containers and other en-

tities were also mentioned in the FMU letter.

The FMU while recommending further probe into the matter said that Siddiquis “are under investigation of NAB regarding embezzlement, insider trading and stock manipulation, corruption, therefore the information received from CAYFIN” is being shared for further probe.

The Cayman Island authorities said that from 2013-18 “numerous investigations have been launched in Pakistan in relation to our client Jahangir Siddiqui, his financial services business and more recently Ali Jahangir Siddiqui in relation to embezzlement, insider trading, stock manipulation and money laundering.” According to the Butterfield Bank Suspicious Activity Report these accusations related to activities as far back as 2007.

The CAYFIN letter stated that Jahangir Siddiqui and Ali Jahangir Siddiqui “may be engaged in money laundering and that the funds received into the Trust structure, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly relate to the proceeds of crime.” CAYFIN launched thorough investigations into the business interests of the Siddiqui family and their companies. Although no further records were available with Cayman Island authorities on the Siddiqui family and their companies, open source searches did give a glimpse of their shady past, according to the document.

The CAYFIN investigations and the letter gives details of how Ali Jahangir Siddiqui was summoned by the NAB in a case in which he was accused of siphoning off funds amounting to 23.758 million euros in 2008 for the purchase of an Italian company, Monte Bello SLR. Ali Jahangir Siddiqui was the director of investment firm Azgard Nine Ltd at that time and he allegedly used a foreign company, Fairtyal SRL, Sweden for this purpose. The NAB said that Fairtal SRL, which was used for the deal, suffered losses along with its shareholders because of the murky transaction.

Investigations also highlighted the case of Agritech Limited. Shares of this company were sold to various financial and government institutions at a price higher than the market rate to settle loan defaults, causing them a huge loss of Rs.40 billion.



An FIA letter, dated July 06, 2021 had named JS Bank, Jahangir Siddiqui Company Ltd., Jahangir Siddiqui, Ali Jahangir Siddiqui and others, in the inquiry.

Similarly, the SECP in its 2016 report revealed that prices of Azgard Nine group’s shares were artificially increased to Rs.70 from Rs.24, and payments were also made to an unidentified party. However, none of these cases were brought to a closure because of the political and financial clout of Jahangir Siddiqui and his family. Both NAB and the SECP failed to follow through on these cases as well as the FIA.

The CAYFIN letter disclosed that bank status of Akamoto Holding showed that out of the initial deposit of US\$1.2 million from Riler Financial Corp, Goldman Sachs Bank AG Zurich on Dec 1, 2011, US \$950,000 was held in cash position, while US\$250,000 was invested in the money markets. The Akamoto Holdings Bond portfolio as on Dec. 31, 2018 consisted of \$5,218,964 with the USD Market Value of \$5,407,470.98. “Akamoto

Holdings seems to be taking short term loans against these bonds to execute a variation of investments,” the CAYFIN letter said.

“We are of the view that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the funds held by the Cayman trust and underlying BVI (British Virgin Islands) company might be derived from proceeds of criminal conduct,” it said, asking Pakistani authorities to contact them for further information. “This information has also been disclosed to the Financial Crime Investigation Unit of the Royal Cayman Island Police Service for intelligence purpose only,” the six-page letter said.

The CAYFIN informed Pakistani authorities that it holds numerous documents provided by the Butterfield Bank on this business family and it should not hesitate to contact it for their copies.

Sadly, the matter remains gathering the proverbial dust on the file FMU offices. And just as the NAB and SECP failed to actively move against this politically connected business family, the Finance Ministry’s Financial Monitoring Unit also seems to be following suit.

With the PML-N government back in power following the ouster of the Imran Khan government in April 2022, the JS Group and its sponsors are breathing easy as fighting and eradicating corruption is no longer a priority of the government and the state institutions. Even the very laws that were aimed to help beat the white collar crime have been diluted to an extent that it is impossible to catch a big money launderer, investigators say. ■



**By Lt. Gen. (Retired)
Tariq Khan HI(M)**

The writer is a retired Lt. General of the Pakistan Army. He is noted for his services as the Commander of I Strike Corps at Mangla & Inspector General of the Frontier Corps.

A New Economic Agenda

Without ensuring political stability, the task of introducing sweeping reforms and reviving the economy on a sustainable basis would remain a pipedream



We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark: the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light

– Plato



John Ruskin, a British intellectual, described the economy as ‘the bastard science of darkness.’ He developed the idea of the ‘Economic Man.’ A material thought that now governs how the world views its activities - always in search of one’s own national interest, regardless at the cost to

the interest of others.

Walter Block, an American economist, expanded on the idea of an economically driven world. He argued that the science of economics led to a ‘brutish’ world where morality was not a priority.

Rand Cooperation, a US think tank, in its analytical paper, ‘The future of warfare in 2030s,’ explains how wars are not only fought because of economic objectives to acquire what one does not have, from those who do, but establishes that economy itself could now be an instrument of war. This is especially so now, as wars have become more total as opposed to being limited in application, and the masses themselves, become a target. Hunger and deprivation are the road to coercing a political decision among the civilized world today.

So as the economy begins to matter more and more, Pakistan finds itself in

a dire state. With a debt-to-GDP ratio at 84.8% (\$278Bn in 2019), the country finds itself trapped in a vicious cycle. There is hardly a possibility of its economy ever improving as the policies overwhelmingly remain unchanged. Therefore, any hope for an economic turnaround under these circumstances is insanity.

The GDP has to grow substantially to keep up with external and internal debt repayments, while ensuring adequate growth at the same time. New solutions are needed to address the existential economic problems that limit the space for any recovery. This recovery is essential for developing an autonomous structure to make independent fiscal decisions in the interest of the people, the sovereignty to make long-term financial plans in the interest of the State and to be able to exercise the liberty of political choices as an independent nation.

Sustainable growth is defined in financial terms as the maximum growth rate a company can sustain without having to increase financial leverage. These leverages are through debt and equity. The first is related to loans and the second to shareholders. This theory can be expanded up to the national level as well where loans are getting more difficult as well as expensive to acquire and there are no significant international shareholders, in terms of Joint Ventures or direct foreign investment. Yet, while one talks of best practices and future growth, it implies that one should somehow manage to meet one's current needs without compromising the needs of future generations. But that's not what's happening and with each passing day, the present is criminally trespassing into the sustainability of the future. Someone needs to not only take an account of this but put a stop to it; red lines need to be defined and limits must be established.

But to discuss economic growth and sustainable development in a vacuum by itself makes no sense. One cannot make any recommendations that are oblivious to the influence and role of the government, its policies, and interventions.

The first and foremost step would be political stability, certainty, continuity and security. Without this, economic activity becomes disorganised, unpredictable and the risks are too high for any individual, institutional or foreign investment. The second issue is that of an effective foreign policy to establish a national standing amongst the comity of nations vis-à-vis trade, corporate undertakings and commercial activities. Business evolving around the inter-state enterprises, joint ventures and foreign investments, both incoming as well as out-going, cannot be done in isolation. Therefore, a sensible foreign policy is a must to integrate the nation's fiscal endeavours into the global economic process and developments. Yet, the current scenario is characterised by the poor international image of the country and its low ranking at the global level in almost all fields of governance. Pakistan has a bad reputation and lacks credibility for investors, as reflected in some of the more pronounced indicators, among many others:

- Pakistan stands 129 out of 163 in the sustainability index

- 140th in corruption out of 180 countries
- And its judiciary ranks 130th out of 139 in judicial propriety.

These must improve and governance needs to develop a credible face; in fact, as a nation in general and a society in particular, there is a need to get out of the denial where the society seems to remain suspended in time, seeing no wrong in itself, promoting false pretenses of a superior culture with an overstated and hyperbolic perception of its history. Patriotism is not about bragging that one's country is the best only because one was born in it. There are other far more measurable and defined parameters which must come into the equation before one can claim any level of ranking in any field. Begging the world for funds to survive, while at the same time projecting national pride is a big

Pakistan stands 129 out of 163 in the sustainability index, 140th in corruption out of 180 countries, and its judiciary ranks 130th out of 139 in judicial propriety.

contradiction.

However, since this paper is about economic reforms, it shall restrict itself to those areas that are relevant to economic growth, but with total acknowledgment of the fact that political and administrative reforms must also be undertaken for which a separate effort is needed. Such reforms are essential to make any prospect of economic growth and development a realistic possibility. So keeping this in mind, some of the most salient aspects, considered essential for economic growth only and focusing on the national economy only, are described in the following paragraphs.

Developing Human Resource

To address the future economic equation, it is of utmost importance to first recognise and then address the greatest liability that is impinging on growth. This dubious distinction, uncontested and unchallenged can be safely attributed to the population -- its current volume and growth and then the quality of human resource that this country is churning out.

Pakistan's population stands at



around 230 million people. It is growing at 2.0% annually and by the year 2050 it is estimated to be 310 million. Pakistan ranks 5th in the world by population. This impacts directly on food security and the water resources. Living space, pollution and environment all take a hit because of such a mass of humanity.

Our annual budget shows that one of the major contributors towards the national income are the foreign remittances. They were \$31.2 billion for fiscal 2021-22 -- growing by 6.0% annually, and may even increase to 8.0%. Remittances at present are estimated to be about 9.0% of the GDP as opposed to an international average of 5.0%. However, this is mostly from unskilled labour that largely works in the Middle East, undertaking menial jobs and who wallow at the lowest rung of employment within this region.

One must be realistic and come to terms with the fact that a large part of the population in the country will never acquire the literacy needed to find a white-collar job and as such qualifying for a blue-collar job must become a focus and a desirable goal to sustain an average family financially. In fact, one finds it difficult to define any national policy that can differentiate between literacy and education, with the former relating to a defined level of certified qualification (leading

to a white-collar job) and the latter more related to technical skills integrated into the wisdom of the street and conforming to the local way of life, leading to a blue-collar job.

Education

It will be in Pakistan's economic interest if substantial part of the focus is shifted toward technical qualifications and expertise, leading to blue-collar employment. Technical skills must be developed and standards established through recognised international certification. Pakistan needs to set up globally recognised polytechnic institutes with a third party accreditation that would allow Pakistan to export skilled labour instead of unskilled labour the world over. Preparing skilled



such as construction skills, mechanics and technicians who currently learn their respective trades through apprenticeships taught from father-to-son or other such family connections.

All these recommendations in no way impinge on or imply that method and means to contain and limit the population growth at some defined level, should not be undertaken concurrently and with equal enthusiasm. To maintain a large population does not make for a sustainable Pakistan. However, also, no nation can go forward in this techno-savvy world without imparting compatible education to its future generations at the high-end level, allowing them an opportunity to compete at the global level. After

Pakistan needs to set up globally recognised polytechnic institutes with a third party accreditation that would allow Pakistan to export skilled labour instead of unskilled labour the world over.

labour in recognised established institutes, technically trained as plumbers, electricians, vehicle mechanics, masons, builders etc. would contribute immensely towards the GDP as well as towards nation building.

If these institutions are set up based on international affiliations and are recognised and certified by the European, Australian, American, Canadian and British guilds, employment for the younger populace could be easily found and facilitated globally. Considering that the projected population in 2050 in Pakistan would be close to 310 million, such an endeavour where young people may be facilitated for gainful employment the world over, is an extremely important aspect of economic growth and development of the human resource. Also standards within the country would improve

all, as was recognized that "after bread, education is the first need of the people", Georges Danton.

The expertise within the country lacks competence and continues to drive the education system based upon a self-defined syllabi and curriculum that is regressive in nature and limited in scope. With global developments and outlook in digitisation, artificial intelligence, robotics and disruptive technologies, Pakistan has a lot of catching up to do.

The present curriculum, method and medium are all outdated and at times, can even be obscure. Future generations are inadvertently denied building intellectual capacities or acquiring progressive knowledge because of criminal indifference towards global standards and internationally compatible education systems. Pakistan's youth need to keep abreast and

survive in a world that is making headway, in leaps and bounds, in the realms of science and technology.

A generation stands to suffer and is held back on account of the lack of intellectual competence compatible to international standards aggravated by a heavy madrassa influence, corrupting contemporary education values - there is a dire need to get out of the paralysis of denial and face reality as it stares all in the face.

The 'Single-National-Curriculum' may address the needs of people with limited language skills and poor awareness but it also subsidises mediocrity and lowers standards to accommodate those who cannot rise to higher standards. The fatwa banning the printing press in Turkey in the 15th century ensured that Islamic Civilisation would never rise or ever again have a competitive edge over western knowledge in sciences, medicine and art. Similarly, it appears, the government is bent on repeating the folly of yesteryears. This is a self-inflicted wound caused by an ignorant and politically self-serving administration in search of cheap popularity, playing to an ignorant gallery.

There are only six universal languages in the world where education, scientific developments, medical progress, business etc. evolve around. These languages are universal only because they acquired a recognition and global respect as mediums of communication in the expansion and illustration of sciences, literature, general knowledge, and development of civilisation, social and civic sciences as well as functional financial transactions and practices. They represent developed societies that were emancipated and liberated allowing for large scale global developments.

Pakistani society does not have any such pretensions or aspirations being indifferent to global progress in every field. Pakistani schools and colleges never promoted modern scientific study because of which we suffer a backward society, drowning in superstition, magic, divinity and extremism. The nation never evolved and remained suspended in history in a false and exaggerated account of its past. Now to expect that the international community will respect or recognise Urdu language as a useful or functional language, is a wishful thought. If the nation continues to obstinately stick to this medium, it will never allow Pakistan's young-

er generation to go global in thought or live an enlightened and progressive life. Generations will remain hostage to what is considered as tradition, custom and local convention. Pilots cannot fly and no plane can be operated by a crew that does not know the international lingua-franca. So whereas it is alright to have high national spirit and display emotional patriotism, yet these values must never be blind or lead to a dead-end.

Urdu should be promoted and taught as a subject but the medium of education must be English to allow everyone an equal opportunity to go for higher education anywhere in the world. Let Pakistani society grow and first contribute to civilisation, be recognised as a partner in a free and liberated world before one can expect one's language to become an instrument of custom, progress, learning and wisdom.

In fact, as it's now, a basic right is being denied to future generations by politicising the education system and justifying its current mediocre standards through ideological rhetoric. There is a need to immediately acquire internationally recognised and acceptable syllabi and programmes. All exams must be third party evaluated allowing for internationally-recognised certification. This is the right way in empowering the youth as they are sent forth into the world to represent their country - not slogans without substance.

Agriculture

The largest sector of our economy rests in agriculture that contributes only 24% to the GDP but involves about 65% of the total population. Even the largest manufacturing industry, which is cotton textiles, is agriculture based.

Here, there is a need to introduce reforms that include crop management, fertilizer and pesticide application, better irrigation techniques and improved farm practices. The soil is totally devoid of NPK (Nitrogen, phosphate and potassium), and needs to be revitalised.

There is a need for radical reforms to improve farming practices. Today, Pakistan has the lowest yields in every major crop when seen against any international data. Pasteurization of milk is the need of the hour to control disease and waste. Such plants can be set up central in all regions where milk can be easily



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brought in. Unfortunately, the parliament did not find it within itself to pass the relevant law for the pasteurization of milk and succumbed to the pressures of the local milk-vendors who sell polluted milk. This is now leading to stunted growth in children.

Meat processing is ad hoc and must also be properly regulated. The type of feed to the animals must be properly defined for quality and should then be suitably regulated and supervised. If proper regulation is undertaken and 'foot-and-mouth' disease eradicated, something which Pakistan is inflicted with, it would allow the export of meat. These measures would allow rural areas to generate a better income.

The migration from rural areas to urban areas is causing saturation of humanity in cities. Rural life must be improved all-around to discourage migration. Emancipation of women would help in changing the way of rural life. Let women lead in the poultry and livestock industry through soft loans. Better schools, sports

and scholarships for children could assist in improving the way of life. Some important steps to improving food security are:

- a) How fertilizer is manufactured and applied needs to be reconsidered. Fertilizers must be blended after soil analysis on the farms. Specific areas have specific needs which need to be customized. An atlas has already been structured on these lines highlighting the peculiarities of the soil from region to region. Fertilizer manufacturers now need to integrate the farmers from every region. Mobile labs need to be deployed to ascertain the type of soil and its needs in every area. Modern blenders mixing suitable NPK (Nitrogen, phosphate, potassium) ratios in accordance to the needs of the lands should be done and only then companies should sell this customised fertilizer to the farmer. This experiment was done and a 30% increase in cotton yields was observed.
- b) Nutrients need to be examined such as Sulphur and zinc etc. These are catalysts to release the NPK at the right time for the plant.
- c) Drone technology with suitable AI must be introduced to predict, assess and deal with pests. Controlled pesticides allow for a healthier plant, enhance yields while saving resources and money.
- d) Water management needs to be controlled and regulated. New best practices using drip and capillary irrigation must be introduced rather than flood irrigation as is the common practice today.
- e) There is a lot of talk about constructing dams to store water, yet no one ever stops for a moment to consider how

the water resource was depleted, that is the existing subsurface aquifer. One may be able to store more water with more dams but without appropriate regulation one shall misuse that stored water as well. This is not a sustainable practice.

- f) A policy to regulate regional crop management must be structured. This should define the cash crops and food crops from region to region keeping in mind the climate, water resource and the agricultural based industry. Marketing strategy to include exports can then be based on a proper coordinated plan.
- g) Burning of roots after harvest of rice and sugarcane is a horrible practice and must be banned. The roots can be easily converted into compost using an appropriate rotor-weightier plough. It will allow for a healthier soil.
- h) Tree plantation and afforestation must be undertaken as a project under national emergency. Pakistan had 6.0% forests in 1947, and now has only 3.0% as opposed to international standards 25%. The overall land cannot sustain such destructive practices.

Encouraging the Private Sector

Pakistan's greatest burden is of course debt repayments. This implies taking a relook at the loans taken out by the successive governments and how best to retire them. To facilitate debt repayment, steps must be taken to offload many of the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) that now number 200 such entities, which according to the World Bank are a liability.

A study conducted over the last five years reveals that these SOEs show a consistent liability towards the GDP by about 12-18%, which in absolute terms amounts to Rs429 billion. In any case, the government must not be in the business of doing business. Instead, it should only coordinate, facilitate and define strategic goals and economic objectives, providing focus and direction for the private sector. The government should refrain from getting itself into the corporate activity, which creates serious imbalances in the national corporate structure.

Today, there is over regulation which

leads to red-tape and corruption. Illogical laws, rules and regulations stifle economic and business activities. Just to illustrate a few: the GIDC (the gas infrastructure development cess) -- a black law -- was implemented, but the practical axle-load law was blocked. The former blackmailed industry into providing funds without setting up the promised infrastructure and the latter allowed trucks to ply on the roads tearing up the surface. This further burdens the government substantial revenue on repair and maintenance of these roads without any reciprocal payment made by the trucks based on the loads. Unnecessary regulation and government oversight discourages investment and growth, slowing down development



Privatisation of the energy system, its production and distribution would go a long way in developing efficiency and a competitive environment.

significantly.

Services are about choices available to clients. Potential clients should be able to choose on the basis of cost, quality, availability and reliability.

Privatisation of the energy system, its production and distribution would go a long way in developing efficiency and a competitive environment, encouraging growth. To develop alternative energy is another goal that should be implemented but through the private sector. Alternative energy, electric transportation, public charging stations and recycled resources

are where the future lie. Such measures would generate higher revenue and save expenses. Line losses can be reduced by investing in the HVDC (High Velocity Direct Current) transmission lines, allowing more energy to consumers on competitive plans and payment methods. Energy must be harnessed with efficiency regardless of whether it is fossil or alternative. The national grid must have flexibility, depth and capacity to supply energy to all parts of the country under all circumstances since life must never come to a standstill from want of an infrastructural collapse or disruption.

Fixed Tax in a Cashless Economy

'I shall easily show that it is impossible to tax further, ruinous to be always borrowing and not enough to confine ourselves to measures of economy.'
--Charles Calonne, 1887.

The tax system is one of the greatest hurdles to development and progress if not properly figured out. One cannot tax oneself into being a rich state. As it stands, in Pakistan, the system is skewed; it is unfair since there are huge amounts of regressive taxes that are borne equally by the rich as well as the poor. The system is narrow-based and resource limited to very few with only 1.2% (2.8 million people) registered taxpayers; it fosters corrupt practices, which is why it is totally stacked against growth, development and expansion.

An out-of-the-box solution is being suggested but it must be examined by experts as well as the government for its efficacy and functionality. After modifications and necessary changes, it must be adopted as soon as possible.

With irreversible damage already done to the national economy, the stage is now far past to expect that conventional or regular interventions may make any positive difference. And so it is time for radically different solutions to take the country out of its present fiscal quagmire. The one being suggested is to introduce a relatively tax-free economy in general, yet to introduce a fixed-tax system for all financial transactions in a newly structured digital fiscal system.

This will immediately control inflation, lower prices, improve economic

activity and allow people, entities and institutions better opportunities for investment in industry, manufacturing and production. This already exist as a system in some countries. The CPEC, which is now coming of age, would become a haven for all kinds of investments -- local as well as foreign -- accelerating industrial growth, manufacturing and production on all its three corridors. This is an obvious road to economic development, a huge employment boom, generating financial activity and large taxable financial transactions and exports.

A government's views on the economy were amply described by Ronald Reagan when he said, if it moves, tax it, if it keeps moving, regulate it, and if it stops moving, subsidise it. So, we desperately need to get out of the conventional governance of economic activity, as it is today, which stifles and discourages growth. Since the government would now have no visible source of income and revenue, it is suggested that a fixed-tax be imposed on all financial transactions, the efficacy of which is explained below.

Parallel to such a radical step, that of introducing a relatively tax-less society, would also be to gradually remove denominations of paper money from circulation and to enforce all financial transactions through digital banking. A fixed percentage of all banking transactions should be taxed and as such everyone would pay tax compatible with the expenditures. The rich with a greater expenditure would pay more than the poor. The figures determining revenue generated by the system being proposed needs to be properly evaluated and the efficacy of the method needs to be validated by qualified economists.

However, as to establish some benchmark to carry the argument forward, the World Bank's figures for Pakistan's per capita GDP has been taken as a benchmark from where the reasoning has been further developed. The working has been attempted on the lower end of the value spectrum so as not to exaggerate the resultant figures.

With a total population, estimated to be 240 million, and using international figures of the per capita GDP, i.e. \$1500 as a benchmark, applying 5.0% tax deductions to it, the annual revenue of the government goes beyond \$18 billion. When commercial and corporate trans-



Another great benefit of digitalization... would be shrinking of space for corruption. It would also speed-up financial activities, make all transactions transparent and ensure that everything is accounted for with an institutional memory and record.

actions are added to this, which actually account for far more in revenue than the per capita GDP. It is assumed the overall revenue would at least go up by another 100%, making it around 36 billion. This is as opposed to \$35 billion, recorded for June 2022. Today with 17% indirect taxes, individuals who pay taxes, pay about \$255 annually, on essential commodities in indirect taxes at the very least, but in the proposed system one would be paying out only \$75 which is 300% less than what it is now.

By introducing a digital economic system that is cashless, the informal economy would also be taken into account. At present the undocumented economy is almost as big as the formal economy and has been estimated to be around more than 35% of the GDP.

If the informal sector also gets into the tax-net, it would double the revenue and push it to at least \$60-70 billion. Individual's overall purchasing power would improve as a consequence of cheaper prices and lower cost. This means new industry would be set up because of lesser taxes, greater investments and demand.

A natural consequence of this would be creation of new employment opportunities and increased economic and financial activities. This would improve cash flows and generate substantial liquidity for the development at the state level.

Another great benefit of digitalization of the economy would be shrinking of space for corruption. It would also speed-up financial activities, make all transactions transparent and ensure that everything is accounted for with an institutional memory and record.

A cashless society has existed in one form or other since time immemorial. Various systems have come and gone such as the barter system and even now the Block Chain. Therefore, it's not really a very new concept. The examples of nations that have taken this road include Sweden with the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Norway, Finland, New Zealand and China closely following it.

However, there are four major impediments towards the introduction of a relatively tax-free society and a cashless economy. First and foremost are the international money regulators such as the IMF and the World Bank. Since they have been politicised by the United States and the Western World, the odds are stacked up against a country like Pakistan in breaking conventional rules and setting up an autonomous system. Regulations based on WTO etc. would come into play, triggering sanctions. Yet, a means must

be found to manage such a shift. Pakistan would be far less susceptible to international influences and acquire a sovereign capacity to reform its foreign policy and political thought if this change is managed well.

The second, most important spoiler would be Pakistan's very own politicians, its system and those in power. A cashless system would limit corruption and thus would trigger resistance from within. But with political will, a suitable process can be constructed so that any resistance can be overcome. One of the ways is to remove the economic process from the political process and structure it to become an independent standalone discipline.

The third serious impediment is the



existing low-level of technology that exists within the country. This would not permit the establishment of a fully digitalised system, and the little that gets set up would be vulnerable to intrusion and hacking. It could easily be disrupted thus causing identity theft or even a national financial crisis. But safeguards against such a threat can be developed and applied. The new system would gradually evolve and mature and cannot be implemented in a short-span of time.

The last problem related to the recommendation lies in losing one's privacy, yet this too can be mitigated through suitable laws and regulations. But it is the price that society would have to bear to own such a system.

An alternative to it remains sticking to the conventional economic system as far as possible, but lower taxes significantly. There should be a gradual shift towards the digital economy to encourage the informal sector to get into the mainstream. At the same time, the government must privatise the SOEs at the earliest.

National Assets

Pakistan's national potential lies

deeply integrated in three major assets.

These are: Thar Coal, Riko Diq and the Coastline, including the Gwadar Port. This does not imply that there are no other minerals, resources or economic opportunities, which are any less important. But the three mentioned above can lead to speedy economic progress.

A) Thar Coal

It is estimated to be the 6th largest reserve in the world. It is estimated to be 175 billion tons. Some have even described its potential to be greater than revenues generated by the Saudi Oil and the Qatari Gas put together.

Pakistan is currently suffering from an energy crunch. Shortage of energy

stunts industrial growth. Already two 660 megawatts and one 330 megawatts plants are being run on Thar coal. The overall production of electricity from this resource would go up to 2000 megawatts in another year. New power generation plants can be set up here provided water issues are resolved in the desert. Scarcity of water can be dealt with by setting up desalination plants through the private sector. The location of such a plant should be close to the coastline and Rahim Ki Bazar from where the water would need to be piped, i.e. about 200 kilometers. The capacity should be modular and serial in design so it can expand and cater for a growing industrial city in the vicinity of the coal mines.

Gasification of coal gas is estimated to be a 3.0 billion equity based project. Monetization of gas is best served by manufacturing fertilizer. Pakistan already produces 6.0 million tons, but is likely to need even more in the future. A bag of Urea today in Pakistan cost around Rs2,250/- while the international price of urea is Rs9,250.47/=. The difference between the two is almost Rs7000/-. This allows for a huge profit margin, helping

generate foreign exchange. Russia is the world's biggest fertilizer producer but is currently under sanctions. Europe at present is in dire need of fertilizers. This is a big opportunity for Pakistan to capture and sustain itself in the global market provided it moves quickly.

Gasification also allows to run industries as well as provide fuel for domestic use, giving a lot of relief to the country. Gasification further permits the manufacture of polypropylene and other plastics. These materials are exportable and are important components of almost every industry.

The environmental issues connected to use of coal can be addressed with new modern best practices. These involve carbon capture and re-inserting carbon back into the ground. If stored, carbon dioxide has a commercial value which could be organised for sale within the country as well as for export. Pollution and environmental contamination is further mitigated by other measures such as tree plantation campaigns and afforestation, which must be organised at a national level.

B) Riko Diq

The Riko Diq reserves are considered among the largest gold and copper mines in the world with a 5.9 billion of ore grading, 0.45% copper, and gold reserves amounting 41.5 million oz. This requires a refinery in the vicinity for value-addition instead of just exporting the raw minerals. A refinery would take care of Pakistan's defence needs in copper and much more. Mishandling of the mines by the past governments and judiciary caused grievous loss to Pakistan's economy. This needs to be fixed.

C) The Coastline

Pakistan's coastline is of amazing geo-strategic importance. Exploiting the location for trade, connectivity and boosting economic activities could actually single-handedly help Pakistan's economic turnaround. It also establishes Pakistan's global relevance as an international trade corridor. With Pakistan, fortunate enough to have a 'Continental Shelf' that extends 350 nautical miles into the sea, all ports along the coastline take on a great significance. The Continental Shelf itself is larger than any province on land and has more resources in it than anything available on land. With a num-

ber of ports along the 1046-km coastline, Pakistan needs to assert proper control of its Continental Shelf, which is being plundered by external elements. This would boost fisheries, minerals, regulation of seafaring traffic generating revenue and 'right-of-way' tariff for the deployment of pipelines and cables etc.

Gwadar is a natural deep water port and remains central to the eastern and western hemispheres, making it important for international shipping. Gwadar Port is being constructed by China under CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) -- a flagship project of China's Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI). The region as a whole, to include the Subcontinent and China, is home to 25% of the global population and remains a lucrative international market and a huge consumer of food and energy. These ports are of great significance to the land-locked Central Asian Republics, allowing them access to the world for trade when connected by road and pipelines.

Russia, on the other-hand, has limited port facilities most part of the year and has always been in search of warm water ports, which at present is limited to Sevastopol, Crimea. Gwadar can provide and facilitate such an all-year port to Russia on account of its warm waters -- if Moscow and Islamabad can come to a mutually beneficial bi-lateral agreement. This will give Russia an alternative to Sevastopol, mitigating the Port's strategic vulnerability as well as its limited capacity.

No wonder that all three superpowers -- the United States, China and Russia along with the EU -- either already have stakes in the subcontinent or are in search of them. This has led to competing interests in relevance to Pakistan's coastline with economic and political interests as well as opportunities and challenges. Pakistan must act carefully and refrain from playing one power against the other.

Take China for instance: its trade is basically through the Malacca Straits, now commonly addressed as the Malacca Dilemma. It amounts to 16 million barrels of oil passing daily and 100,000 ships carrying cargo annually. Control for the Malacca Straits is now being contested. The United States is asserting itself and has aligned other countries against China. This has forced China to seek an alternative to the Malacca Straits, which it



Reko Diq



Gwadar Port

found in the BRI.

So why has CPEC become so important? The distance from the Western China to the Pakistani coastline is less than the distance it takes to transport goods within China to the Chinese ports; currently the distance travelled is 16,000 KMs -- taking two to three months, which would reduce to 5,000 KMs or to 1 month at the most through CPEC. Thus from a strategic angle, CPEC is more important to China than Pakistan, but remains a game-changer for our country as well. Because of CPEC, China has begun the industrialisation of its South Western regions since these are now easily accessible logistically. It also implies that in the future, Afghanistan and Central Asia could also benefit from it.

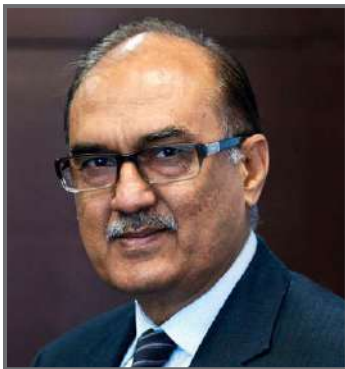
Gwadar Port has the potential of being one of the world's largest when it gets completed in 2030. The berths at Gwadar can accommodate 200,000 ton tankers and other ships, which along with the newly constructed oil pipelines, fibre optics etc., makes it an ideal regional trans-shipment port. It out-does the Long Beach Port at Miami and has greater capacity than all the Indian Ports put together. With its potential as a future trans-shipment port in the region, the Saudi Government is contemplating investing in Gwadar by constructing one of the world's largest refineries. The future of such a Port, if managed properly, allows for huge development and inter-

national connectivity. The trade hub and conduit at Gwadar establishes Pakistan's relevance in the region as well as the world as a trade corridor -- connecting the east to the west; a key component in global trade as well as a supplier of oil and gas. If manufacturing industries develop within these CPEC corridors, the potential for economic growth is huge for the country.

Pakistan stands at a defining moment in history. With a background of missed opportunities and failed initiatives, the country is suffering from self-inflicted damage. Lack of sustained economic policy and with gross indifference towards the well-being of its people, Pakistan remains wallowing in abject poverty. It blunders on from day-to-day.

The world in general and the region in particular -- China, India and Bangladesh -- on its march towards development and progress has left Pakistan trailing behind, barely surviving on hand-outs, as it limps on from one day to another.

Therefore, it is time for bold decisions and brave initiatives, grappling with the situation with courage, grit and determination, putting all national resources to work. The suggestions made in this paper can be improved upon and there are many more aspects to the economic development that can be examined, but what has been stipulated in this document is the bare essential that must be executed at the earliest. ■



**By Lt. Gen. Naeem
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Difficult Choices

For Pakistan, a balancing act between the US-led Western bloc and the emerging Russia-China alliance is easier said than done

There are times in the history of nations when the golden rules of policies and strategies may become difficult to follow.

Pakistan, unfortunately seems to be passing through one such bad patch. Foreign policy gurus tell us that always maintain a balance while dealing with big powers. They tell us that don't fall in the lap of one to the chagrin of the other and keep the options open as diplomacy is not a black and white affair or a zero sum game.

However, one threatening question -- 'you are with us or against us?' -- forces us to put aside what we learnt from

Margenthau, Henry Kissinger and many other international relations professors, experts and practitioners.

Such is the time when the background knowledge of Political Science, International Relations, Art of Negotiations, Fundamentals of Strategy, How to Play Poker and Chess along with the robustness of heart and mind comes handy. This is also the time for introspection and realising the gaps in one person's or few persons' potentials, who ought to take momentous decisions under great constraints. In such times that the issue at hand must either immediately be hand-

ed over or discussed with the specialists of all the subjects mentioned above. Fortunately, our Foreign Office's senior personnel are trained and groomed to make cogent recommendations under such testing times, which also demand a robust democratic environment, stable economy and mature institutionalised decision-making mechanism.

But what if before raising such difficult questions the Great Power ensures softening of the ground by propping up a dictator, tying down the economy with the shackles of FATF, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and engineering internal and external security threats? This leaves no option for us but to move in a direction, which is set by these world powers. This may be a conjecture or a fact, but enough indicators exist for the people to make up their minds. Now let's revert to the main theme of the foreign policy choices available for our political leadership and other institutions.

No Escape from US & the West

Some analysts were duped into believing that the United States after exiting Afghanistan was no more interested in the region. This false belief was initially reinforced by some American pronouncements, but soon their continued interests in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan became obvious. So, 'Uncle Sam' is back in Pakistan with all its machinations. The two books 'Deadly Embrace' by Bruce Riedel and 'No Exit from Pakistan' by Daniel Markey, say it all.

And how could they leave Pakistan when they need to stem the Chinese economic and political strides in Central, West and South Asia. For this, the West is propping up India as a bulwark against China in the Region. Therefore, they don't want Pakistan to continue to remain an irritant for India. Washington also has strong reservations about Pakistan's role in forcing them to abandon its military campaign in Afghanistan. The United States would never allow the Taliban regime to continue strengthening its hold in Afghanistan peacefully.

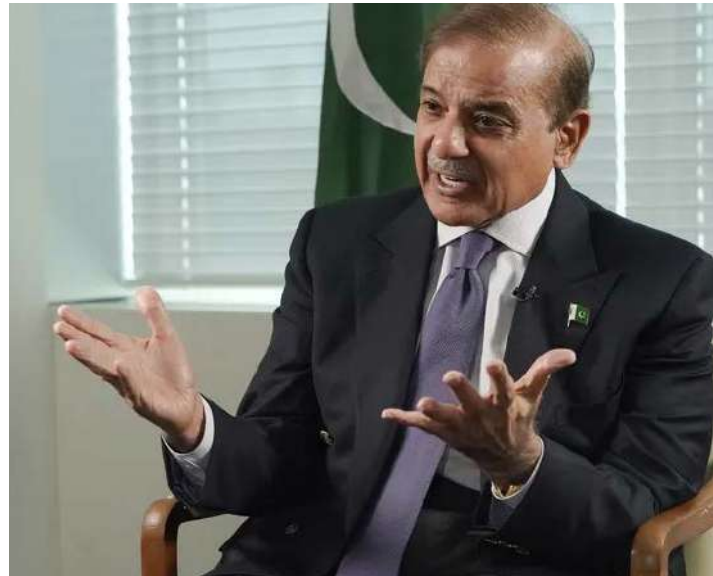
Pakistan's predicament is that nearly all our economic, political and social interests and ties are deeply embedded in the US, West Europe and Middle East. And these regions are so closely knit with each other that either we embrace them all or

lose them collectively. We definitely cannot afford that. Our destination of exports and manpower, badly required remittances, education, understanding of languages etc. -- are all indicative of the conclusion of the inevitability. Moreover, the influence of this bloc along with India can rub our nose through the FATF, the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation. The present precarious economic situation (that in my humble opinion has been fabricated through economic hit-men) makes our independent decision-making ability close to zero. So those who profess that for Pakistan there is no moving away from the Western Bloc are logically and factually correct.

Even if we are aware that the United States has always used and abandoned Pakistan at its sweet will, we can't do a dime about it. The problem remained

Even if we are aware that the United States has always used and abandoned Pakistan at its sweet will, we can't do a dime about it.

manageable as long as Washington kept allowing us or was unable to block us completely, to cultivate economic, military and political ties and interactions with China. Hats off to our Foreign Office that it kept a fine balance, and managed our interests very well. But going forward, it may be difficult if not impossible. Because presently all our core interests -- the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, relations with China, Russia, Afghanistan, Iran and the Central Asian Republics run counter to the American interests in the region.



Shehbaz Sharif – Ensuring a pliant Pakistan

We may be goaded to go soft on Kashmir and nurture good relations with India so as to remove any New Delhi's distractions from their common enemy, China. Some undercurrents indicating inclination towards recognition of Israel can also be easily discerned, to ease up tensions in the Middle East. We may again be in a situation to answer that difficult question; "You are with us or against us?"

Prospects of moving towards the East?

At the global level, the competition (conflict) between the United States and its allies and China-Russia Group is on and gaining momentum. The United States has already engaged a reluctant Russia militarily in the Ukraine Conflict and intends bleeding it economically, politically and militarily, but the main brunt being faced by hapless Ukrainians.

The US efforts to precipitate a military engagement with China in the Indo-Pacific by raking up the Taiwan issue has temporarily failed. But they are not likely to relent and are expected to make more serious provocations in the near future, before China becomes militarily formidable. The Chinese are following their own timelines and would be contended to keep assisting Russia to keep the United States and the West engaged in Ukraine. While this military muscle flexing is still on, Russo-Chinese Grouping is trying hard to make a dent in the World Economic Order in a way that they may escape the hegemony of Petro-Dollars



super powers geography may be less relevant, the distance of the American mainland should be a factor for us to consider during comparative studies.

The Silver Lining

For decision-makers, there are some glowing pointers to guide them through these tumultuous times. Within the Western Europe, Germany and to an extent France are not happy with the American hubristic behaviour. Turkey has shown its resistance to certain US dictates. Their leadership and public is openly exhibiting their abhorrence of Uncle Sam's Global hegemonic policies. Saudi Arabia, the leader of the Middle East Muslims, has shown annoyance more than once on certain American remarks. They are cultivating economic relations with Russia and China. Qatar is already showing positive overtures towards Iran and Afghanistan. Even India has defied few expectations of their new strategic ally, the United States, openly professing and pursuing their own national interests.

All this means that we have a good chance of escaping the gravity of magical trance so aptly woven around us by the United States, mainly by pushing us (our own inabilities made it happen) in the present vortex of economic meltdown. We may have to face a big socio economic shock while changing our own orientation towards the East without breaking away from the Middle East and some parts of Europe. However, it will enable us in the long run to ultimately sail into less choppy waters by embracing Iran, Afghanistan, the Central Asian states, China, Russia, and Turkey. India will remain a wild card that may also mellow down if we successfully build our dream around CPEC and BRI countries. Non-antagonist behaviour towards the United States is being suggested, as we can ill afford any such overt gesture. However, our efforts of shifting the foreign policy orientation will not be taken kindly. That we will have to bear as a tyranny of the times we are passing through. What has been painted and suggested is just a raw and dotted outline of prevailing scenarios and opportunities. This definitely needs to be refined in debates in more aware circles of academics of international relations, practitioners of Foreign Policy and strategists. Only a humble contribution as a teaser idea has been floated. ■

and unilateral sanctions.

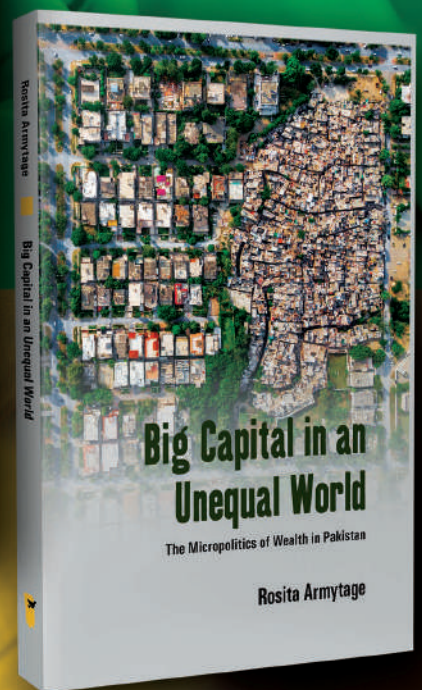
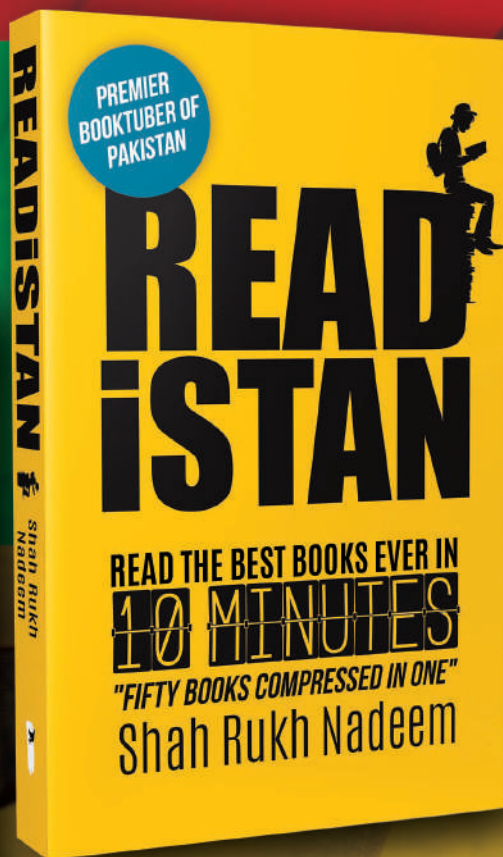
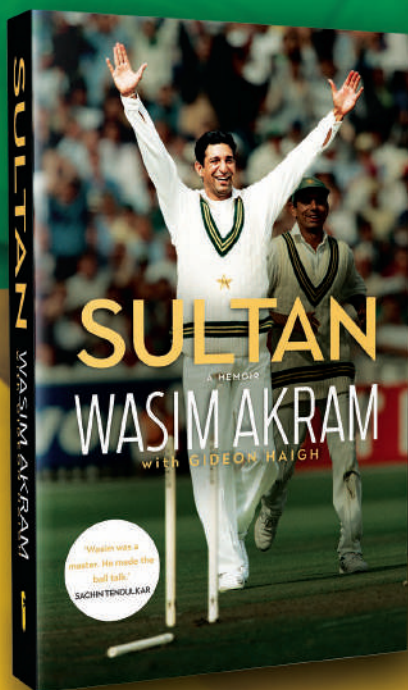
This effort to modify the regime of dollars and at least partially replace it by other means augers well with most of the debt-ridden and sanctioned poor and developing countries. But it is going to take time. And as this politico-economic conflict rages without any final outcome, this interim period has put many nations across the globe in an economic turmoil with far reaching political ramifications. Pakistan is clearly one of the leading victims of this environment. And our choices of tilting towards the East have to be seen in this context. Big Powers are expanding their political and economic influences by various policies and strategies. Belligerent America and Revisionist China have made our choices limited and difficult. In an endeavour to avoid a direct clash with the United States, China is not in a mood to salvage its allies and partners (except maybe Russia) from the debilitating impact of the impending economic and political turmoil. The cases of Sri Lanka and Pakistan says it all -- especially when the inept leadership of such countries (like our own) could not foresee what was happening to them economically and psychologically through employment of economic hit-men and the perception management techniques, ensuring a near meltdown situation. This leaves apparently no option for Pakistan but to look towards the United States.

Geography and history must never be forgotten while employing geopolitics. China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, the

Effort to modify the regime of dollars and at least partially replace it by other means augers well with most of the debt-ridden and sanctioned poor and developing countries.

Central Asian Republics, Russia and the Middle East -- all are within our geographical vicinity. This is a huge region with nearly half the world's population and about a third of the global wealth, if not more. Nurturing good relations with all of them can open wide economic and political vistas and it is not difficult at all except probably for the intransigence of India. China, the emerging new super power, has had an excellent history of relations with Pakistan. And now as they are expanding their economic influence, this remains the best time to stick around with them. Antagonising China to appease Washington would be a monumental blunder under the changing global environment. The US-Pakistan history of relations has been chequered and with high and low spikes. In other words, it is highly unreliable to put it bluntly. Though for

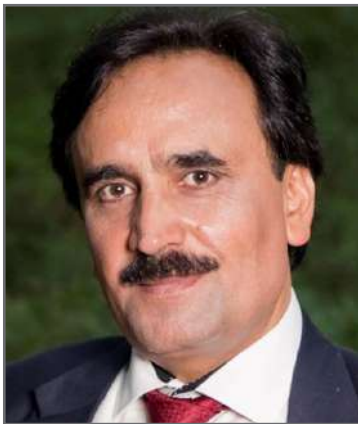
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By Abdullah Khan

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

DAESH & Afghanistan's New 'Great Game'

Rowing activities of DAESH in Afghanistan is also a bad news for Pakistan

On September 5, 2022, a suicide bomber detonated himself near the entrance of Russian Embassy in Kabul, killing around 25 people, including two Russian nationals -- an assistant secretary and a security guard. DAESH Khorasan (Afghanistan) claimed responsibility of the suicide bombing, saying that it was carried out by Waqas Al-Muhajir - apparently a non-Afghan militant. In its statement, DAESH clearly mentioned that the target was the Russian Embassy.

The attack was the first against any

diplomatic mission after the Taliban took control of the war-torn country in August 2021. Russia was among those few countries, which did not close diplomatic missions after the Taliban's return to Kabul.

After their return to power, the Taliban launched a brutal crackdown against DAESH in a bid to crush the group. But so far, the rulers of Kabul have not been successful in achieving this desired goal.

Since the Taliban's seizure of power, the DAESH claimed around 250 attacks in Afghanistan. Thirty-five of these have

been high-profile and significant than the others. The main targets of ISIS in Afghanistan remain the Taliban commanders, the government officials and minorities, especially the Shi'ite Hazaras. However, the group also fired rockets against Uzbekistan and Tajikistan besides stepping up its activities in Pakistan too.

It was widely believed in Pakistan and Afghanistan that DAESH had been receiving active support from the Americans as well as Afghan intelligence during the previous regime. However, when the United States started negotiating with the Taliban, it shared some intelligence against DAESH and a secret counter terrorism cooperation was developed between the two former foes.

Perhaps at that time Washington was eager to please the Taliban to avoid attacks against withdrawing US-led NATO troops. It seemed that the United States had lost interest in Afghanistan and shifted its focus to the South-China Sea. After the Russian special operations started in Ukraine earlier this year, the US and its allies were forced to reshuffle their priorities. Instead of China, Russia became their major pressing problem.

The US and its allies are looking to open multiple fronts against Russia. The United States with the help of Türkiye has allegedly transported hundreds of DAESH fighters from Syria and Iraq to Ukraine. The Russian government has openly accused Washington of transporting DAESH fighters to Ukraine's Donbas region. Money is pouring in for DAESH operations in Afghanistan from Syria and Iraq, too.

According to the UN reports, at least half a million dollars were sent by DAESH central command to its Khorasan chapter last year. The primary objective of DAESH is to upset the improved security situation in Afghanistan and create a conducive environment for the militant groups to operate from the Afghan soil.

It was evident since March 2022 that the United States is eager to come back to the region with its combat operations. It claimed a drone strike on July 31 in Kabul to target Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the leader of Al-Qaeda. Since then, the US drones are seen regularly hovering Afghan skies. The Afghan Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob even accused Pakistan of providing air-space to the US drones.



A massive blast was reported in vicinity of Russian embassy in Kabul.

The renewed US combat engagements in Afghanistan will have serious consequences for Russia, China and Pakistan.

According to local sources, a US drone carried out another strike in Kabul's Dehmazang area during the night between September 2-3, 2022 in which two key Al-Qaeda leaders Abu Hassan and Hamza Al-Shahab along with four Taliban fighters were killed. However, the Taliban's Ministry of Interior claimed that the explosions were because of two rockets fired on the buildings, and there was no new drone strike. But locals and independent analysts reject the Taliban claims. Interestingly, the reported US drone strike occurred barely 3.0 kilometers from the Russian Embassy and that too, just two days before the suicide attack on it.

It is also interesting that the Afghan Taliban's tone towards the United States is now very mild. It seems that the Islamic militia is more keen to have good relations with Washington compared to the other key powers of the region.

The renewed US combat engagements in Afghanistan will have serious consequences for Russia, China and

Pakistan. As Ukraine is being made another 'Afghanistan' for Russia, Afghanistan itself is being pushed to revive anti-Russia violent activities. DAESH in this regard may be used to destabilize Afghanistan, which will eventually create an environment where militant groups from Central Asian States can thrive.

The weakened Taliban would not be able to control their allied Central Asian militants. In the wake of mounting pressure from DAESH and NRF, the Taliban need support of these militants. There are growing concerns in Islamabad that defections in the Taliban ranks in the north are paving the way for a turmoil there, which is gradually spreading to the south and east too.

A prominent Hazara Taliban commander, Molvee Mahdi, had defected some months ago and started to fight against the ruling militia in Balkhab in Saraipul province.

In mid-August, the Taliban claimed that he was arrested and then killed near the Afghan-Iran border when he was trying to flee out of the country. Some sources claim that Iran handed him over to the Taliban, which shows that so far Tehran is in a cooperative mood with Kabul. Some Uzbek Taliban commanders in Faryab and Jozjan and Tajik commanders in Takhar and Badakhshan are parting ways with the Pashtun-dominated Taliban government.

The rifts between the Kandhari group and the Haqqanis are also growing. The situation will consume a lot of resources and attention of the Taliban leadership to



deal with the challenges emerging from inside. The DAESH, meanwhile, will keep flourishing. The forces who once again want to turn Afghanistan's peace into violence are supporting ISIS in the region. Despite the Taliban's consistent crackdown against DAESH, the group not only sustained the onslaught, but has spread its activities in almost the entire country which was not possible without active external support.

Sources in Islamabad claimed that despite India's overtures towards the Taliban, the links of Indian intelligence with DAESH are still intact.

India, being the strategic ally of the United States, is eager to sabotage the Chinese Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), including CPEC. China and Russia remain the ultimate target of the new great game being unfolded from the Afghan soil.

From the Russian perspective, another Ukraine-like front is being opened to its South. As the Russian security forces are getting stretched due to protracted conflict in Ukraine, the objective is to create unrest in Central Asia and then in the name of counter-terrorism, the US and its allies may increase their footprints there to limit Moscow's military influence in the region.

In May 2022, the head of Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) Molvi Abdul Haq Turkistan was spotted in northern Afghanistan. He along with another TIP leader, Abdus Salam, were seen in a video released by the group on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr. Previously, he was believed to

Despite India's overtures towards the Taliban, the links of Indian intelligence with DAESH are still intact.

have migrated to Syria where most of the Uighur militants are present these days.

The return of the top leadership of the Uighur militant group to Afghanistan is an indication that a new front against China is also being worked out. Although TIP (ETIM) is an ally of the Taliban and played a significant role in conquering northern parts of the country, the Afghan ruling militia had now reportedly relocated majority of its fighters from Badakhshan to eastern and central parts of Afghanistan last year.

The TIP was also asked to keep a low profile as the Taliban wants to have cordial relations with China and do not want to allow the Afghan soil to be used against it. Curbs on the TIP and other Uighur militants in Afghanistan are leading some defections in the group. Now the Chinese militants are also joining DAESH. The defections taking place in the north are gradually creating an environment, where such groups will have more impunity to operate.

ISKP's propaganda channels in many languages such as Arabic, Pashtu, Persian, Urdu and Tajik is the highest number of channels by any regional branch of DAESH. The group is attracting more Jihadi fighters to its ranks. The internal rifts among the Taliban will further strengthen the group. A sizable number of fighters of the group belong to Uzbek and Tajik ethnicities. The group has shown its clear intent to spread its operations into Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, while it has already stepped up its operations in Pakistan. The Taliban have failed to contain the group. So far DAESH has sustained the Taliban onslaught successfully and is now hitting back. With the money and men coming from Syria and Iraq and tacit support from the major anti-Russia and anti-China forces, the group is expected to enhance its influence and activities in the region. The group appears much more lethal than Al-Qaeda. However, its policy of banking upon the Salafi school of thought in the region is backfiring and that's perhaps the sole reason that DAESH so far remains unable to attract fighters in large numbers. However, this policy can be changed any time due to pragmatic and practical reasons. If a Hanafi leader is appointed as head of DAESH in the region, that will be devastating for regional security as most of the militant groups operating in South Asia and Afghanistan belong to the Hanafi-Deobandi sect.

DAESH will step up attacks against the Taliban, and especially its top leaders in the coming months. It has clearly shown that the top leadership of the Taliban is its primary target in Afghanistan. The group is expected to further step up its activities in Pakistan too. There are indications that apart from KP, it is also focusing on the Balochistan province.

Regional cooperation is more important to deal with this growing threat. However, until and unless the vested interests of the great powers are not properly comprehended, any effective mechanism to eliminate the threat cannot be worked out.

A pertinent question remains that when will Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) prove its worth to deal with the security threats to its member countries? The room left by the regional powers is supposed to be filled by the non-regional powers. ■

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GO INDIA
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**By Dr. Imtiaz
A. Khan**

*The writer hails from
Indian Occupied
Kashmir and teaches
at The George
Washington University.*

Occupied Kashmir Bleeds

Although the precarious food and economic situation of Pakistan is understandable, sacrifices made by Kashmiris should not be bartered for onions and tomatoes

On August 5, 2019, Articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution that provide special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir were abrogated. These actions made the state's own Constitution, that protected the demographic character, inoperative. This was done with mala-fide intentions, meticulous planning and nefarious designs. On this date there was also the infusion of additional paramilitary and regular forces into the state, taking their number to one million. All the Hurriyat leadership was incarcerated and even politicians like Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, who in the past were in cahoots with the Indian government, were arrested.

Thousands of young men ranging from 15 to 35 years were picked from their homes and locked in different prisons of India. Most of them continue to languish there in sub-human conditions. The goal was to create a fear-psychosis within the population, and to convey the message that any person showing semblance of resistance will be dealt with brute force.

Once the changes were firmly entrenched, the plan to undergo numerical alterations in the population of the region, was embarked upon. At present, the state is directly ruled by New Delhi through a handpicked Lieutenant Governor, who is responsible to execute the orders of the Home Ministry. The ministry is headed by Amit Shah, a notorious politician whose

criminal activities against Muslims in Gujrat riots of 2004, are well documented.

Those of us who have visited Kashmir prior to 2019, will notice observable differences in the situation of the region. The airports are crowded with Hindu fundamentalists, and you will be hard-pressed to find a local passenger or vendor catering to the needs of tourists. Similarly, you have Hindu settlers being housed in government-provided accommodations and these people are in line to receive the certificate of residency. The bureaucracy has been totally overhauled and all high-level positions in the civil secretariat and police force are occupied by Hindus brought from India. Recently, one highly respected Kashmiri American visited the valley and met the local people from different walks of life. The observations made on the basis of this visit are well corroborated by others who have been to the region. What has been noted is severe repression, undaunted efforts to change the demographic character of the region and forcing people to subjugation to the extent they shudder to even think of protesting against the grievous abuses inflicted on them. Brief description of the violations applied by the Indian government is as follows:

1. Freedom of press remains blocked: Press is totally muzzled. Anybody writing against the occupation forces based on facts is slapped with draconian Unlawful Public Activity Act (ULPA) and subsequently imprisoned without any judicial reprieve.

2. Cordon and search operations are held on a daily basis in all areas of occupied land to create an atmosphere of fear and to arrest or kill youth. During this process, properties are destroyed, women molested and youngsters are especially targeted.

3. All the top-level government positions are held by Hindus from India and local Kashmiri officials are being marginalized.

4. With the influx of a large population of Hindus from India, local Kashmiris find it difficult to compete even for the lower positions in the government.

5. Institutions that were previously under the jurisdiction of IOK (Indian occupied Kashmir) Government are now run by New Delhi and there is assiduous effort to increase the number of Hindu applicants into Medical and Engineering colleges. Jammu Kashmir Bank that used



Those of us who have visited Kashmir prior to 2019 will notice observable differences in the situation of the region.

to provide an avenue of employment for the local population has been heavily Indianized and filled with Hindus from India.

6. Any financial transaction taking place in administrative sector has to go through Reserve Bank of India

7. Agricultural land is being destroyed by constructing unnecessary roads entirely for transportation of occupation forces.

8. The apple production, main source of income for occupied Kashmiris, is systematically being decimated by many oppressive measures like delaying the harvest and impeding the transportation so that fruit gets destroyed in the process.

9. Under a well-planned scheme measures are adopted by which local businesses are systematically transferred to Indian Hindus.

10. Revenue records are being tampered clandestinely to change the ownership of commercial properties from Muslims to Hindus of India.

11. Major activity to change the demographics of IOK is the rapid issuance of domicile certificates, and gerrymandering like application of settler colonial laws

like delimitation.

It is very disappointing for the people of Kashmir that these violations are continuing in an unabated manner and India appears succeeding in its evil design and the silence of the International community in this regard, is reprehensible.

Pakistan, notwithstanding the current political and economic quagmire, could play an important role in highlighting the crimes against humanity committed against Kashmiri people.

In this regard, it is important to note that national security of the country cannot be compromised due to the economic crisis.

I am pretty sure that both military and political leadership of Pakistan will not demur to protect the country against external invasion, in case it happens. We Kashmiris were always told that Kashmir is the jugular vein of Pakistan and the country is incomplete without its inclusion. That would make Kashmir an issue in the dimension of national security of Pakistan. The current stand of the country as regards to repression of Kashmiris do not authenticate these claims.

Although the previous government had taken a stand that talks with India cannot be re-started until the decisions of August 5, 2019 are reversed, at present there are strong voices emerging from Pakistan to establish business relations with India. Although the precarious food and economic situation of Pakistan is understandable, sacrifices made by Kashmiris should not be bartered for onions and tomatoes. This will be a colossal betrayal to Kashmiris and send the wrong message to the world. ■



Indian Aggression & Kashmiri Muslims

In the latest move, India is now depriving Kashmiri Muslims of their livelihoods and businesses

By Dr. Imtiaz A. Khan

The macabre cycle of violence unleashed by the Indian occupation forces in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir continues unabated. The total and veritable amalgamation of the region to the Indian dominion is being pursued at a break-neck speed as the world is oblivious to these radical changes that are being made in contravention to the International agreements and laws. The rate at which India is modifying the rules in occupied Kashmir, it is predicted that within the next year or two the demographic character, political landscape and

property ownership in the region will be substantially altered and holding of plebiscite will become inconsequential. People who have visited the valley recently are aghast at the transformation that has occurred and the region from the point of entry resembles the holy Hindu city of Varanasi or Mathura rather than alluring picturesque visuals it presented in the not so distant past.

Grotesquely tragic experiences of the inhabitants of IOK (Indian occupied Kashmir) at the hands of occupation forces have been well documented and Khurram Parvez (who is currently incarcerated in a notorious Indian jail) has done a yeoman's service for this cause. In the exhaustive report presented by Khurram and few others, the independ-

ence movement gained momentum in late 1989. This was triggered by the emergence of young Kashmiri leadership like Yasin Malik, Shabir Shah, Ashfaq Majid, who were convinced about the mala-fide intentions of the successive Indian governments and their nefarious designs to renege on the promise to uphold the UN resolutions in the territory. The peaceful resistance was met with overwhelming force and brutal assassinations in which youth were especially targeted. To sum it up, in the last three decades, the Indian forces have murdered about 130,000 youth, and gang-raped 11,300 Kashmiri women. Moreover, there are thousands of missing persons who were picked up by the armed forces. In a survey conducted by an Indian-born academician in the

United States, thousands of mass graves were discovered and the investigation could not be completed as the Indian government booted her out of the country and cancelled the visa.

All the above happened under the watch of the Congress regime. Its policy was to meet the resistance with overwhelming force and crush the voices of independence. In 2014, the Congress government was replaced by the extreme rightist, Hindu fundamentalist party, called the BJP. Its strings are controlled by the Hindu extremist RSS that serves as the ideological fountainhead, believing that anybody residing in India has to embrace Hinduism. Under Prime Minister Narinder Modi, who is assisted by two hardline Hindu extremists, Home



Minister Amit Shah and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval a plan was formulated by which the IOK would be stripped of its autonomous character and brought directly under the central rule. This plan was brought into action on August 5, 2019 when article 370 and 35-A were abrogated as two hundred thousand additional troops were deployed in the area and about 10,000 youth as young as 15 were whisked away from their homes and lodged with hardened criminals in various Indian jails.

The larger game plan of the BJP government is to change the demographic character of this Muslim-majority region so that the occupied territory becomes a Hindu majority state. In this regard, hundreds of thousands of Hindu fanatics from India have been provided residential status and the government is breaking all the barriers to facilitate them to acquire immovable property. Under the garb of discovering new Hindu religious sites, thousands of Hindus are being transported

in the last three decades, the Indian forces have murdered about 130,000 youth, and gang-raped 11,300 Kashmiri women.

every month and efforts are made to build permanent settlements for their convenience. It is important to note that till recently about six lakh kanals of agricultural/horticulture land was under the unauthorized occupation of the Indian Army. These measures have proved to be a serious blow for the local population, who earn their livelihood from horticulture that amounts to 9.0 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Draconian laws have been introduced which allow the oc-

cupation forces to grab private property without any legal recourse for the owner. Recently, the Indian government decided to cancel the lease of hoteliers and resort owners in the prime areas of tourist attractions like Gulmarg and Pahalgam. These individuals have invested substantial finances and labour to develop tourist infrastructure in these areas and their efforts have provided thousands of jobs to the local population. This iniquitous action is intended to distribute the property to Hindu outsiders and deprive the locals of the much-needed livelihood. This will further aggravate the situation for the locals, who are already suffering because of the growing unemployment. According to reliable sources, the Indian government plans to expand this land grab operation, or economic terrorism, soon to other areas, and the local population would be restricted to ghettos.

Although over the years numerous incisive articles on the issue of Kashmir occupation have been inked, they have failed to gain attention of the international community. During the decades of intrusion, incursion and invasion of this disputed territory, the repeated pleas to the United Nations have fallen on deaf ears as this protracted problem continues to fester threatening regional and world peace. As a Kashmiri, I find the role of the United Nations disappointing. The UN has just become a paper tiger that dances to the tune of superpowers. The role of the OIC (the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation)



has been restricted to issuing mere statements with no result-yielding practical measures. In the current situation, the most disenchanting is the role of Pakistan -- one of the important stakeholders. It is agonizing to say that Islamabad's vision regarding IoK is misplaced, misconstrued and sluggish. Unfortunately, Kashmir watchers have to admit that Indian skulduggery and chicanery has succeeded, while the Pakistani Foreign Office has miserably failed to draw the world's attention to the plight of the Kashmiris. The unrealistic belief of the successive Pakistani government that holding occasional demonstrations in their capital and some other cities on February 5 or October 27 will yield results is puerile and unrealistic. Although it may not be the view of the majority of Kashmiris, a sizable number of them believe that Pakistani politicians have betrayed their cause. This kind of thinking may be a stretch, but these apprehensions are not unfounded.

A glaring example in support of this argument is the episode when former premier Nawaz Sharif visited India during his third stint in power and on the advice of his Indian business partners, he did not meet Hurriyat leadership including stalwarts like Syed Ali Shah Geelani. To the chagrin of Kashmiris, some Pakistani politicians continue to partner with India in business deals undermining their national interests and even their country's honour and pride. The proponents of extending commercial ties with India should remember that trade between the two countries is fostered by a conducive environment, trust and certitude. They

When former premier Nawaz Sharif visited India during his third stint in power and on the advice of his Indian business partners, he did not meet Hurriyat leadership including stalwarts like Syed Ali Shah Geelani. To the chagrin of Kashmiris, some Pakistani politicians continue to partner with India in business deals undermining their national interests

should remember if a cracker bursts in a remote corner of India, the agencies will not blink to blame the intelligence agencies of Pakistan. Unless the Kashmir issue is resolved, trade relations with India would remain a far cry.

It is also important to mention that the former Army Chief of Pakistan,

General Qamar Javed Bajwa issued statements in support for peaceful relations with India. Before issuing friendly overtures, the General should have taken into consideration the jingoistic statements emerging from New Delhi where there are no takers of peace and even mere talks with Pakistan. It is hard to believe that the General was unmindful of the policy detrimental to the interests of Pakistan being followed by the Indian leadership. What was aggravating for the people of Kashmir was the General's statement that "past should be buried." He may find comfort in these utterances, but people of Kashmir are not prepared to condone and bury the massacre of their youth or mass rape of their women by Indian forces.

The young foreign Minister of Pakistan Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari may receive plaudits for his recent exuberance and verbal dual with his Indian counterpart, but with due compliments to him, unfortunately such words are not a substitute to a cohesive Kashmir policy which Pakistan desperately needs. Jingoism or war of words has limited utility in international diplomacy and state relations. What will work is a firm and well-thought-out persistent short- and long-term policy aimed at countering the Indian propaganda and dis-information campaign as well as highlighting the Kashmir cause. Unless the world opinion changes, mere words and token protests will not provide succor to the sufferings of the people of Kashmir.

In fairness to the foreign Minister he alone is not to be blamed as the successive Pakistani governments have adopted a haphazard and slapdash approach on this issue. Perhaps, the minister should take lessons from some of the foreign policy gurus, who understand the complexity of the problem. It should be understood by not tackling the issue of IoK, Pakistan is not doing favor to people of that region. Larger plan of India is not to stop here, but usurp Azad Kashmir as well as Gilgit-Baltistan. Furthermore, there will be serious attempts to invigorate the secessionist movement in Balochistan. Undoubtedly, Pakistan faces an existential threat never contemplated or witnessed in the past. I hope that both the civilian and military leadership of Pakistan -- despite their internal conflicts -- rise to the occasion and defeat the heinous and evil designs of the Indian establishment. Like any Kashmiri, I can only pray for this to happen. ■



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By Munazza Siddiqui

The writer is an executive producer, Geo News and editor of Jang - The Economist annual edition.

Murders We Wrote Off

Diyat law perhaps makes Pakistan the only country where the rich are given legal immunity from murder as long as they can afford to pay blood-money

The Shehbaz Sharif-led coalition government is leaving no stone unturned in reminding the world of its duty to compensate Pakistan for the unprecedented severity of recent floods that wreaked death and devastation across one-third of the country.

These appeals would have packed more punch had the government deemed it equally urgent to ensure that the killers of 27-year-old journalist Nazim Jokhio don't get to buy their way out of punishment with the help of the controversial Diyat (blood money) law.

This young man was a whistle-blower, an eco-martyr killed for exposing the illegal hunting of the endangered Houbara Bustards in Thatta, Sindh. His tortured body was found at the farmhouse of a member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly Jam Awais, who belongs to the Sindh's ruling Pakistan People's Party.

Almost a year has passed since Nazim

Jokhio's murder, yet the trials of his family are far from over. Officially, his heirs have pardoned Jam Awais and five of his henchmen in the name of Allah and without accepting any Diyat. But according to media news, the forsaken family has been paid four to five crore rupees as blood money.

Given reports of alleged threats and intimidation faced by the mother, wife and young children of Nazim Jokhio over the last one year, this didn't come as a surprise. What is surprising, however, is that courts don't seem inclined to reinterpret and invoke section 311 of the Pakistan Penal Code which empowers them to convict a person despite compromise (Diyat).

This particular section of the law is based on the principle of "fasad-fil-arz" (mischief on earth). The definition of "fasad-fil-arz" in Section 299 of the PPC includes "the brutal or shocking manner in which the offence has been committed which is outrageous to the public conscience..." It means any crime that sabo-

tages or undermines peace on Earth, be it terror or terror from spilled blood. Nazim Jokhio was killed for trying to protect Mother Nature. It doesn't get more "fasad-fil-arz" than this, the case is literally mischief on earth.

The various ups and downs in the case highlight how the rich and powerful are easily able to drag cases on for so long that the victim's family is left with no choice but to eventually relent and forgive the killer with or without blood money. As far as the court is concerned, Nazim Jokhio's family forgave the killers, for free. This means that officially no Diyat has been paid, and the court doesn't seem to have a problem with that.

What's more, the principal accused, the MPA, Jam Awais was nominated in the FIR and witnesses in their initial statements implicated him in the crime, yet the Investigating Officer (IO), instead of collecting evidence, recommended the court to discharge him because he's been forgiven by the victim's family. The court took the IO to task, but the point remains that in a system already stacked against them, what chance do the innocent stand when investigating officers become a mouthpiece for the rich and powerful. Can't help but mention that this is the third IO in the case, the victim's family obviously doesn't have the clout or money to get IOs changed.

As far as the court is concerned, no money changed hands in exchange for the pardon. What kind of justice is that and why is that not a legal consideration! Nazim Jokhio feared for his life and made a video a few days before his death in which he named the people who eventually killed him. He made the video because he wanted the state to protect him for doing the right thing. The state failed him. He made the video because he wanted the perpetrators to be brought to justice in case something happened to him. The video is evidence that he didn't want his killers to go scot free by paying off his heirs. It's been a year since then. Again, the state is allowing the perpetrators to drag on the case in court. True, the video is not evidence and justice has to be blind, but do we also have to be blind to the wishes of a dead man reaching out from his grave.

A much ignored irony is that the very lawmaker who is supposed to help make laws to uphold justice is trying to benefit from one of the most ill-conceived and



Nazim Jokhio's killing was anything but accidental, it was premeditated and deeply intentional.

hastily approved law; a law that damaged the basis of our criminal jurisprudence by turning even murder into tort. A tort is a transgression between two individuals with the state under no legal obligation to put its foot down. Our Diyat Law has made murder an offence against the victim's family, not an offense against the state. Unlike states, however, family members can be beaten, broken or bought as usually happens in the Islamic Republic.

The acquittal of Shahrukh Jatoi and his accomplices in the Shahzeb Khan murder is another in-your-face example of how the Diyat law is misused and help acquit a man sentenced to death for brazenly taking a life.

In the recent Zaitoon Bibi verdict, the Supreme Court historically noted why brothers never gift away their inheritance, why is it always the sisters. In the same vein, why do the weak almost always opt for Diyat (monetary compensation) and not Qisas (an eye-for-an-eye)?

It's elementary; there's a fundamental flaw in the Qisas and Diyat Law: the absence of State's role in determining the applicability of Diyat. Murder is a violation of the state's law, so how is it that the Law of Diyat has come to supersede law of the country. We are perhaps the only country where the rich are given legal immunity from murder as long as they can afford to pay blood-money. This law only and only benefits the rich, and is hence in direct breach of the Constitution.

One of the religious basis for Diyat is to ensure matters don't get violent or drag on in case of accidental death or involuntary murder. Nazim Jokhio's killing was anything but accidental, it was premeditated and deeply intentional.

"Whoever takes a life -- unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land -- it will be as if they killed all of humanity" (5:32). This verse of the Holy Quran should ensure that forgiveness for heinous crimes like murder flow from the "community or its legal organs (state) and not the victim's heirs".

As punishment for murder has been legally watered down, even the ruling Pakistan People's Party of Sindh hasn't deemed it ethically necessary to suspend or remove its accused lawmaker Jam Awais, currently in jail. Let's also not forget that the federal environment minister is also from the Pakistan People's Party.

Earth's ecology is only as strong as its weakest link. Planting trees alone will never, ever suffice if animals and birds facing extinction are not protected. And Houbara Bustards will go extinct if they continue to be used as a foreign policy concession in whatever geo-political empire we are trying to build on our planet at the cost of the very planet.

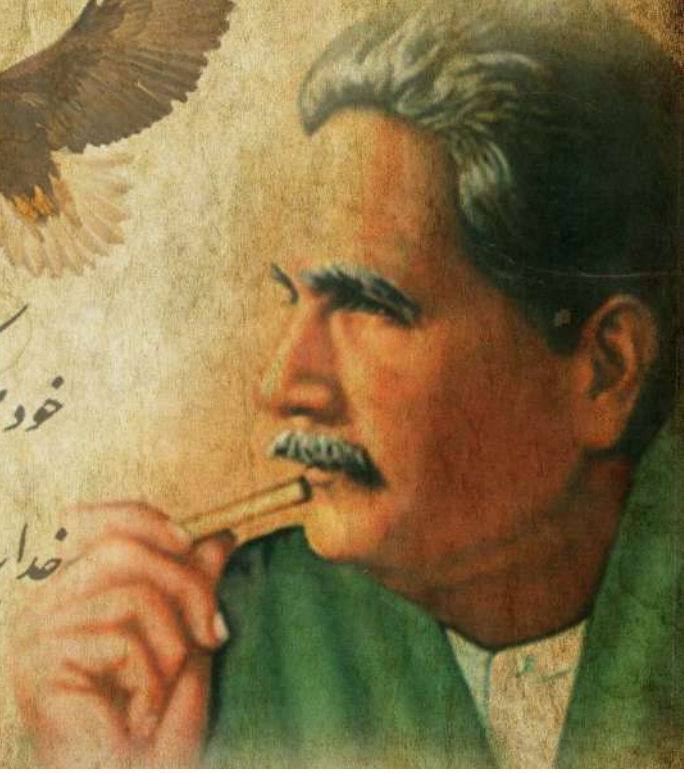
The world knows we are not responsible for the current deterioration of our climate, but we are definitely responsible for protecting the lives and legacy of our eco-warriors. If the killers of Nazim Jokhio are not brought to justice, environmental crimes will only increase because whistle-blowers will be too scared to come forward, and that will play right into the hands of the powerful mafias.

Nazim Jokhio's murder is a national tragedy and a crime against the state. If he's not provided justice, will Pakistan be in a moral position to expect environmental justice for itself. ■

Essay



خودی گو کہ ملت دنیا کہ تہمت دیر سے پہلے
خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری ضحالیامی



By Tahir Mehmood

*The writer is a student of human history. He has authored two books: **A Lone Long Walk and Where Clouds Meet.***

Iqbal's 'Khudi' as Creative National Power

Iqbal's message needs to be explained and understood in the current context

If ever there exists a constant factor in the history of human race, it is nothing but phenomenon of 'change,' which has its manifestation in the form of continuous evolution. Leaving aside the physical realm of the things, the domain of the idea and thought is always and ever evolving.

In the domain of religious thought, often the new interpretations are made to allow the zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) to make its way, whereas in case of human idea, the continuous process of addition, deletion or supersession is always underway. The famous thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic process by German

philosopher Friedrich Hegel explains one manifestation of this continuous evolutionary progression. One fundamental reason for this behavior is attributed to the limits of idea and the thinker vis-à-vis time and space dimension of life of human race itself.

Consciously or unconsciously a thinker is partially, if not wholly responds to the phenomena prevailing in a particular age that in some way is constrained by space itself. Alluding to this change phenomenon, Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal writes in the preface of his most famous compilation of lectures, 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,' as:

“It must, however, be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it.”

Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, published by Sang-e-Meel Publishers, page 8).

ہاتھ پہ اللہ کا، بندہ مومن کا ہاتھ
غالب و کار آفرین، کارگشا، کار ساز

یہ کائنات ابھی ناتمام ہے شاید
کہ آربی پدمادم صدائے کن فیکوں

Iqbal is not only the most celebrated poet in the sub-continent, but also a philosopher-thinker for the Muslims. Many draw inspiration and meaning of life - both individually and collectively -- from his poetry. He is one of the founding fathers of Pakistan. His poetry and thought played a fundamental role to nurture a resolve among the Muslims of the sub-continent to unite and throw away the yoke of slavery during the British Raj and create a separate homeland for themselves.

‘Khudi’ (ego or egohood) among others was a key message of Iqbal to his nation, which lacked the materialistic wherewithal to stand up and break the shackles imposed by the British colonial power and a dominant Hindu-majority.

Iqbal’s man of ‘khudi’ was so highly empowered by his self-actualization that despite lack of wealth and material power, he possessed an iron will and he could withstand, fight and win against heavy odds. In the times of colonial subjugation and predominance of Machiavellian politics by the Hindu-majority, this man relying on iron will won independence by offering huge sacrifices. However, Iqbal’s message of ‘khudi’ was not limited to that particular pre-independence age, and is valid beyond time and space for any universal man or nation that by espousing the agency of supreme power i.e., khudi (attaining highest power, remains at the pinnacle stage in evolution of ‘khudi’ and no base desire or challenge could con-

strain it). Since ‘khudi’ is not mere an abstract idea but a power that affects the worldly affairs of the man, it remains relevant to the spirit of the age i.e., zeitgeist, and will be path to success and glory whenever applied accordingly.

Notwithstanding above, many of Iqbal verses due to peculiar environment of first half of 20th century’s subcontinent politics and people, emphasize an aspect of ‘khudi’ which shuns away the material power of wealth and military means, and fundamentally prepares a man with an iron will to withstand against the challenges posed by the life itself.

This man in common understanding appears somewhat a ‘dervish,’ a minimalist in desires and needs, not interested in wealth, prefers being frugal and devoid of material means to life, and does not need any or modern equipment to fight his war.

Below are a few examples of such verses which are very popular in our national life and still taken in same literal sense when we were under colonial power in the pre-Partition era:

میرا طریق امیری نہیں فقیری ہے
خودی نہ بیچ، غریبی میں نام پیدا کر

اُس قوم کو شمشیر کی حاجت نہیں رہتی
بو جس کے جوانو کی خودی صورت فولاد

خودی ہو زندہ تو ہے فقر بھی شہنشاہی
نہیں ہے سنجرو طغرل سے کم شکوہ فقیر

کافر ہے تو شمشیر پہ کرتا ہے بھروسا
مومن ہے تو بے تیغ بھی لڑتا ہے سپاہی

There are numerous such verses which place more emphasis on will-power than the worldly means -- monetary wealth or military equipment. This was a very potent message for a community, waging a Herculean struggle against the wealthy and mighty powers -- the British and the Hindu-majority.

Even today, when such a verse is read without the full grasp of its meaning, it appeals to our youth to idealize the man of ‘khudi’, who appears to abhor being rich and prefers to live in poverty -- almost re-

‘Khudi’ (ego or egohood) among others was a key message of Iqbal to his nation, which lacked the materialistic wherewithal to stand up and break the shackles imposed by the British colonial power and a dominant Hindu-majority.

nouncing all the worldly needs. For some simple minds, this can translate into being uninterested in any kind of invention or innovation -- vital in day-to-day routine modern life - and not relying on material means of modern warfare and equipment, and instead banking on the sword. This type of interpretation of ‘Khudi’ evokes an image of a hermit and a lone warrior.

Such traits when found in a man can be sparingly celebrated, but when adopted by a nation, living in the abundant age of 21st century, it can lead to poverty and weakness. If the 19th century can be called the age of colonization, and the 20th century as age of ideologies and revolution, the 21st century can be aptly called as an age of consumerism and consumption, technological innovations and material abundance. Today’s yardstick of power is not the number in armies alone, but added emphasis is on trade surplus, industrial growth, scientific and technological innovations, and provision of services to a world population, preferring luxury and comfort than pursuing any other goal in individual or collective life. This spirit of age is so pervasive that any denial to it, will be the denial of power, and in many ways add to reliance on others; and in fact becomes death of ‘khudi’ when begging and borrowing is adopted for survival as a nation.



Iqbal's poetry has a message for the young and the old alike.

Today, when such verses are read with fervor by our youth without understanding their full meaning, there always remain enough possibilities that subconsciously a hatred towards wealth-generation become part of the collective national thought, and in the same vein discarding all modern developments, technical advances and innovations, including the military ones, get into our national psyche.

We, as a nation, will have to first understand in the intellectual domain and then adopt in our national life that the context under which these verses were written when we read them in the 21st century. Now we are an independent nation, which confronts economic and military challenges of its own age. The zeitgeist of this age is different than first-half of the 20th century; at that time it was the struggle for liberation, and now it is preserving our freedom by our financial and military might. Breaking the shackles of slavery through unflinching resistance was one aspect of our national life, and it now must be replaced by great powers of construction to survive and lead in the comity of nations.

Here again none other but great Allama Iqbal is our guide when he concludes his argument on 'khudi' in the book of his lectures as under:

"The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something, but to be something. It is in the ego's effort to be something that he discovers his final opportunity to sharpen his objectivity and acquire a more

It is the combination of objectivity, creativity and action through which khudi would lead to power that dominates and shapes the physical world than mere winning a higher thought contemplation competition.

fundamental 'I am' which finds evidence of its reality not in the Cartesian 'I-think' but in the Kantian 'I can'. The end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of the individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it. The final act is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action. It is a moment of supreme bliss and also a moment of the greatest trial for the ego." -- The Reconstruction of Religious Thought

in Islam, page 173

A few important points related to khudi (ego) can be derived from the above message by Iqbal are:

- The ultimate goal of 'khudi' is not in the realm of thought or some abstract idea but purely action.
- A super-being (egohood) in realm of action is achieved through sharpening the objectivity (objectivity here can be equated to critical thinking, aiming at power acquisition goals).
- The aim of 'khudi' is not emancipation from limitations of individuality, but being defined by these in a way that the will to act gets strengthened through a creative assurance that makes and re-makes the world in physical being through continuous action (It can also be deduced from this particular point that the men of khudi are need not to abhor worldly life and its means, rather they must master the worldly life and add to it through their power of creativity).
- It can also be deduced from the above concluding message by Iqbal that the ultimate aim of khudi is to be a power of action which is able to shape and re-shape the world. It is the combination of objectivity, creativity and action through which khudi would lead to power that dominates and shapes the physical world than mere winning a higher thought contemplation competition.

Before delving upon further on what to be done by us as a nation which is caught struggling to live and prosper in first half of 21st century, it is important to have a review of contemporary power agencies (zeitgeist of present time and space). Today, we live in an age of a somewhat regulated capitalism, which defeated communism. In this world, wealth creation remains a primary objective and a power measure rather than wealth distribution. In simple terms, when the United States or China are being assessed as a world power, their financial health is taken as the primary yardstick, followed by military might which is again not measured by counting the men but superior military technology and sophisticated equipment. When Iqbal lived and gave his poetic message during the first-half of the 20th century, the world was suffering from ills of unregulated capitalism, espoused hopes for a better world from communism, and science and technology had not been able to harness human

life as it can be seen today, and reacting to the ills of time, messages of abhorrence towards wealth generation, accumulation or capitalism, were common in those times. Also never forget that Iqbal was addressing and reviving the hopes of an individual who was not only slave, but poor and ill-equipped. So Iqbal made his weakness as his strength. This part of Iqbal's message should be seen in the light of his age. However, Iqbal's universal message of 'khudi' aiming at attaining the power to change the world in any given time and space, needs a new interpretation and visionary courage to match the ever changing world.

While we deduce meanings of 'khudi' in milieu of individual and national acquisition of power, some critics can raise the issues of morality attached to the pursuit of power. Since Iqbal is a universal thinker and in certain aspects of his messages stretches beyond the limits of time and space, his care for morality is understandable and merits reverence. As a universal philosopher, Iqbal's vision of pursuing a moral and just world as its final goal is somewhat a *fait accompli* for any universal message and messenger. However, those responding to the issues of lack of power limited to their age, can seek guidance from another angle of Iqbal's philosophical message related to power acquisition and exercise of power, conveniently ignoring the issue of morality. Or, those seeking the power to meet a national crisis emerging out of lack of power can first acquire the power, and then later suitably regulate it to the demands of morality, but only to the extent where it does not lead to yet another weakened state of affairs.

Iqbal on various occasions accepts the primacy of power and its application for attaining one's goals:

جو کبوتر پر چھپنے میں مزا ہے اے پسر!
وہ مزا شانند کبوتر کے لہو میں بھی نہیں

تقدیر کے قاضی کا یہ فتویٰ ہے ازل سے
ہے جرمِ ضعیفی کی سزا مرگِ مفاجات

Today, the limitations our nation suffers are from poor economy, weak industrial base, stagnant agriculture, untrained human capital and insufficiency in modern technology, including military among

others. If we want to master the power (for ease simply equated to financial wealth, technological advancement and military power), Iqbal's man and nation of 'khudi' can never stay away from happy pursuit of the both. It needs a change of attitude towards money or wealth generation as a nation as well as mastering science and technology. Today and tomorrow, as a nation and people we will be living and competing in a world and age which is entirely different than first half of the 20th century. We are no more waging a struggle to

Iqbal's universal message of 'khudi' aiming at attaining the power to change the world in any given time and space, needs a new interpretation and visionary courage to match the ever changing world.

overthrow a colonial power, but have to compete with neo-colonialism, and have to construct a contemporary power as a nation that should guarantee and safeguard our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Our today's and tomorrow's man of 'khudi' needs not to dream of acquiring an iron-will to acquire both money and power, which add to the national power. We as a nation must adopt to and master the ways of wealth generation. For a nation with no money and modern knowledge, has no future!

While we as a nation decide to fight out this decay which can result in further economic strangulations by rich powers, there remains a needs to be cautious of any over-organisation of the individual and society.

Iqbal's man of 'khudi' is a free man to attain self-actualization and fulfil his dreams. Iqbal alludes towards this reactionary tendency in one of his lectures:

"For the fear of further disintegration, which is only natural in such a period of political decay, the conservative think-

ers . . . focused all their efforts on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people . . . Their leading idea was social order, and there is no doubt that they were partly right, because organization does to a certain extent counteract the forces of decay. But they did not see, and our modern Ulema do not see, that the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men. In an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of existence. He gains the whole wealth of social thought around him and loses his own soul. Thus a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people's decay. 'The verdict of history,' as a modern writer has happily put it, 'is that worn-out ideas have never risen to power among a people who have worn them out.' The only effective power, therefore, that counteracts the forces of decay in a people is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals. Such individuals alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision."

● The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, page 133

We as a nation and people today face enormous challenges of economic downfall and technological reliance on others, and it is only through reinterpreting the message of 'khudi' as a national creative power that we will rule the spirit of the age. All men and women into the fields and factories, and nothing short of it, will grant us a creative power of production that makes us a truly independent and honorable nation. That stage of self-reliance to self-sufficiency will be a real tribe to Iqbal's message of 'khudi' by a 'khudar' (honorable) people and nation. ■

عروجِ آدمِ خاکی کے منتظر ہیں تمام
یہ کہکشاں، یہ ستارے، یہ نیلگوں افلاک

جہان تازہ کی افکار تازہ سے ہے نمود
کہ سنگ و خشت سے ہوتے نہیں جہاں پیدا

وہی ہے صاحبِ امروز، جس نے اپنی ہمت سے
زمانے کے سمندر سے نکالا گوہرِ فردا

MUSINGS



By **Muhammad Nasar Khan**

The writer is a Bachelor's in Physics Freelance Writer for websites and blogs.

The glorious European past thumps like a parallel beat in the heart of Pakistani intellectuals. They look back at the series of revolutions and movements of enlightenment that occurred in Europe and America with such a nostalgic longing that had humans not learned the craft of spotting a lie, our intellectuals would have claimed that their forefathers fought under Napoleon against the monarchy.

However, if events that lead to revolutions in France or in America were to occur

Democracy & Pakistan's White Past

Today, if events that lead to revolutions in France or in America were to occur in Pakistan, nobody would probably even bat an eye

in Pakistan, nobody would probably bat an eye. The Stamp Act of 1765, for example, under which the British sought to tax the Americans on official documents, does not sound nearly as bad as to fuel a revolutionary fire. But it certainly did. Or the Boston Tea Party, when the Americans threw chests of tea into the Boston harbor as a reaction to the Tea Act of 1773. A Pakistani reading the act in 2022 would be just as shocked as the American who would have read it in 1773 with the difference being that the Pakistani would think how something so little could cause a revolution, while the American had thought how it could not.

Despite that Pakistan's academic and intellectual circles cannot be acquitted of their intellectual corruption and barrenness. Their immortal infatuation with the White past forces them to merely criticize

the Pakistani society rather than simultaneously addressing the root causes of the destructive patterns existing among the people. Indeed, it is understandable as well: those key elements that perpetrated European societies to revolt against monarchies and establish democracies are missing in our society. For that purpose, criticism is acceptable, inevitable, and in most cases, necessary. However, while discussing the success of those societies, our analysts forget the most basic elements integral to the ultimate supremacy of democratic values.

I have mapped out three causes below in no specific order as to why democracy is failing in Pakistan. It is left up to the reader to think which issue requires foremost attention. However, all three causes are to be read keeping the moral corruption of our intellectuals in mind.

The first postulate is that there can be no democracy without enlightenment. Enlightenment is essentially believing in the superiority of reason and individualism over tradition. So, our intellectuals sit at high-end cafes, sip overpriced coffees, and discuss the issues of a common man who is in majority, all the while being completely oblivious and disengaged from ground realities. What they ought to be doing, however, is to try and enlighten the people. At the moment, the discussions concerning the worsening political, economic, and social issues are confined to a small elite. However, one of the events that led to the French revolution, for example, was that the voices of economic and political dissent were heard from all over European society. Those conversations were not limited to the walls of elite coffeehouses. For how long will the intellectuals of this country sit and criticize the lack of democratic values and revolutionary spirit in this country? When will they start contributing great ideas in a common man's language rather than being consistently sarcastic towards those who don't even know what sarcasm is? Democracy is not possible in a country where intellectuals belong to a class impossible for the poor majority to dream of.

The same European enlightenment that makes a Pakistani intellectual's mouth water, occurred because minds such as Descartes, Locke, Voltaire, Kant, Goethe, and Rousseau had contributed individually to the society. Had they been born in modern-day Pakistan, a certain political party thriving because of feudalism would have offered them huge bribes to somehow produce theories justifying their right to rule. Is it not mind-baffling that in the 21st century, the ideas of the enlightened and liberal Pakistani minds coincidentally align with the ideologies of a party thriving on feudalism? The French Revolution of 1789 paved the way for most of the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. One of those principles was the abolition of feudalism. This brings us to the second postulate of why democracy is impossible in Pakistan: feudalism.

There is already enough evidence, in case common sense does not help, to suggest why feudalism is one of the biggest hindrances to achieving democracy. I will not bother to explain the intricate and bamboozling schemes of how a person living on somebody else's land can-

not choose to vote against the latter's will. The trouble is that when the hollow think tanks of Pakistan give examples of the European past, they once again choose to use their intellect for corrupt purposes and conveniently gulp the entire chapter of European history when it transitioned from being a feudal society to a capitalist one. Even the heads of those political parties of Pakistan who claim to be the direct descendants of Marx and portray themselves as the ultimate revolutionaries of the country, shamelessly and openly interact with well-known feudal lords. The irony is unending.

Is it not mind-baffling that in the 21st century, the ideas of the enlightened and liberal Pakistani minds coincidentally align with the ideologies of a party thriving on feudalism?

The writers of the European Age of Enlightenment mocked the times when feudalism existed in the West. They called the Middle Ages, the "Dark Ages", knowing that feudalism was a massive part of it. Is it not surprising to think that in today's Pakistan, those who are supposed to help the vassals stand with the lord instead? If memory serves me correctly, I cannot seem to recall any well-known intellectual having struggled against feudalism. Quite the contrary, numerous names rush to mind when the word "feudal" rings in it. If one gets too optimistic and thinks that feudalism is mostly gone from Pakistan, a glance at the lifestyles of the uniformed elite, civil servants, and politicians would be a good reality check.

Finally, it is ironic that every person in Pakistan is an expert when it comes to societal matters and yet the country has failed to produce a single good sociologist. The lack of good social scientists is hurting the country more than the lack of good natural scientists is. This is yet an-

other matter that our intellectuals have failed to address: until the country excels in social sciences, no progress is possible in natural sciences.

The undemocratic and toxic family values based on tradition rather than individual freedom produce adults too feeble to raise their voice against the abuse of power. But they cannot be blamed for it; how can you produce normal adults with abnormal childhoods? A country that is bringing up new generations of adults with no concept of individualism and private space will not be able to absorb democratic norms. When there is no concept of personal space in families, no genius will have the time and space to prosper as well. The death of tradition is the birth of enlightenment.

Therefore, when a society does not permit its adults to make their personal decisions, the social fabric is embroidered with brains too lazy to think for themselves. As a consequence, when it comes to voting, everybody relies on the other person to elect the least bad politician out of the given superficial choices.

Does all that matter to our intellectuals? It does not. Because a corrupt politician ruling the country needs to normalize his corruption. And how does he do that? He intellectualizes it. He pays his loyalists to tell the people in fancy lingo how corruption does not damage society as much as they think it does. Had the people, at a societal level, been pushed into taking difficult decisions for themselves at an early age, and then had those decisions been respected by elements of society such as parents, normalizing moral decline would not be as easy as it currently is in Pakistan.

Well, then, is Pakistan doomed? Have we not been bestowed with anything pure, whether it is grain, ideology, or intellect? I am going to go on a stretch here and say, no, we are not doomed. From the recent series of political events occurring in the country, I would say that there is still hope. We owe it to the existence of social media, without a doubt. It is a brilliant sight: seeing old, wrinkly intellectuals trying to defend corrupt, dynastic political parties in the name of democracy and getting wrecked by the youth for their hypocrisy. It definitely spreads out slivers of hope in an otherwise somber atmosphere. ■

Politics of Hijab

While women in Iran fight against the mandatory hijab, women in India and France struggle for their rights to be allowed to wear one

By **Ibrahim Sajid Malick**

These days my Facebook feed is filled with the mention of “liberal revolution,” and “Hijab.” Let’s first try to wrap our heads around “hijab.”

The hijab, or headscarf, is at the centre of a movement against hardline Iranian rulers and is widely seen as a highly politicised symbol. Women are protesting the mandatory hijab by setting them on fire in towns around Iran.

The situation is different in countries like France and specific areas of India,

where women have struggled for decades to be allowed to wear the hijab despite being prohibited from doing so.

The Islamic head covering was outlawed in Iran by Reza Shah Pahlavi, the country’s monarch at the time, in 1936. Turkey implemented a similar policy ten years ago. A “symbol of modernity,” women who chose to remove their headscarves were celebrated. They weren’t feminists; they thought women who wore headscarves in public looked retrograde.

With the establishment of the “Islamic Republic” in Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the country’s supreme leader, ordered all women to wear the hijab.

Men and women both utilise women’s visibility as a political instrument to de-

fine “nationhood,” whether that means forcibly revealing or veiling them.

Revolution, is it?

The primary purpose of a political revolution is to drastically recreate the government of a nation to a form that will quickly create desired policies. They begin with economic, religious, or social movements within a country. Notable political revolutions include the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution of 1917. The main characteristics of political revolutions include the following:

- Revolutions are fought against rulers or government officials, often ending

in these individuals' deaths.

- Revolution typically begins among the ordinary people, the lower classes of society.
- Revolutions are usually violent.

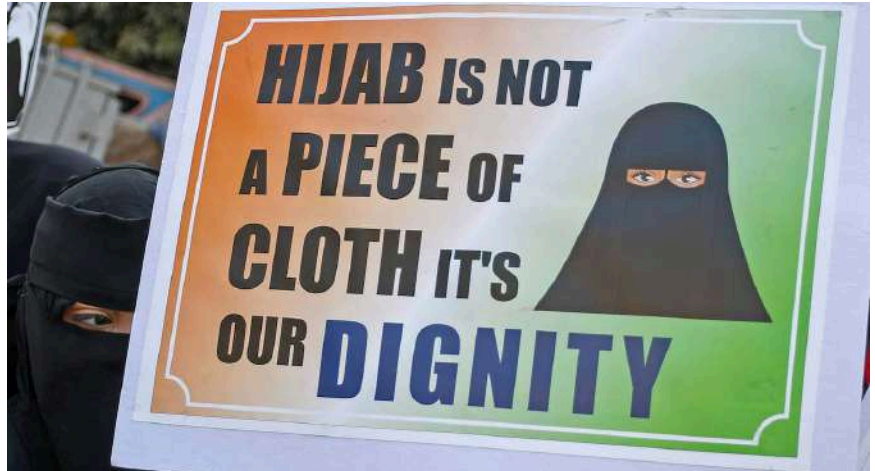
Resistance, rebellion, secession, and revolution are all phrases used to describe the rejection of the authority of an existing government outside of its constitutional framework. Acts of disobedience can be both overt and covert, public and designed to achieve maximum publicity or peaceful, nonviolent, and disruptive. Resistance instead involves disobeying some particular law or laws or efforts to thwart some specific government policy or attempt to perform certain actions. A critical distinction between rebellion and resistance is that the former entails an outright rejection of official authority. At the same time, the latter involves just some kind of obstruction. The motivations for such rejection of government authority can vary widely, from the anarchist's desire to abolish all government to the creation of a new territorial unit out of part of the existing government's territory (secession) or the severance of part of the territory of the government and its union with another existing state (irredentist secession). The conventional definition of a revolution includes the rejection of the current government's authority and the effort to replace it with a new government by extra-constitutional methods. It is possible to interpret both revolution and rebellion as having the "negative" goal of rejecting the government's authority. Still, the positive intent of establishing a new government in its stead is unique to revolution.

Feminist Revolution?

The central slogan of the ongoing protests in Iran is "Women, Life, Freedom." Compare this with one of the main slogans of the 1979 revolutionary movement, which was "Bread, Work, Freedom." It was the central slogan of the Communist Labor Party, which the revolutionary movement had inspired in Russia.

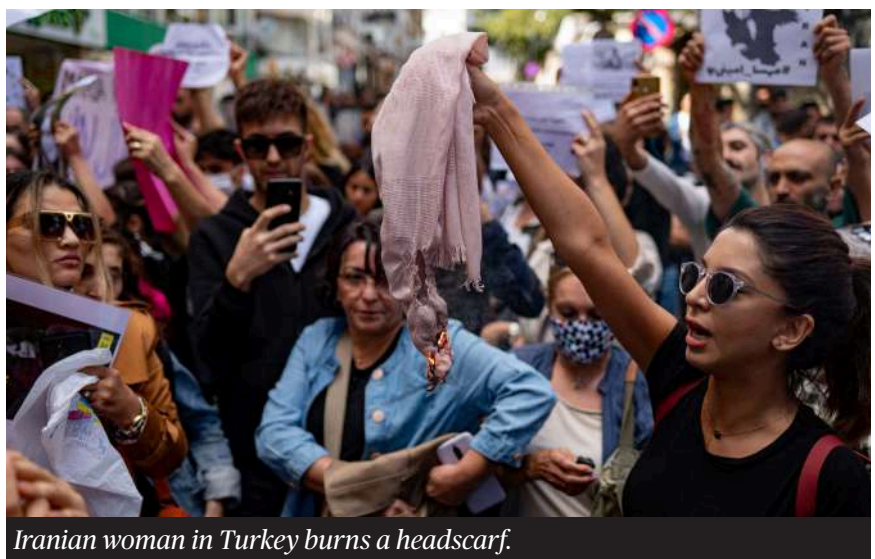
Central to the ongoing protest is the idea of women taking back control of their bodies. Kurdish women in one of Iran's poorest regions—the Kurdish provinces—are primarily responsible for popularising this phrase over many decades. Kurdish women in Kurdistan and Turkey initially adopted this phrase.

Feminism is the ideology that holds



Resistance, rebellion, secession, and revolution are all phrases used to describe the rejection of the authority of an existing government outside of its constitutional framework

To avoid falling into the gender equality trap of seeing men's lives, the concept of equal worth provides a method to recognise both traditional "women" priorities like caring and the labour traditionally associated with "men." This view expands feminism beyond its ideological roots to describe it as a social justice movement that welcomes both mass and individual involvement and a wide spectrum of thought and activity that may be embraced equally by women and men. Last but not least, this multifaceted and nuanced definition acknowledges that women's lives are shaped not just by their gender but also by other elements, such as race, class, and sexuality.



Iranian woman in Turkey burns a headscarf.

that women and men have equal value. Realising that gender constantly overlaps with other social hierarchies, social movements are required to establish equality between women and men since most civilisations favour males.

Suppose the current movement in Iran overthrew the current religious government and put in place a secular government, and issues of race, class, and sexuality remain unchanged. Would you call it a revolution? ■

Tribute



August 1, 1973 – September 8, 2022

Gone too Soon

From education to politics, Hunaid Lakhani, founder and founding chancellor of Iqra University, established a platform where youth from all walks of life can prosper and accomplished what most won't even if they live to 100



**By Ibrahim Sajid
Malick**

*The writer is a Senior
Editor, Narratives*

“Not, how did they die, but how did they live?

Not, what did they gain, but what did they give?

These are the units to measure the worth

Of a person as a person, regardless of birth.”

– Anonymous

I first met Hunaid Lakhani in July 2010 in Boston. I was there to interview Prof Noam Chomsky, and he was attend-

ing an entrepreneurship workshop at Harvard University. I was immediately impressed with his humble demeanour. I could tell in the first meeting that this young man was more than a Pakistani seth.

We stayed in touch with occasional eid mubarak messages on WhatsApp and often shared memes in the spirit of levity. We met again in New York during the 2016 Christmas, where I was privileged to host him. We talked at length and walked around Times Square. During our conversation, not only was he open to opposing

views and new ideas, but he sought to understand the motivations and obstacles of others.

After dinner at midnight, he asked if we could get ice cream from the street vendor. Cognizant of his status, I suggested some lovely places in Manhattan. We walked to Rockefeller Center in the snow and minus 20 Celcius temperature to get the ice cream. The look on his face was delightful. I have never seen an adult enjoy ice cream like Hunaid.

Altruism

Hunaid showed empathy and selfless concern for the welfare of others and ventured to alleviate the struggles of others without seeking anything for his benefit. Like a true philanthropist, he acted without expectation of compensation or recognition of his efforts. Hunaid understood that education transforms lives and breaks the cycle of poverty that traps so many children. I recall him saying (I paraphrase), “education for girls is essential – an educated mother will ensure her children attend and stay in school.

That was before the coronavirus pandemic hit and turned an education crisis into a catastrophe that will have overwhelming short- and long-term consequences. At the beginning of the pandemic, I received a message asking for a recommendation for a Learning Management Solution (LMS).

Real Change

People who want to make positive changes in the world tend to look far into the future. They want to make a lasting impact on society rather than temporarily fixing a problem and recognize that they must direct their efforts accordingly. They realize that for a significant societal change, it is crucial to address underlying structural issues by investing in long-term solutions. Hunaid understood that the pandemic was impacting not only his university but millions of students in Pakistan.

To make structural changes in society, it is also necessary for philanthropists to advocate for political change. That is why Hunaid was active in local politics. He recognized the importance of investing in programmes for quick and tangible results; advocacy is also important because it allows progress on a broader scale. He sought specific causes to support rather



Hunaid understood that education transforms lives and breaks the cycle of poverty that traps so many children.

than organizations. He understood that particular organizations might be able to tackle one aspect of the problem best and then look for other groups to work on different aspects of the issue. He maintained a holistic view of the issue and used many tools to catalyze these changes.

Bahria Campus Launch

In December 2020, I welcomed Hunain Lakhani to the stage at the launch of the Bahria Campus. Here is how I introduced him:

“From education to politics, Hunaid Lakhani, founder and founding chancellor of Iqra University, has established a platform where youth from all walks of life can prosper.

After graduating in Business Administration from American College, Los Angeles, in 1997, Mr Lakhani attended the Owner-President Management Programme at Harvard Business School in 2006. In 1998, Mr Lakhani built Iqra University, an institute for every Pakistani

irrespective of social class. As head of Bait ul Mal Sindh, he actively participates in social welfare projects.”

Later on, when I moved to Pakistan and worked for Iqra University, I realized that his contributions were investments in society and the economy. He wanted his money and resources to be used efficiently to promote self-sustaining change. Hunaid looked at issues through a business lens, treating his philanthropic work with the same work ethic as his real estate and education business. Hunaid utilized his resources, networks, and social standing to advance a cause, just as he would to advance a corporate objective. This broad perspective compelled him to extend his support to for-profit businesses and legislative proposals that will increase the cause and charitable groups.

When I briefly met the current Chancellor of Iqra University, Erum Lakhani, in Dubai early this year, she mentioned something that stuck in my mind. She said, “even when Hunaid was very young, he used to talk about building a university with grand architecture.” He fulfilled his dream and more.

I have shared many laughs, strategic sessions, and (few) heated conversations. We broke bread, prayed together and tried to launch an innovative edtech solution. Still, I will remember Hunaid for his kindness, vision and humility.

Hunaid Lakhani left too soon, but he accomplished what most won't even if they live to 100. ■



Preparing for the Future

Unfortunately, Pakistani educational institutions are still preparing students, if preparing at all, for the last century's industrial needs

By **Ibrahim Sajid Malick**

Technology is fundamentally altering our lives, making it imperative for us to transform and align education with the skills necessary for employment. Building future-ready education systems involve a curriculum appropriate for the 21st century and the constant delivery of broadly accessible training that lays the groundwork for a lifetime of adapting and acquiring new skills. Specialized education should prioritize high-demand skills and

bridge the gap between industry and talent pools.

Unfortunately, Pakistani educational institutions are still preparing students, if preparing at all, for the last century's industrial needs.

Pakistani schools and colleges produce three types of graduates -- primarily based on their parents' economic status. Elite schools with "O" and "A" level education, private schools in the middle-class neighbourhoods and public schools, aka "peela school."

If one of your kids is unwell, do you focus more on taking care of them? Do you treat your children equally when one is a rule-follower and the other is a free spirit?

Most of us parents know that to provide for our children adequately, we can't treat them all the same way all the time.

This is also true in academic settings. Every child walks into a public school with a unique set of requirements, as any educator will tell you. Some students have been through terrible things, some are just starting with the English language, and some may not read at grade level. Therefore, we must recognise that every one of our students has unique requirements for success and development. Although it may be challenging, the ultimate objective of educational fairness is to provide for each child as we would for our children.

Providing students with the resources they need while respecting their individuality is the essence of equality. It also involves maintaining a growth-oriented and results-oriented mindset. When children's socioeconomic status is no longer a predictor of their future success, we will know that our equality efforts have been successful.

In the current situation, wealthy students enjoy a head start because of their families' financial stability and have easier access to a more challenging curriculum, knowledgeable instructors, and individualised attention from tutors.

Equality exists when we affirm that all kids deserve the same educational opportunities regardless of socioeconomic status. It is challenging, if not impossible, to advance when one is so far behind that one cannot even see the playing field.

Policymakers and educators must commit to equity to ensure that all students can access the possibilities that education may open up for them. Equity efforts should concentrate on removing obstacles that prevent all kids from achieving their full potential. I am not suggesting that we lower "standards" or prioritize one set of students over another in the name of equality (affluent or underprivileged). Doing so only holds children back from reaching their full potential.

All the children can succeed when

educational institutions and systems are committed to providing equal access to resources and producing outstanding outcomes for all students. Working with teachers around Pakistan, I have found that the vast majority fully support equality. However, many don't realize how their implicit prejudices and actions stifle the progress of underprivileged students.

Many schools, for instance, assign the least seasoned educators to the most challenging positions, and then they scratch their heads when such works produce no results. Many schools concentrate too much emphasis on grades and fail to see that children learn best via trial and er-

Providing students with the resources they need while respecting their individuality is the essence of equality

ror; if we ignore such signs of learning, many students may graduate high school without the skills they'll need in college or the workforce. Many current methods of schooling (such as monitoring, labelling, and excluding pupils as a form of disci-

pline) do not benefit students and instead do nothing more than further spread existing inequalities. Our worldview is outdated, so we cannot utilize education to break the cycle of poverty by inspiring children to become lifelong learners.

Therefore, we must be ready to question: "are our current school organisational practices beneficial to our students?" If the numbers don't add up, we must be open to introspective self-reflection and taking cues from teachers who have found success via other approaches.

Let's be clear: being poor should not be a learning handicap. At the same time, as we can't disregard student's fundamental needs for food, shelter, and emotional support. We also can't dismiss the fact that persistent success disparities often indicate that a child's school isn't doing its job.

You can be confident that a school will not progress if teachers consistently blame students or their families for low academic performance. Or if teachers presume the families, they serve do not place a high priority on education. Nothing will change unless they take ownership of the factors within their sphere of influence, namely, the state of their classrooms.

A paradigm change is required, one that makes the pursuit of excellence through fairness the primary goal of education in Pakistan. ■





Joyland: Problem Lies in Name

The criticism against Joyland has got nothing to do with religion or society's social values. It has got to do with "joy" in the movie's name and "love" in its synopsis

By Muhammad Nasar Khan

Joyland tells the story of a man who falls in love with a transgender. As one might already guess from the first sentence, the movie got severe heat from religious factions for allegedly depicting a homosexual relationship. It then bagged the Queer Palm award, which paved the way for further criticism from those who hadn't seen the movie in the first place. As always, the fundamentalist mindset held the state hostage, and the government banned its countrywide release. However, after much scrutiny, the federal government of Pakistan allowed it to be released

whereas owing to the 18th amendment, Punjab banned it anyway.

Here's a spoiler alert: the criticism against Joyland has got nothing to do with religion or society's social values. It has got to do with "joy" in the movie's name and "love" in its synopsis.

Why are we so defensive of our social and cultural values? It has a rather simple explanation: we are insecure about them. Any insecure person goes on the defensive when confronted with his weak spot. He doesn't do anything about it, he only keeps trying to hide it.

Pakistani society is creamed with such minds. This mental insecurity translates from an individual to the collective, resulting in a confused, paranoid, and constantly threatened set of hollow social

values. When Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy won an Academy Award for her short documentary 'Saving Face,' many Pakistanis villainized her for portraying a negative image of the country. Of course, that actually translates to her having exposed the society at large. One could quote statistics about the number of women in Pakistan who get their faces disfigured as a result of acid attacks, but facts and figures are useless for such societies. If one wants to truly learn, mere observation is enough.

The Hollywood movie Spotlight released in 2015 focused on the true story of four journalists who uncovered the story of paedophilia undergoing in the local Catholic church. It went on to win two Oscars that year, including best picture. When the actual story was published way

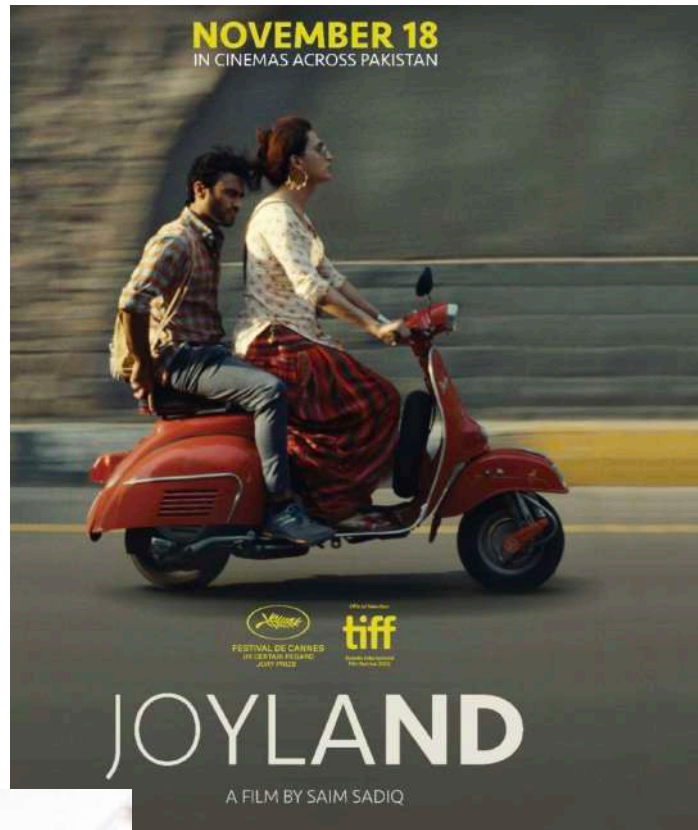
back in 2002, it had launched a chain reaction in the United States. People all across the country started to come out with their own stories of abuse at the hands of the priests. Soon enough, the local issue culminated in shaking the core of the Roman Catholic Church at a global scale.

People fretted about the real issue that had been brought to light: society's most trusted were caught molesting society's most vulnerable. Such a scandal would tear apart the entire social fabric of any mentally fit society. It would demolish all social values built on conservative religious thought within a matter of seconds. Imagine, however, if such a story got uncovered here in Pakistan?

In the same year that Spotlight was released, a political scandal had broken out in Kasur involving child pornography and sexual abuse. Hundreds of videos were discovered which showed children performing forced sex acts in front of the camera. About 280 to 300 children were the alleged victims of sexual abuse with the majority of them being male. To top

The answer to this is again connected to our mental paranoia. We consider child abuse as something native, but we think homosexuality is being imposed on us. This has always been our problem: to shield against anything that we think is a Western agenda, even if it benefits us. That's why there is a whole list of people who achieved global fame but were disowned by us. As soon as they are applauded by the West, our paranoia suddenly kicks in and we declare them to be villains. The same thing happened with Joyland.

The problem is not Joyland, nor is it homosexuality. The rising HIV epidemic in the country as per UNAIDS is a testament



Director Saim Sadiq, cast member Alina Khan and producer Apoorva Guru pose in Cannes.

When Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy won an Academy Award for her short documentary 'Saving Face,' many Pakistanis villainized her for portraying a negative image of the country.

it all off, it was alleged that police and the local MPA were also involved in attempting to sweep the story under the rugs. One might think that there would have been lawsuits at the very least, if not capital punishments. Till date, however, there hasn't been any proper investigation at all.

So why is it that an unreleased movie which tells the tale of love, however explicit and R-rated it might be, threatens our values more than an actual, real-life case of child sexual abuse and murder?

to that. Majority of the key populations living with HIV in Pakistan (except for those who acquired it through contaminated needles) are men who have had physical relations with men, or with transgenders. Even if facts are not brought in to back the argument of homosexuality already prevalent in the society, mere word of mouth from someone belonging to South Punjab, or to the villages of KP and Sindh should be enough to make anybody believe it.

Our religious bigots, however, will force people to think that a bunch of Western bums who have nothing else on their hands are coming up with new ways to impose homosexuality in the land of the pure. Let me save you the trouble: our society is as impure as one can get. Had our sociologists reported the data correctly, the number of child abuse cases, rapes, molestation, harassment, domestic violence, homosexuality, and bestiality would be much higher than what is documented. ■

Religious Minorities & Pakistan

Murree Brewery chief executive highlights the role of religious minorities

Mr. Isphanyar Bhandara, chief executive of the Murree Brewery, organised a luncheon in the honour of some of the distinguished members belonging to the minority community on December 3, 2022. Mr. Bhandara, a former member of the National Assembly and a leading philanthropist, works for promoting religious harmony in the country.

Members from the Sikh, Hindu, and Christian and other religious communities attended the luncheon at Mr. Bhandara's residence in Rawalpindi. While welcoming his guests, Mr. Bhandara highlighted the role of the religious minorities in the development of Pakistan - from the country's defence to education and health sectors. Religious minorities also play a leading role in creating business and employment opportunities, he said, adding that they would remain committed to this role.



Books, Books everywhere

136 local & 40 foreign publishers attends the 17th Karachi Book Fair

The 17th Karachi International Book Fair (KIBF) - held from Dec. 8-12 - attracted a record crowd of more than 500,000 booklovers at the Expo Centre of the mega-city. However, the number of youngsters outstripped the elderly, underlining the fact that the tradition of reading books stays alive despite all the prophecies of doom and gloom about the book trade.

According to organisers, as many as 330 bookstalls on various topics were set up at the fair in which 136 local and 40 foreign publishers participated.

The mega rush of the people at the Book Fair was seen as a good omen by the book publishing and selling industry, which like other businesses suffered because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, new publishing houses are being set up in the country and the old players are trying to expand their businesses.

Pakistan Publishers and Booksellers Association has been holding the Karachi Book Fair every year since 2005.



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