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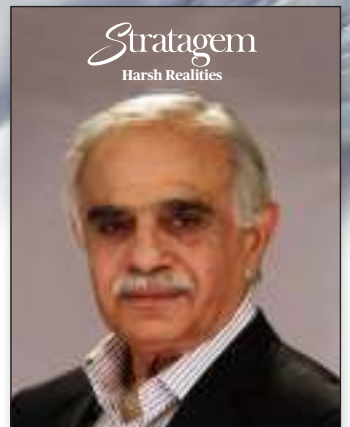
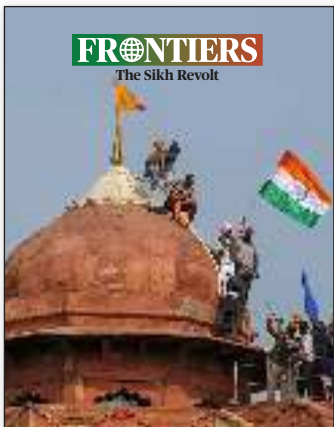
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Managing Editor
Amir Zia

Editor
Ibrahim Sajid Malick

Editorial Assistant
Sami Subhani
Gulrukhsar Mujahid

Special Correspondents
Ather Kazmi (London)
Rabia Ali (Istanbul)

Head, Computer Section
Khalid Ahmad

Design & Creative
Aman Ahmed Khan

Admin. Manager
Waqas Hasan

Marketing
Lubna Naz
Asif Musa

Monthly 'Narratives'
Published by Amir Zia

D-160/7
Aamra Cottages
Clifton, Block-5
Karachi - 75600
Pakistan.

Contact us:
letters@narratives.com.pk

Website:
www.narratives.com.pk

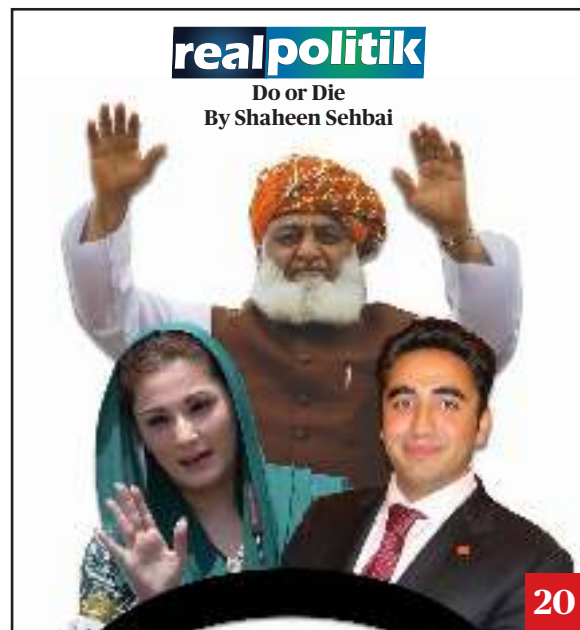
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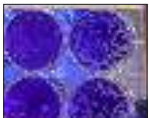
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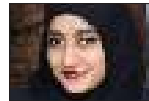
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Health First



Ibrahim Sajid Malick
Editor, Narratives

Do most Pakistanis really care about who chairs the Senate – the ruling coalition’s Sadiq Sanjrani or the opposition’s Yousuf Raza Gilani? The Senate election validates that our times’ defining battle isn’t necessarily one that is progressive vs. conservative or rural vs. urban or even democracy vs. fascism. It is about facts vs. misinformation. And in some ways, that struggle is more elemental to a functioning society than any of the others. If every basic fact is disputed or called into doubt, a common, agreed-upon reality will become ever more elusive. Because in such a situation, we become unable to deliberate or compromise or make informed decisions. Liberal democracy itself becomes an unsustainable enterprise. Senate elections have always been clouded some suspicion, as lawmakers’ loyalty is known to have been bought and sold. And this is expected – our politicians are rarely on the side of the voters.

But Senate elections have consequences. One of the more commonly attributed advantages to a parliamentary system is that it is one that makes it faster and easier to pass legislation. This is because the executive branch is dependent upon the legislative branch’s direct or indirect support and often includes members of the legislature. Thus, this would amount to the executive (as the majority party or coalition of parties in the legislature) possessing more votes in order to pass legislation. When viewed from this perspective, Imran Khan’s vote of confidence was an unarguably brilliant move.

However, the majority of Pakistanis are more focused on the devastation caused by the coronavirus than the theatrics telecast by all the local news channels. The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic precisely a year ago. Now that we have vaccines, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has criticised “the many examples of vaccine nationalism and [global] hoarding.” Making vaccines available equitably presents the “greatest moral test of our times,” he says. Despite appeals by international organisations and efforts to pool resources so that all countries can begin inoculating at least a fraction of their most vulnerable people at the earliest, several countries have been unable to administer even a single dose, although vaccines were beginning to be stockpiled since November last.

Can Pakistan vaccinate 70 percent of its population by the end of 2021 given that conspiracy theories, myths, and disinformation impede the mass inoculation drive? The Pakistani government launched its COVID-19 vaccination drive in February, starting with frontline health workers. After successfully inoculating 37,289 by mid-February, the authorities began registering other civilian groups. The government hopes the COVID vaccine will be able to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Still, not everyone is willing to get a shot.

Conspiracy theories related to the vaccine abound in the Muslim-majority country. According to a report published by Gallup Pakistan, 49 percent of the population is reluctant to get vaccinated even if it is offered free of cost. Experts say that misinformation and religious beliefs are responsible for people’s mistrust of the vaccine.

While there is some reprieve to be found in the fact that more vaccines are in the pipeline, there will always be the concern that the poor, the old, and the digitally naive will be shortchanged. The UN must continue to exert pressure on the privileged nations to improve global availability and bear upon countries to enhance equitable access within their territories.



Doodh ka doodh pani ka pani

As a common media man, I keenly read the article 'Media Metamorphosis' written by the young and dynamic Mr Duraïd Qureshi, CEO of HUM Network. I too share his concern that over past years there has been a decline in revenue for the media houses and especially the TV industry. He says that in the past two years, advertising revenue dropped from Rs. 38 billion to Rs. 26 billion, which means that there was only a 2 percent decline. He fails to mention that the total advertising budget for media houses was Rs. 68 billion in the year 2018-19 and it dropped to Rs. 58 billion the next year, again not a huge drop. I was upset to read that he forgot to mention the 50 bureaus that were shut down by these media houses, resulting in the redundancy of over 5,000 employees. I know personally that 80 percent of the media houses and TV channels are not paying their employees on time.

Through this letter, I would also like to make a suggestion – let PBA sit with our representatives and show us their assets, accounts and expenses and earnings through the legal way of advertising, not to mention the income they earn from under the table, thanks to political parties and different sources. I would like to sum it up with this: Doodh ka doodh aur pani ka pani samnay ajaye ga

Mujahid Barehvi
Karachi



A Much-Needed Alternative

I would like to extend my most sincere wishes to the entire team of Narratives for keeping the legacy of print alive. The closure of magazines such as Herald and Newline left readers in a quandary. In a country like Pakistan where library culture is slowly dying out, Gallup Pakistan surveys indicate that three out of four Pakistanis don't read any books at all, whereas a mere nine percent are avid readers.

In this day and age when the entire planet is switching to digital technology, a vast majority of the world's population suffers from attention deficit. It often seems to me that by becoming more and more technologically advanced and mechanised, we're becoming less human. We are bombarded with an endless stream of news, views, insipid gossip, videos, and images. Keeping this global scenario in mind, reading habits and trends of our citizens may not present a rosy picture, but the publication of a high quality magazine like Narratives is a clear-cut sign that the joy of holding a printed publication will never cease.

Zanobia Ilyas
Karachi

Kashmir is burning



'Paradise Lost' by Dr Ghulam Nabi Fai is a much-needed holistic narration, along with a way forward for the crisis that grips Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir territory. As mentioned by Arundhati Roy (quoted in the article), Kashmir stands today as perhaps the most densely militarised zone in the world, with more than half a million soldiers deployed to counter the 'threat' by alleged 'terrorists' who in actuality are experiencing a brutal form of new age settler colonialism and destruction that almost amounts to the ethnic cleansing of the Muslim-majority in the Valley. The perpetual crackdown on the people of Kashmir and the atrocities inflicted, represent grave human rights violations. Moreover, the enactment of two controversial annexation and anti-democratic bills are deepening the crisis that envelops Kashmir.

Therefore, as stated in the article, a UN fact-finding mission should be sent to corroborate the atrocities taking place, apart from internationalising the conflict in the lost paradise, for some semblance of a solution in the foreseeable future.

Savaïl Fazil Jamili
Karachi

Of Media Chains and Freedom of Expression



In Pakistan, unfortunately, the media has been in chains for a long time. A cursory reading of Pakistan's history will reveal that the threat of government repression has always hung over the heads of journalists. Many were jailed or faced exile for their commitment to truth. Thousands of journalists are currently being laid-off by media owners; others are facing salary cuts. This has led journalists to exercise self-censorship or toe the official line, with the consequence that objectivity and professionalism are rarely taken into consideration when reporting facts or presenting analysis.

But in saying this, one should not ignore the fact that the media also bears some responsibility for the troubles it is going through. Too often considerations of profit and commercialism have been motivating factors in media sectors, which lead to sensationalism and media's subsequent unpopularity among people.

However, all is not lost. In a period, when traditional media is seeing a decline owing to digitisation, and wherein we are seeing increasing state repression to muzzle media freedoms, it is really heartening to see the emergence of this new magazine in Pakistan. The future of media freedom does not look very bleak!

Shahab Saqib
Islamabad

The Magic Bullet?

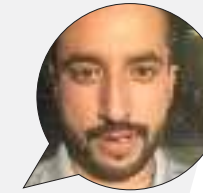


Over the last year, the world has experienced a global pandemic that has not only led to disastrous health consequences, but has had devastating economic repercussions as well. There now seems to be some light at the end of the tunnel with the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccines normally take several years to develop. However, this does not mean that the currently available vaccines are a result of shoddy science or bad ethics, but rather technological advancements in the past couple of decades have made it possible for the world to arrive at a number of vaccines for COVID-19, in a short span of time.

A larger looming concern is access to vaccinations in the developing world. Vaccine nationalism seems to be plentiful – Canada for example, has procured enough supplies to vaccinate its population four times over. Moreover, vaccines come at a price, and that too a high one. Initial promises by pharmaceutical companies to make vaccines financially accessible, are proving to be largely untrue. In Pakistan, for example, one cannot expect vaccines with a higher efficacy rate to come into the market for a while. When they do arrive, they are more likely to be in the private sector, beyond the reach of a large portion of the population. If one hopes to achieve herd immunity, at least 60 percent of the population must be vaccinated. We are not out of the woods yet but we may get there if we deal with issues of access and equity.

Sualaha Sheikhani
Karachi

Façade of Democracy



One needs to be critical of Maulana Fazlur Rahman's leadership of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) for myriad reasons as his position is being justified for his ability to pull out crowds in large numbers, which the rest of the self-serving 'democrats' are in dire need of.

However, the gravity of the situation where the opportunistic Maulana Fazl is leading the PDM – a movement for alleged restoration of democracy – remains unrealised by the mainstream political parties and some segments of society. This shows that for these groups, a principled stance for the progressive transformation of Pakistan is far from being a priority. Therefore, we see them supporting Maulana's leadership and a party (JUI-F) that fuelled the Afghan jihad bringing the menace of religious divisiveness and hyper-nationalism to Pakistan. Critical questions must be raised by the progressive and truly democratic segments of civil society and beyond, as we see that the mainstream political parties are running out of steam already, struggling to remain relevant in the corridors of power and on the streets.

Qiyas Khan
Islamabad



Politics of Hate

It's been more than 70 years since Partition and it seems that the Indo-Pak saga is here to stay. A solution to the rivalry and conflict between the two nations seems unimaginable and impossible. Political analyst Zafar Hilaly has, through his article, laid bare the current socio-political dynamics in India as the anti-Muslim Hindutva mindset takes the reins in Modi's India.

India is being ruled with an iron fist while simultaneously claiming to be the largest democracy in the world, as conspicuously evident with any criticism of the PM taken as an act of sedition. Hyper-nationalism coupled with increasing authoritarianism has put a halt to any possibility of productive engagement or negotiations between India and Pakistan since the BJP (inheriting the fascist ideology of RSS) and Modi thrive on and garner a wide voting base by letting loose those who spew hatred towards Muslims – and Pakistan.

Maham Khalid
Arizona, US



Colossal Blunder

Narratives has done a great job in revealing details regarding the Broadsheet scandal with expert opinion being included that provided a clear, comprehensive and thorough analysis of the scandal, being popularly titled 'Ali Baba and the forty thieves'.

One can't reiterate enough how the scandal under discussion has brought about national and international shame and a loss of credibility towards holding the powerful and corrupt accountable, who now roam around freely, through a blunder as shameful as not reading the contract properly and signing of shady deals like the NRO.

Pakistan, an economically downtrodden state – through the Broadsheet agreement – has ended up paying foreign exchange up to \$28.7 million (Rs. 4 billion). This money could have reached those in need, alleviating the poverty index of the country instead.

Rabya Hassan
Karachi

Letters should carry the writer's name, address and phone numbers.
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space.
Email address: letters@narratives.com.pk

ZEROING IN



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

Peace on Indian Terms?

Pakistan must not succumb to international pressure and accept peace on India's terms

In an unexpected move, the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) between Pakistan and India has finally been restored. Ostensibly, it is a positive development. After all, who can argue against guns falling silent along the disputed Kashmir frontiers and providing respite to villagers living on both sides of this artificial divide.

But the hushed manner in which the agreement was made, raises more questions than providing answers about the future of Indo-Pak relations and, more specifically, the fate of Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

It is pertinent to ask what prompted the Director-General Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two countries to come up with their surprise joint statement of February 25, 2021? Is this development in any way linked to the de-escalation between China and India on their disputed borders in the Ladakh region? Has the new US-administration under President Joe Biden played any behind-the-scenes role in pushing the two nuclear-armed South Asian rivals to step back and ease tensions? And to what end? How does it suit Pakistan's objectives? How is it beneficial to Kashmir's freedom struggle? These critical questions are triggering all sorts of speculation in the absence of any official details regarding this development.

But in the context of Pakistan and Kashmir, perhaps the bigger and crucial question remains: what next? Will this ceasefire be followed by a resumption of talks? What will be the ambit of these talks? Should Pakistan set any pre-conditions for them, including the demand that India first revoke its unilateral decision of August 5, 2019, which changed the status of Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and desist from changing the demographics of this Muslim-majority region?

After announcing the ceasefire, the



Pakistani leadership has, once again, expressed a desire to re-engage with India, but made no mention that New Delhi first revert Occupied Kashmir to its pre-August 5, 2019 status to create a conducive atmosphere for the talks. This is an ominous sign.

If Islamabad continues on this trajectory, which appears to be the case, then any resumption of talks – sooner or later – under the changed status of Occupied Kashmir, will be a decisive win for India's policy of brinkmanship and a blow to the Kashmiri struggle for the right of self-determination under the UN resolutions.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in one stroke, has settled the Kashmir dispute in India's favour and is now managing the fallout of his decision by using brute force. He changed the con-

Prime Minister Imran Khan's passionate speech at the United Nations, his tweets and statements – all looked good on the domestic media, but failed to build any pressure on India.

stitutional status of Occupied Kashmir and assimilated it into the union territory by transforming the region into the world's largest prison. In doing this, New Delhi withdrew even the nominal constitutional guarantees given to Kashmiris, scrapped its bilateral agreements with Pakistan and violated the UN resolution.

In a nutshell, Modi broke the mould of conventional policies on Kashmir and dared to take a different route, anticipating the reaction on all three fronts – within Kashmir, Pakistan, and the world at large. And his assessment seems to be right. He managed to stifle the voice of Kashmiris and quelled their resistance with the use of military might. The world, barring a few statements here and there, largely turned a blind eye to Indian atrocities, human rights violations and media curbs in Kashmir. And Pakistan, too, did not go beyond conventional diplomacy – which has never worked in the past and failed to fight Kashmir's case effectively post-August 5, 2019. Prime Minister Imran Khan's passionate speech at the United Nations, his tweets and statements, and all the protests, rallies and expressions of solidarity with Kashmiris in Pakistan – all looked good on the domestic media, but failed to build any pressure on India.

Now, in less than two years since his controversial decision on Kashmir, Modi has agreed to the restoration of ceasefire with Pakistan at the LoC, which he himself has continuously violated, soon after assuming power in 2014. There is certainly a method to Modi's madness.



Has Modi settled the Kashmir dispute in India's favour?

Firstly, the restoration of ceasefire between Pakistani and Indian troops along the disputed Kashmir border is a positive symbolic gesture for New Delhi to show to the world. Secondly, whenever talks between the two estranged neighbours resume from now onwards, India will be doing it from a position of strength – by changing the matrix of the Kashmir dispute and tilting the rules of the game in its favour.

Any thaw in diplomatic relations, re-engagement and revival of normal trade or cultural ties in the near or distant future, with the changed status of Occupied Kashmir, would mean that India has finally had its way. If it agrees to resume talks with Pakistan now, it won't be the proverbial 'two steps forward and one step back' policy; it would be akin to 10 steps forward and no step back.

India does not want to bring Kashmir on the table. Period. Consequently, any talks between the two countries following the scrapping of past agreements are meaningless. If the Pakistani leadership agrees to open dialogue with India against the backdrop of the changed ground realities, it would be the biggest betrayal of the country and the Kashmir cause. No amount of foreign pressure should force Pakistan to enter into talks with India until it revokes its August 5, 2019 measures.

If history is any guide, bilateralism between Pakistan and India has failed to resolve the main dispute of Kashmir or the secondary ones, including Siachen and Sir Creek. Even when there was a proper mechanism in place for bilateral engagement, the two sides failed to move

Whenever talks between the two estranged neighbours resume from here, India will be doing it from a position of strength.



A thaw in relations would mean India's brutal occupation of Kashmir goes unchecked.

an inch on any of these fronts. Holding talks for the sake of talks is meaningless, and, in the current scenario, will only harm Kashmir's case.

A cold peace – which means downgraded diplomatic ties and a complete ban on trade relations – is the minimum that Pakistan can do under these circumstances.

The Modi government has already

shown its aggressive designs by claiming Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan as their own territory. The Indians are stoking terrorism in Pakistan and working overtime to hurt Pakistan's interests wherever they can. After the restoration of the ceasefire, the Indian Army was quick to announce that there would be no thinning of troops along the LoC and it repeated the allegation that Pakistan continues to sponsor terrorism in held-Kashmir, and threatened to give "a befitting response to any misadventure."

Under these circumstances, any one-sided concession to India or holding meaningless talks will only strengthen the Indian position on Kashmir.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's civil and military leadership had read Modi's intentions incorrectly even in 2019, and they should not repeat the same mistake again. In the real world of international politics and diplomacy, counter-brinkmanship is the only response to brinkmanship.

Pakistani leaders, no matter how bogged down they are by the compulsions of domestic politics, the opposition-campaign, a weak economy and international pressure, must remember that there are national causes worth fighting and dying for – and Kashmir is one such

cause.

Yes, peace should be the ultimate goal, but peace on Indian terms and at the cost of Kashmir will be unacceptable to the nation. Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa must ensure that history does not remember them as the leaders who took all the wrong turns when it came to Kashmir. ■

The Big Divider

The SNC concept has divided the education sector like never before

The Single National Curriculum (SNC) is not a bad idea. Prime Minister Imran Khan's decision to provide a level playing field to all students, irrespective of their class or social background, is in principle a step in the right direction. Pakistan's class-based education system remains a major factor in creating divisions within society, giving students from the elite class a head-start in their life, while blocking or creating hurdles in the social and economic mobility of those who belong to the lower economic strata.

It is often said that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Ironically, this aphorism aptly highlights the chaos that has been created in the entire education sector in the name of the SNC, under the watch of Federal Education Minister Shafiqat Mehmood.

According to several leading educationists, the "ill-thought out" concept of a SNC, instead of raising the overall bar of education in Pakistan would in fact lower it, as it appears to be aimed at appeasing the conservative elements in society. At the same time, it has also shaken the struggling publishing business as one of the major regulators – in this case the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) – itself has become their competitor.

How? Highlighting and understanding this is important if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government wants to ensure that the shelf life of its SNC is longer than its own days in power.

According to the SNC implementation plan, in phase one, the new pre-one to class five curriculum would be implemented this year (2021), while the phase two, for classes sixth to eighth, in 2022, and phase three, for classes ninth to twelfth, in 2023.

On paper, there should be no problem



The SNC has removed the subject of Computer Studies from the primary classes.

According to several leading educationists, the "ill-thought out" concept of a SNC, instead of raising the overall bar of education in Pakistan has, in fact, lowered it.

with the vision of the SNC, which pleads the case of "one system of education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment, so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education."

However, the SNC, which has been unveiled, falls short in many aspects and over-emphasises rote-learning, which even the leading educationists of the 20th century had rejected.

According to a Facebook post by Kasim Kasuri, CEO of the Beaconhouse School System, "the SNC does not include art, music, physical education, IT/robotics, personal/social/health education (PSHE), all of which are key components of the Beaconhouse curriculum."

"After a detailed mapping exercise, we have learnt that even the subjects it does cover, only address 70 percent of the content delivered in similar subjects in

the existing Beaconhouse curriculum up to Class 5," he wrote.

This is just one example of how the leading educationists of the country view the SNC.

Further, the SNC expands the quantum of religious education exponentially, which appears solely aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the operators of religious seminaries. Under the SNC, Islamiyat is a separate subject from class one onwards and elements of compulsory teaching of the Holy Quran, reading of the 200 Ahadith from class I-XII has been added to it. In addition to memorising the Surahs, 40 Ahadith also need to be learnt by heart from class I-VIII.

According to another education expert, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the architects of the SNC have sprinkled similar topics including Islamic personalities and national heroes in the other subjects as well. "There is a lot of repetition of topics and themes from Islamiyat, even in subjects like Urdu and English," she said. "I fear that the SNC will not lay a strong foundation of education in the young minds but will create puppets."

"Sadly, the Urdu language also suffers in the SNC... The basic Urdu Qaeda, which normally has been taught at the pre-school level, is now being included in grade one," she added.

Similarly, educationists have expressed their concern regarding the fact that the SNC, instead of declaring Computer Studies a compulsory subject

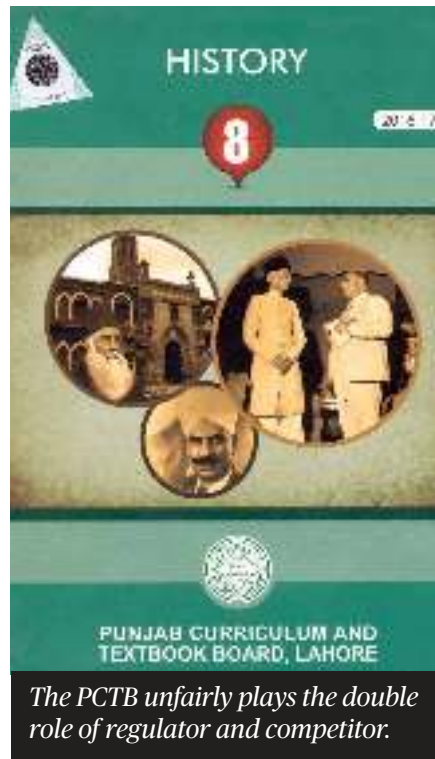
and incorporating 'coding' in the secondary classes, has removed it altogether from the primary classes. They lament the fact that the subject of Information Technology does not even exist there.

The government should have aimed at improving the quality of education in seminaries, and government and the smaller private schools; what it has done instead is that those performing better are being stopped from doing so. Then a key element of raising teaching standards and ensuring basic facilities at schools remain the biggest missing link from this grandiose plan.

As for publishing textbooks, the PCTB has emerged as the biggest hurdle for publishers. Instead of facilitating them to adopt the new system, it has become their biggest competitor.

It has declared that no textbook can be taught at schools without an NOC from the PCTB. Unfortunately, the procedure for obtaining NOCs is not just lengthy and vague, but also expensive.

According to a Lahore-based publisher, the PCTB does not have the capacity to review books and take fair and timely decisions. "We do not know how long it will take to get an NOC, or how to file an appeal if a decision is unjust; what is the route for redressal of any griev-



The PCTB unfairly plays the double role of regulator and competitor.

ances or a bad decision. Everything is so vague and opaque."

The biggest objection of the publishers to what they call "PCTB's draconian measures" is the raising of the NOC fee for each textbook from a maximum of Rs.

10,000 to Rs. 150,000.

Publishers have already incurred huge inventory losses, while the future prospects of reviving their businesses also appear bleak.

With the PCTB itself publishing textbooks, there is a clear conflict of interest – an issue which needs to be addressed, according to the publishers.

Despite protests and intense lobbying, both the federal and the Punjab governments appear oblivious to the concerns of the stakeholders.

Only in the Sindh province, which has refused to be part of the SNC at least for this year, it is business as usual. The Federal and Punjab governments are already at loggerheads with publishers as there are concerns that the provincial governments of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will soon jump onto the SNC bandwagon.

The government needs to address the concerns of all stakeholders on a war-footing and end the uncertainty in the education sector, which has already been jolted by the pandemic. If the government continues to push the SNC in the same rabid way as it is doing now, Prime Minister Imran Khan's plan to reform the education system would collapse even before it takes off. ■

Falling Short

Public spaces must play the positive role they are meant to play

On February 13, T2F (The Second Floor) celebrated an evening dedicated to Faiz Ahmed Faiz, on the occasion of his birthday. How would you react if you made an effort to attend Faiz's celebration, but found that the names of several people you have known well are being invoked? What if some of them had a streak of sexism, misogyny? That's precisely what happened in Karachi last month at T2F – a venue considered a "safe place" for local progressive citizens. T2F is a project of the non-profit organisation Peace Niche, founded by the late Sabeen Mahmud.

Unfortunately, a small number of enthusiastic young Karachiites had to sit through an underwhelming discussion that evening which invoked folks who couldn't survive a minute of the #MeToo movement. A few other respected left-leaning leaders were also highlighted for reasons that were never explained. Of course, everyone recites Faiz to make a point. That's fine. No one owns Faiz. But it is rather sad when history created in front of your eyes is re-created in your presence.

But let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. T2F provides a valuable public space in Karachi. There has been much debate about definitions of public space – whether it is public or private, inside or outside, restrictive or free, democratic and inclusive, or otherwise. The everyday use of public space has been changing – from necessary services to optional, intellectual, cultural benefits. This changing role increases the need for appropriate, well-designed places where people choose to spend time, that provide a safe place for them to discuss ideas without fear of state or communal repercussions, a place to socialise, and just chill.

Jurgen Habermas considers the public sphere a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. Places like T2F can potentially serve a much-needed



T2F provides a valuable space for debate but it must be objective.

It is rather sad when history created in front of your eyes is re-created in your presence.

purpose for the democratisation of society. Habermas' definition of a public sphere is the first, and founding trigger to classification attempts to form public opinion and legitimise state and democracy in post-war Western societies.

Urban design forms public space in the sense of 'informing' it and instructs, educates and empowers it. This argument merits a more thorough study and an investigation of how the relationship between urban design and public space is configured. To get at this relationship, a further question arises, and that is the question of what actually constitutes public space.

From an urban planning perspective, discourse on public space focuses mainly on an accessible and contained spatial configuration, i.e., a public square in a city. In other disciplines, political theory, for example, the meaning of public space is slightly different and more broadly defined.

Public space is constituted twice. First, it arises from standard performative and fleeting action and contains the public's spirit and politics. Second, it can

be formed permanently only through a spatiality that causes the political and the public to receive the chance to last longer than the moment. Two fundamentally opposing driving forces that act in public space can be identified: one ephemeral and performative, the other stabilising and solidifying. Public space is at once the outcome of conflict and negotiations and protective of these negotiations through spatiality.

People make places, and places shape people. Public spaces play various roles in the cities' everyday life, being the physical meeting spaces of cultural, political, economic, social, and individual trajectories. They can create places of interaction and cooperation with the public sphere and the various ethnic/religious/ideological groups; a sphere for mutual tolerance and understanding; a place for acculturation, places for groups to penetrate and get acquainted with 'other' cultures. Public space has repeatedly been suggested to be an essential and necessary platform for the diverse ethnic and cultural groups' socialisation, the building of group identity, and negotiation of relations among different groups themselves and between them.

Karachi needs more public places that serve a mature, educated population, to share oral history and set the record straight. There is no need to glorify people who were outstanding in their skills and also misogynists. We shouldn't put labels like progressive and conservative on these spaces' entrance doors and allow for open, fair, respectful, and informed debate. ■

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The newsmaker

On a Sticky Wicket



Uneasy Lies the Head ...

Will Imran Khan emerge unscathed from the myriad challenges of governance and the gathering political storm?



By Amir Zia

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

By fair means or foul, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) managed to get its candidate elected to the Senate from Islamabad, defeating the sitting Finance Minister, Dr. Hafeez Sheikh, despite having fewer numbers than the treasury in the National Assembly. The surprise defeat of the government candidate came as a huge blow to Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was subsequently forced to take a vote of confidence from the house.

However, in the election for the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Senate, Imran Khan's candidates sailed through the vote count, despite officially having lesser numbers in the house. The opposition cried foul – the same way Imran Khan did, after his candidate lost the Senate seat from Islamabad. By levelling the score, the PTI managed to get its own back.

The outcome of the Senate elections was more or less in keeping with the government's expectations, barring the loss of a seat in Sindh and one in Islamabad. In the overall numbers game, the government's position has improved in the Senate, though not sufficiently enough to have a smooth run when legislating. It will still have to perform a high-wire act to secure the required number of votes each time any bill is brought before the house. Nevertheless, the overall balance of pow-



Has Sadiq Sanjrani's election as Senate Chairman stabilised the government camp after Dr. Hafeez Sheikh's stunning defeat?

er appears to be tilted in the government's favour.

Does this mean that Imran Khan has emerged stronger after the Senate elections? Will he and his team be able to breathe easy now? Will they be able to complete the remaining half of their term in office and implement their reform agenda – at least partially, if not entirely?

The credit or discredit – depending on how one views it – goes to the opposition in that it did manage to create an atmosphere in which Imran Khan appeared vulnerable – for the first time since assuming power in August 2018. The PDM also managed to weave a perception

that Imran Khan had failed to deliver on his agenda and that he and his team were hopelessly “incompetent” in running the affairs of the government.

Additionally, the opposition kept targeting the Pakistan Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) relentlessly, with no adverse fallout of it on its leaders or the PDM's rank-and-file. By doing this, the opposition did manage to create and expand the space for itself, strengthening the hawks within its ranks, who advocate attack as the best strategy for defence.

The Army's complete silence and no visible reaction to the PDM, more specifically the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN)'s tirade against the institution and its leadership, is also emboldening many fringe groups to amplify their critical voices against the armed forces, using both the traditional and social media. Openly ridiculing and levelling all sorts of allegations against the army has now become extremely fashionable within a tiny segment of society and it is most visible in the media and academia, and among select political, ethnic, sectarian and rights activists.

This situation, in the mid- to long-term, could prove damaging and act as a destabilising factor in the country, as attempts to discredit this institution and create a wedge between the army and the

The surprise defeat of the government candidate came as a huge blow to Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was subsequently forced to take a vote of confidence from the house.





Bringing relief to the beleaguered masses is Imran Khan's toughest challenge.

people are rapidly intensifying. However, one view is that the army leadership's apparent silence in response to all the criticism demonstrates the confidence and strength of the institution.

That may well be true, but the strategy the state institutions have adopted carries certain potential risks – the foremost among them being the weakening of the state writ. In such cases, perception often overshadows reality and institutions, despite having all the power at their disposal, lose their capacity to act. They become too sensitive to the dissenting and critical voices from home and abroad, which could result in indecision and inaction on vital issues of national importance.

Even in the Senate elections, some PDM leaders tried to put pressure on the armed forces by first vouching for their "neutrality," which was followed by the opposition's unexpected victory against the government candidate. However, when the results of Chairman and Deputy Chairman in the Senate elections went against their expectations, the maligning game restarted.

On the political front, Prime Minister Imran Khan is not only facing increasing heat from the opposition and an overwhelmingly hostile media, but his own 'house of cards' appears to be very shaky. Many of the old-time Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf loyalists are disillusioned as Imran Khan is being forced to play the game of power politics, as it must be played in a flawed democracy like Pakistan – by flirting with the electable politicians and

Given both the objective and subjective problems of the government, a political storm appears to be in the making for Prime Minister Imran Khan. The "cornered tiger" will have to play out of his skin to save the day.

those with deep pockets. Then there are those PTI backbenchers who are unhappy as they were not able to secure any of the prized positions or tickets to Parliament.

Imran Khan's awarding of the Senate tickets to his favourites – instead of on merit, as he had always advocated – has also dampened the spirits of some hard-working second and third tier leaders and workers. A case in point remains Imran Khan's decision to award tickets to the highly unpopular and controversial, Faisal Vawda, and a new entrant in the party, Saifullah Abro, instead of trusted party hands like Samar Ali Khan and

educationist and philanthropist, Hunaid Lakhani.

Although Imran Khan refuses to acknowledge it, his choice of Usman Buzdar as Punjab Chief Minister, is eroding his political base rapidly. Barring his own self, Imran's "Waseem Akram-Plus" has failed to impress even his own party members. He has become a punching bag – a soft target for the media and the opposition alike. Central Punjab has major issues accepting an uncharismatic chief minister hailing from the backwaters of South Punjab.

Imran has to pay heed to the growing criticism against Buzdar, who has not only become a butt of jokes, but is also being accused of indulging in low-level corruption. This, apart from the stories of his alleged incompetence, which are for too many to ignore. Imran has to somehow make Buzdar perform and help him navigate through the political minefield, if he wishes to continue with him.

However, given Buzdar's abysmal performance in the first half of his term, chances of his turning over a new leaf appear remote.

Another challenge before Imran Khan is keeping the ruling coalition intact, particularly in Punjab and at the Centre. Although there is no apparent threat to the PTI alliance for now, the demands and expectations of allies require constant management and appeasement at short intervals. Imran Khan, with his aloof nature and a certain arrogance, is not cut out for this kind of wheeling and dealing, which comes naturally to conventional politicians hailing from feudal or tribal backgrounds or the neo-rich urban businesspeople.

However, the biggest challenge confronting Imran Khan and his team is how to meet the expectations of the masses, who are bearing the brunt of the economic slowdown and the rising cost of living, which the opposition is exploiting to the hilt. In these tough times of the Covid pandemic and Pakistan's past economic mess, there are no quick fixes to turn the economy around and give immediate relief to the masses.

Imran Khan's economic managers are fixated on the tried and tested formulas doled out by the International Monetary Fund to keep the economy afloat. Any creative and out-of-the box solutions, which were expected from the

PTI government, are yet to be seen.

Imran Khan's slim majority in Parliament and his politics of confrontation also remain impediments in the reform process. This is one front which will prove to be a make-or-break situation for Imran Khan in the coming months.

The PDM will also flex its muscles and try to increase pressure on the government through protests and sit-ins. Imran Khan's uncompromising and inflexible stance against corruption is the main factor which is keeping the opposition united.

Is Imran Khan willing to play smart politics in the days to come by giving concessions to some and holding others accountable in an attempt to create a wedge within the opposition alliance? His close aides maintain that the prime minister has no such plans. This means the politics of confrontation will intensify in the coming days – both inside and outside parliament – as the PTI government, despite its many constraints, will try to confront the opposition head-on.

Needless to say, the increased political polarisation will take away the government's focus from governance and its efforts to turn the economy around and carry out sweeping reforms.

Under these trying circumstances, the most important question remains: What options does Imran Khan have to revive the fortunes of his government? Just surviving from one day to the next in Islamabad is hardly a choice, as it will eventually pave the way for the traditional political establishment to strike back and regain what it has lost.

If Imran Khan wants to deliver on his promises, he needs political stability in the country. And political stability can only be achieved either by striking a grand compromise and pursuing the policy of forgive and forget with the opposition or going full throttle against those who are corrupt – both within the rival and the government camps.

While the first is not an option for Imran Khan, the second means playing tough. But for playing tough, the PTT's besieged government would need the support of all the institutions – from the National Accountability Bureau and all the anti-graft arms of the government to the judiciary and the armed forces.

All state institutions have to be on the same page to enforce political stability



Unpopular appointees like Buzdar (above) and Vawda (below) are eroding Khan's political base while alienating many PTI stalwarts.



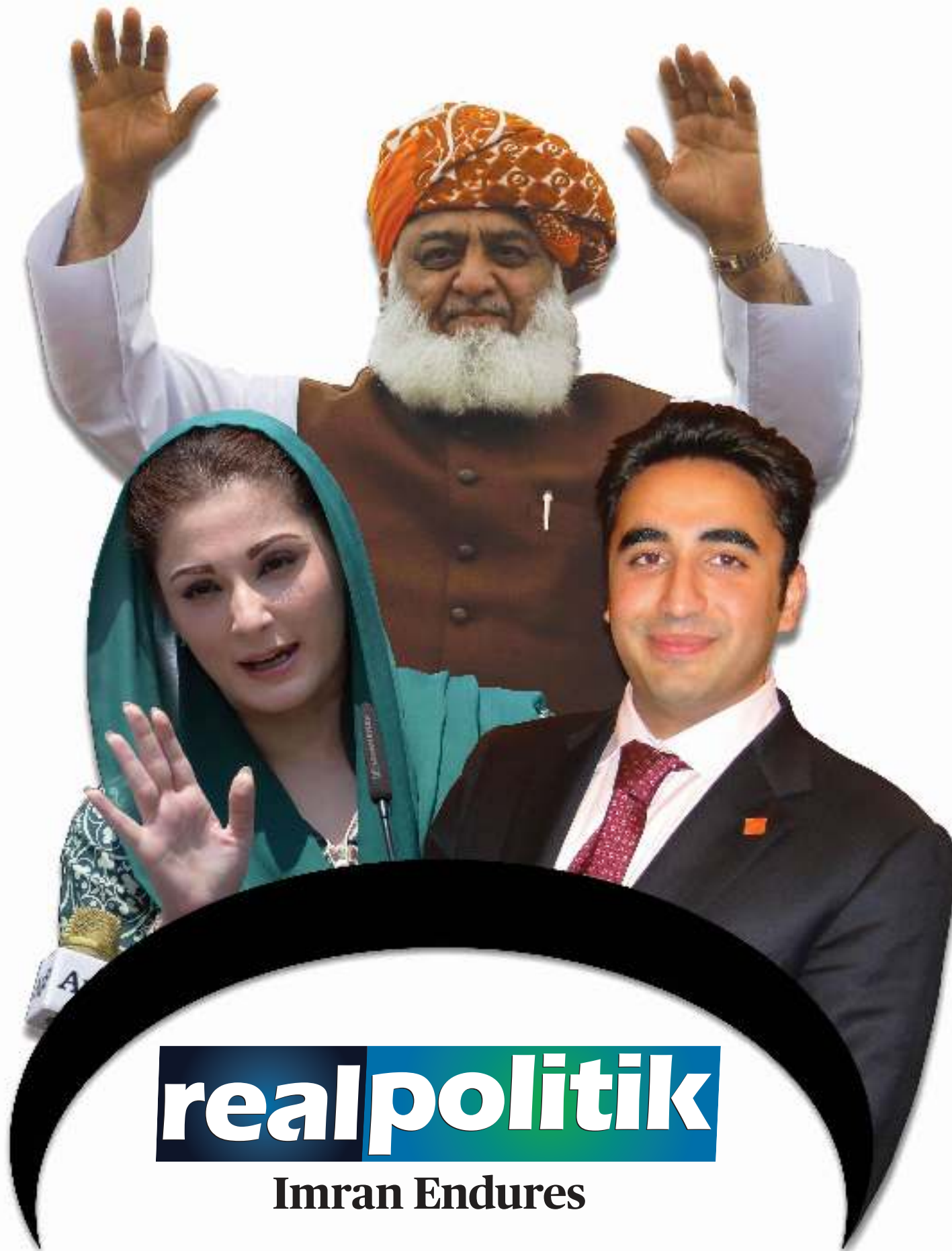
in the country in a fair and transparent manner and bring the truly corrupt public office holders – past and present – to justice. The first round of accountability created a lot of sound and fury, but failed to bring the majority of the high-profile cases to a closure.

But reenergising the accountability process is easier said than done; there appears to be a lot of hesitation within institutions in pushing this agenda forward. Nawaz Sharif's departure to London is just one example that illustrates how the accountability process has been derailed for good or applied selectively.

Calling for early elections could also be a choice – as indicated by Imran Khan – but this is far too risky for the PTI at the

present moment.

Given both the objective and subjective problems of the government, a political storm appears to be in the making for Prime Minister Imran Khan. This time around, the "cornered tiger" will have to play out of his skin to save the day – and to win. Imran Khan has the determination and the stubbornness to take on the challenge, but to overcome it, requires more than good intentions and sound character. The complexities and flaws of Pakistan and its dysfunctional democracy can crush and destroy even the best among us. But for the captain, it is not over till its over. His fans and followers will continue to root for him till he bowls the last ball. ■



realpolitik

Imran Endures

Do or Die

Will Imran's gamble to take a vote of confidence pay off or will he have to call it quits, sooner rather than later?



By Shaheen Sehbai
The writer is the former Group Editor of The News International.

Surrounded by political hounds and desperadoes, Prime Minister Imran Khan took a huge risk and survived – but only by the skin of his teeth.

Repeated defeats in the by-elections – one, surprisingly in his own backyard, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, followed by a drubbing on the Senate seat from Islamabad – made Khan look like a goner. But he is a fighter and so he fought back.

His gamble to seek a vote of confidence was daring and he emerged victorious, securing more numbers this time round than in his original victory as Prime Minister. But not before squeezing through a maze of conspiracies, manipulations, backdoor-deals and rough and tough wheeling and dealing.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)'s celebrations were short-lived and a bruised opposition complained that Khan had used "gutter tactics," which, they strongly believe, is their sole prerogative. They are known to use every trick in the book of crooks and mafias. If anyone dares to use a single page from it, he would instantly be told that his "Character dheela hay" (He has a loose character).

Politics is, admittedly, a dirty game,

but if one party sticks to the rules and the other does not, how long can the game go on? And the Federal Information Minister, Shibli Faraz, put it succinctly: "We cannot be expected to play soccer with our hands tied, when the others use their arms and legs."

So caution was thrown to the winds. Everyone climbed down from the high pedestal of morality, rolled up their sleeves and jumped into the arena. What followed was a despicable sight, for which all politicians across the political spectrum got a lot of flak. Hopefully, it will never be repeated.

The recent events have given Khan a new lease of life, but his challenges have also multiplied.

The seemingly empty sloganeering of the opposition parties started showing results when Asif Ali Zardari convinced the confrontationists to cool down and use the system to exploit Khan's weaknesses in governance and in managing his own men and matters.

Being a master of backdoor deals, he first put up Yousaf Raza Gillani as the opposition's candidate from Islamabad and then allegedly used his billions and cronies to buy a solid bunch of PTI legislators.

A veteran witness of many such deals,



It is rumoured that Zardari got Gillani elected in the most expensive election for a single Senate seat to date.



The PM may have overcome the PDM's latest onslaught but he cannot rest easy just yet.

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid said, on record, that almost 25 PTI votes had been compromised in the most expensive election on a single Senate seat. Zardari, whom Rashid credits with possessing a Phd in politicking, made sure that money was not in short supply.

A wobbly Establishment, shaky after the volleys of direct fire from the Opposition, had just started to hold its hand, and it was at that very vulnerable moment that Zardari struck the PTI government with Gillani's victory.

After the initial shock, Khan collected his wits and hit back instantly. The Establishment also realised that it was far too dangerous to let a wounded Khan fall before the sneering hounds. The battle was expected to be fierce.

According to Sheikh Rashid, the usual midnight telephone calls started flooding the telephone exchange and out of the 25 renegades, many were persuaded to show up and vote for Khan the following day. Two of the PTI MNAs were showing attitude until just one hour before the votes were to be cast. Finally, they did come around, and Sheikh Rashid noted that these two persons were the loudest in celebrating Imran Khan's victory in the House.

Such is the inglorious hypocrisy of a system that we call "democracy." None other than the Prime Minister himself shared this view with me a few days be-

After the initial shock, Khan collected his wits and hit back instantly. The Establishment also realised that it was far too dangerous to let a wounded Khan fall before the sneering hounds.



Sheikh Rashid accused the PDM of compromising 25 PTI votes.

fore the Senate polls.

I asked him about the prospects for democracy in the country. In my view democracy could never take root with a band of crooks and hypocrites, devoid of any values or morals, wanting to take turns at ruling the country; they had to be eliminated through a major surgical strike across the board. Imran Khan quickly responded by saying, "Sadly it's the only way to clean up this rotten system."

His words resound in my mind as he enters the second phase of his term, with just about two years left and a massive people's agenda yet to be implemented.

Khan believes he will now have to go in for a surgery, sure-footedly and as quickly as possible. He is trying to convince the Establishment that unless they take a firm decision and stop dithering and vacillating, Pakistan will go down the drain and become impossible to govern, à la Ethiopia or Somalia. And this, even if they eventually decide to take over the reins of government.

Khan's virtual second term thus begins with a new resolve to reform the system, clean up the mess and use all the tricks in the book, foul or fair, to achieve the results that he views as being essential for this country's survival.

A variety of options are being considered, including a presidential system with Imran Khan in the seat of president, to keep the international community from agitating and protesting too much.

The process of accountability to counter the all-pervasive corruption in the country, led by those elements who have not just been identified but charged and indicted, needs to be taken to its logical conclusion.

These elements include those within the ranks of the PTI as well. Imran Khan has mostly appeared like a lame-duck PM in the first half of his term, dependent on a motley bunch of corrupt people. But now that clarity has come to him, as it must to all decision-makers, he should ensure that only the genuinely clean persons from either side of the spectrum are allowed to stay in the field and the rest are sidelined.

If the PDM continues to pull him down and create bigger hurdles in his way, it is likely that his like-minded sponsors will move in quickly and resolutely to put an end to the opposition's movement, and allow the PTI to complete its tenure. ■

thinktank

Terms of Engagement

By Maleeha Lodhi
The writer was Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN. She has also served as Pakistan's High Commissioner to the UK, twice, and as Pakistan's Ambassador to the US.

Limits of a Thaw

Does the agreement on a truce on the LoC mark a step towards normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan?

The February agreement between Pakistan and India to adhere to a ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC), in accordance with the 2003 arrangement, has helped to melt the ice between the two countries after a protracted period of tensions. From the depths of confrontation evidenced last year, the two countries seem to have walked back from the danger of conflict to agree on a truce on the LoC. Does this thaw mark a step towards normalisation of relations? Is it a portent of an eventual resumption of peace talks between the nuclear neighbours? Or is the de-escalation of tensions limited to the LoC, which both sides have concluded in their own interest?

It is much too early to come to any conclusion about the future prospects of a troubled relationship, especially as the positions of the two sides are so far apart on the terms of re-engagement.

For now, the agreement between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) has been publicly welcomed by both capitals in somewhat guarded terms. The joint statement issued after talks between the two DGMOs declared their re-commitment to the 2003 arrangement and said that "both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firings along the LoC and all other sectors," with effect from the midnight of 24/25 February 2021. Both sides "reiterated that existing mechanisms of hotline contact and border flag meetings will be utilised to resolve any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding." It further said that the two DGMOs agreed to "address each other's core issues and concerns, which have the propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence" in the interest of "achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders."

This development comes after an extended period of turbulence between the two countries which saw a spike in ceasefire violations on the LoC, as well as a rise



in civilian casualties on Pakistan's side of the border. In 2020, there were over 3,000 violations of the LoC by India. The crisis in relations, triggered by India's air strike inside Pakistan at Balakot two years ago and Delhi's abrogation of Article 370 of its constitution and illegal annexation of Jammu and Kashmir on August, 5 2019, led to a complete suspension of diplomatic engagement. Diplomatic representation was downgraded. Pakistan closed its airspace to India and ceased bilateral trade. Both countries repeatedly exchanged hostile statements. Tensions soared to a record high last year, with Islamabad accusing Delhi – more than once – of subversive activities to destabilise the country and seeking to contrive a 'false flag' operation to justify aggression against Pakistan.

Irrespective of any 'back channel' meetings that took place to produce reaffirmation of the LoC ceasefire, the more consequential question relates to the future and whether broader engagement between the two neighbours is in the offing? Before considering this, two background factors should be kept in view as they provide a wider context to the latest development. Both have been

noted by several observers. One, this thaw has taken place when China and India have also been easing tensions by embarking on military disengagement from Ladakh, which saw serious armed clashes between the two countries last year. De-escalation on the LoC has come on the heels of this modest relaxation in Sino-Indian tensions. Two, the advent of the Biden administration has seen countries try to position themselves to renew or upgrade their ties with the US by taking actions to influence the thinking in Washington. That also applies to South Asia's principal powers and may well be one of the driving factors behind the latest development.

Whether factors external to the Pakistan-India equation have motivated their mutual desire to reduce tensions, what is more important is whether the ceasefire move will substantially bring down the temperature and pave the way for resumption of the long-suspended dialogue. The path to reinstalling bilateral talks remains strewn with formidable challenges, especially as Delhi's policy of using unprecedented levels of repression in occupied Jammu and



Is the arrival of President Biden a key factor behind the ceasefire?

Kashmir remains unchanged. This recently prompted Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to criticise India's human rights record and continuing restrictions in Kashmir. A day after the DGMO's agreement, Islamabad also made it clear that its principled position on Kashmir remains unchanged.

Against this backdrop the question is, on what terms and circumstances can any meaningful dialogue resume between the two countries? Before the ceasefire agreement Pakistan had demanded that India rescind its unilateral August 5 action before any talks could be considered. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi repeatedly ruled out any possibility of talks with India in the prevailing situation unless Delhi reversed the steps it had taken in occupied Kashmir. Prime Minister Imran Khan has also reiterated this. In January he said no talks were possible unless India restored the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir though more recently, during a visit to Sri Lanka, he asserted that if India took one step towards peace Pakistan would take two.

Delhi, for its part, has constantly echoed the mantra that "terror and talks" cannot go together and ruled out talks on Kashmir, insisting it is an internal matter and is being dealt with accordingly. Last month, for example, the Indian representative told the UN Human Rights Council while referring to the 2019 decision to scrap Article 370, "We reiterate that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India. The steps taken... are our internal matters." India's Ministry

It would be next to impossible for Pakistan to agree to talks or normalise relations with India if Delhi refuses to discuss the dispute of occupied Kashmir and continues to demand that Pakistan should vacate Azad Kashmir.

of External Affairs has also repeatedly claimed that "the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession." And further that Pakistan "has no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it." Delhi also called on Pakistan to "immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation" - a reference to Azad Kashmir. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has also stated that if bilateral talks take place, it won't be about Jammu and Kashmir, but about "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the territory under Pakistan's control since it invaded the region in 1947."

Finding common ground between these sharply divergent positions for a dialogue seems a remote possibility. It

would be next to impossible for Pakistan to agree to talks or take steps to normalise relations with India if Delhi refuses to discuss the dispute of occupied Kashmir and continues to disingenuously claim that all it is willing to talk about is that Pakistan should vacate Azad Kashmir.

It may be in India's interest to normalise ties without including Kashmir in the dialogue to create the impression that Pakistan has accepted the August 5 action and there is no longer any dispute over Kashmir. The opposite is the case for Pakistan. Engagement with India or talks minus Kashmir will nullify Pakistan's position on the dispute and would be unacceptable for Islamabad. The government will therefore have to avoid any engagement for the sake of engagement with India unless Pakistan's concerns are accommodated in future talks. This is difficult to envisage given the Narendra Modi government's hardline posture and its flat refusal to discuss Kashmir.

Kashmir always figured in past dialogues and peace processes between the two countries. The most comprehensive framework for talks in recent history, known as the composite dialogue process, was evolved in 1997. It took place from 2004 to 2008, when the ceasefire was also observed on the LoC, and then again in 2010 (although the two rounds then were referred to as resumed dialogue). This was structured around an agenda of eight issues: Kashmir, Peace and Security, Terrorism and Drug-Trafficking, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar barrage/Tulbul navigation projects, Commercial and Economic Cooperation, Promotion of Friendly Exchanges. It proceeded for several years because the agenda reflected the priorities of both sides, Kashmir for Pakistan and terrorism for India. It is unlikely that a similar structure can be envisioned given India's refusal to talk about Kashmir.

Managing tensions with India will continue to be a major pre-occupation for Pakistan, but the immediate outlook for any substantial improvement in relations is marked by uncertainty. Until there is substantive dialogue aimed at a negotiated settlement of disputes, especially Kashmir, the two nuclear neighbours will continue to be in an uneasy state of no war, no peace, with sporadic efforts to manage tensions, as the February DGMOs agreement seeks to do. ■

Line of Fire, No More?

With the DGMOs' hotline communication and joint ceasefire announcements, are India-Pakistan relations on the mend?



Lt. General Naeem Khalid Lodhi

Apparently the ceasefire agreement is a first step towards normalisation of relations between two nuclear-powered neighbours. It will bring immediate relief along the Line of Control (LoC), for both the armed forces and the civilian population. However, much more seriousness and resolve is required to take the process to an irreversible level. Foremost would be the cessation of Indian atrocities in Indian occupied Kashmir to build further trust and prepare the grounds for political level talks. From there on, the road to ultimate peace would emerge.

Therefore, the real test would be an Indian change of heart inside occupied Kashmir, otherwise this temporary peace along the LoC will not hold for very long. Moreover, there should be little doubt that this has happened due to cajoling by the USA, as it wishes to dampen Indo-Pak tensions, to further its own interests in the region.



Imtiaz Gul
Senior Journalist & Analyst

While it is still early days, one hopes that the Biden administration will serve as a moderating factor in India, as the Democrats are traditionally sensitive to human rights violations. The Biden administration's quiet back-channel pressure could have possibly led to a ceasefire agreement. It seems to be treating human rights in South Asia seriously, compared to the previous two administrations. Moreover, the State Department has welcomed the resumption of 4G mobile internet in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, while showing interest in continued political and economic improvement, in order to restore normalcy to the occupied Valley.

However, the occupied J&K's human rights situation has been bleak since August 2019, with India's annexation move, as well as the hostile treatment of minorities in the country, at large. The situation has been deteriorating over the last three years, with the Indian press under pressure and an undeclared censorship taking place due to fear of reprisals by the RSS and BJP.

India's human rights violations have generated anti-BJP sentiment abroad, in major US and UK media such as the *Washington Post*, *Guardian*, and *New York Times*.

India needs to correct this, to be able to forge ahead with the relations previously reached during the Trump administration. If that happens, it could lead to a softening of its position, with a direct bearing on India-Pakistan relations.



Syed Hasan Jawaid
Former Ambassador,
Author, and Analyst

The ceasefire agreement can be seen as an initiative backed by the new Biden administration, whereas India's sincerity is suspect. India has been trying to isolate Pakistan since 1947. However, the ceasefire announcement could be looked at as a face-saving measure to counter mounting pressure from the Western world due to India's increasing human rights violations. The annexation of Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir in 2019 garnered criticism from Western media as well as international human rights watchdogs and organisations.

Additionally, secularism and the democratic right to protest is under threat in India with the BJP government in place which has had a worsening impact as the state attacks farmers and minorities, mainly Muslims, Dalits, and Sikhs. The Western world, championing ideals of human rights, can't see eye to eye with India because of these gross violations.

Moreover, joint announcements seem arbitrary from the Indian side, as it is trying to buy time to take complete control of the Valley, where it intends to change the demographic and distract national and international critics. It wouldn't be wrong to call this a bitter pill for India, where its priority has become some semblance of positive image-making in front of the rest of the world, with the internal state in shambles. India's main goal now is to cover up the atrocities taking place within. On the other hand, with recent developments in place, Pakistan should demand the reversal of the annexation of occupied Jammu & Kashmir, before normalising relations, as this ceasefire announcement could prove to be mere opportunism from the Indian side.



Dr. Qamar Cheema
Academic and Analyst

It has been Pakistan's utmost desire to formulate a ceasefire agreement. Whenever there was a local, indigenous uprising in Indian occupied Kashmir, the Indian government linked it with the Line of Control (LoC), and this has been happening since PM Modi came to office. What is needed at the moment are legal frameworks, along with third-party intervention, which would help in normalisation of relations.

India and Pakistan have been talking behind the scenes, since there has been international pressure on India because of which it doesn't want to show a hard face to the Biden administration. Efforts for peace and reconciliation have been emanating from the Pakistani government for confidence-building measures at the LoC.

One more thing that has been visible in Pakistan is military diplomacy, which has been effective. The military has the institutional memory to deal with India. The military on both sides has the support of its leaders as they are working to attempt confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the coming days. Pakistan's unelected officials have shown interest in having economic ties with the whole region, therefore, Indian partnership would be required for comprehensive growth.

Pakistan is on the path of economic recovery and stability, for which it looks forward to mending of ties with all its neighbouring countries, including India. Lastly, outstanding bilateral disputes must be discussed during CBMs when a minimum common agenda is recognised by both countries. Joint announcements are a positive gesture coming from both the governments, and should be viewed from a lens of positivity.

FRONTIERS

The Sikh Revolt



Why not Khalistan?

The Sikh demand for a separate homeland is not without merit or legitimacy



By Ikram Sehgal

The writer is a prominent defence and security analyst, who heads Pakistan's largest private security agency. He writes regularly for leading national and international publications.



Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Tara Singh meet with Lord Wavell, then Viceroy of India.

Sikhs are followers of a monotheistic religion – Sikhism – that originated in the 15th century in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent. When studying the Sikh's sacred scriptures, such as *Adi Granth* or *Dasam Granth*, one finds references to Hindus and Muslims that convey one message: that of the unity of mankind under one God.

One of the most forceful expressions of this irenic belief is to be found in a famous passage of the *Dasam Granth*: “Some are called Hindus, others are Muslims, members of sects such as Shia or Sunni. Let it be known that mankind is one, that all men belong to a single humanity. So too with God, whom Hindu and Muslim distinguish with differing names. Let none be misled, for God is but one; he who denies this is duped and deluded.”

The Sikhs participated in the decade-long Indian freedom movement against colonial rule, along with Hindus and Muslims, in the first half of the 20th century. In 1920, the Akali Dal was founded

as the political representative of the community under its leader Tara Singh. Singh strongly opposed the partition of India and campaigned for the recognition of Sikhs as the third community. The months leading up to the 1947 partition of India, were marked by a tussle between the Indian National Congress (INC), led by Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Muslim League, led by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for the support of the Sikhs in the negotiations on the drawing of partition lines. Nehru is on record as having promised a Sikh state, probably within the Indian Federation, in return for Sikh political support during the negotiations.

On behalf of the Muslim League, the Quaid offered very generous terms to the Sikhs (Master Tara Singh, the Maharaja of Patiala and others) to dissuade them from demanding the partition of Punjab, if India was partitioned. He offered a Sikh state that would be independent and comprise unpartitioned Punjab minus one or two southern districts. Traditionally closer to the Congress, the

Sikh leaders did not take up this offer, one factor being their apprehension that Pakistan would not follow through on the plan in case of the Quaid's demise. This offer throws interesting light on Quaid-e-Azam's ideas about Partition and his vision regarding the future of the subcontinent.



Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale surrounded by supporters inside the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

ment. In fact, just months before Partition, he had agreed to the suggestion of Fazlul Haq and Suhrawardy for an independent Bengal, comprising undivided Bengal and Assam. In his policy statement as President of the All-India Muslim League on June 17, July 11 and again on July 30, 1947, the Quaid stated that Indian princely states had every right to declare independence, in addition to their right to join India or Pakistan. That kept the option for an independent Kashmir open. Just imagine a subcontinent with Pakistan, Kashmir, Punjab and Bengal. Such a vision put the Quaid much ahead of his time. Missing this historic opportunity is now rumoured to be a cause of regret among a substantial number of Sikhs. The 1960s saw growing animosity between the Hindus and Sikhs because of the Sikh demand for the creation of a Punjabi state on a linguistic basis, along the lines of other states in India. To partially fulfil the Sikh demands, Chandigarh was made a union territory in 1966 as the capital of both Punjab and Haryana. However, that did not appease the Sikhs.

Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was initially supported by Congress leader Sanjay Gandhi, eventually triggered an armed struggle

for a fully autonomous Punjab. Earlier, in November 1982, the Soviet Union leader (and former Head of KGB), Yuri Andropov, approved fabrication of Pakistani intelligence documents detailing ISI plans to create an independent Sikh state. This disinformation, including the purport-

Lasting from June 1 to June 10, 1984, the actual assault began on June 3, 1984. The army gained control of the Golden Temple, which was fiercely defended by the Sikhs, after a 40-hour firefight. The official casualty figures of the army were 83 soldiers dead and 249 injured; however, in September 1984, Rajiv Gandhi disclosed that 700 soldiers were killed. What remains a mystery to this day is, why did the Indian Army permit 3000 pilgrims to enter the Golden Temple on the day of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, the founder of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), and then seal it off. Several hundred people lost their lives in the attack. There is widespread suspicion among the Sikhs that the Indian Army did this to inflict maximum civilian casualties and thus demoralise the Sikhs. Operation Blue Star had far-reaching consequences, and one of them was the tragic assassination of then Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, by her own trusted Sikh bodyguards. Nearly 3000 Sikhs were estimated to be killed in the subsequent anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. Sikh soldiers across India mutinied; several were killed and nearly 3000 soldiers were court-martialled. Dozens of Sikh officers resigned from the Indian armed forces.

In 1985, the Indian Government attempted to seek a political solution to the grievances of the Sikhs through the Rajiv-Longowal Accord signed by then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, and the Akali Dal leader of Punjab, Harchand Singh Longowal. The Accord accepted the religious, territorial, and economic demands of the Sikhs that were considered non-negotiable in Indira Gandhi's tenure and agreed to establish commissions and independent tribunals in order to resolve the Chandigarh issue – whether it was to be handed to Punjab or Haryana – and the dispute between Punjab, Haryana and other states over the sharing of water from the Ravi-Beas system. This led to the Akali Dal's victory in the subsequent elections. However, not all Sikhs accepted the truce. There was opposition from several orthodox leaders, as well as some politicians of Haryana. In fact, Longowal was assassinated by militants opposed to the accord.

Rumours abound that during Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto sought to appease him by instructing the then Interior Minister, Aitzaz Ahsan,

to hand over the list of the Sikh militants involved in the Khalistan movement hiding in Pakistan to the Indians. And even though Aitzaz Ahsan has denied it, rumours still persist, especially among intelligence circles. By the early 1990s, Indian security forces had managed to suppress Sikh insurgents, who were behind the indiscriminate attacks designed to cause extensive civilian casualties, such as the derailing of trains, and exploding of bombs in markets, restaurants, and other civilian areas between Delhi and Punjab. As a result, Hindus left Punjab by the thousands. The insurgents even assassinated many of those moderate Sikh leaders who opposed them, and sometimes killed rivals within the same militant group.

The demand for Khalistan has not died down to this day. Recent reports indicate a rise in pro-Khalistan sentiment among the Sikh diaspora overseas; they are determined to revive the secessionist movement. During the Cricket World Cup in 2019, some people were even spotted in pro-Khalistan jerseys, but they were whisked out of the stadium by security.

Following RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's speech on Dussehra in 2019, in which he said, India is a Hindu nation, Sikh community leaders such as Giani Harpreet Singh, the Akal Takht jathedar (head of the Takht or authoritative seat), and Gobind Singh Longowal reacted sharply. Objecting to Bhagwat's remark, Giani Harpreet Singh said: "When we oppose the RSS, we are not opposing the Hindus; this should be clearly understood. The RSS can preach Hinduism; we have no problem with that. But they should stop defining Sikhism. Sikhs have many institutions to decide who they are. We don't want outsiders to tell us who we are... We are not part of the Hindu nation of the RSS."

In Pakistan, where the Sikhs comprise a small minority, they have had their share of problems with Muslims. This may have to do with the horrible memories of Partition in Punjab and also because of Pakistan's failure to provide the necessary security, acceptance and comfort to the Sikhs, despite the firm determination of the Quaid to protect the minorities. Fortunately, the situation has improved over the years; many Sikh places of worship located in Pakistan are now very well maintained. The credit goes



The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor allows Sikhs easy access to the final resting place of Guru Nanak.

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to a former DG, ISI and diehard Islamist, Lt. Gen. (R) Javed Nasir, who was at one point, Chairman, Evacuee Trust Property Board. Consecutive Pakistani governments have allowed Indian Sikhs access to their places of worship on the occasion of Sikh holidays.

With the restoration of the religious Sikh site in Kartarpur and the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor which allows all Indian Sikhs almost unrestricted access to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, the last resting place of Guru Nanak, Pakistan has shown a marked change in its attitude towards the Indian Sikhs. However, India has not reciprocated this gesture so far. Pakistani Sikhs are not allowed to use the

border-crossing and hence, cannot access Dera Baba Nanak on the Indian side without first obtaining an Indian visa.

With the fascist BJP ruling the country, Pakistan cannot expect any real progress in its relations with India. In fact, India's National Security Advisor (NSA), Ajit Kumar Doval, and others openly talk about breaking up Pakistan by fomenting trouble in Balochistan and elsewhere, repeatedly and vociferously, as do some of their reputed TV anchors.

Instead of fishing in Pakistan's "troubled waters," perhaps India should be taking a cold, hard look at its own backyard, where several insurgencies are underway – and I am not talking about Kashmir.

The Sikhs have been demanding their own separate homeland, Khalistan, long before Partition. The separatist movement gathered momentum in the 1980s. With financial and political support from the Sikh diaspora in Canada, Italy and the UK, the movement gained force in the Indian State of Punjab in the '70s and reached its pinnacle in the '80s. However, it received a setback after Operation Bluestar and the subsequent crackdown on the separatists. But the movement refuses to die down.

While the Indian government fomented trouble in Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan, it has the gall to accuse Pakistan of instigating the Sikh community. Perhaps it's time Pakistan too lent active support to the Sikhs to acquire their own homeland, Khalistan, for there is considerable merit in the Sikh demand for their own sovereign state. ■

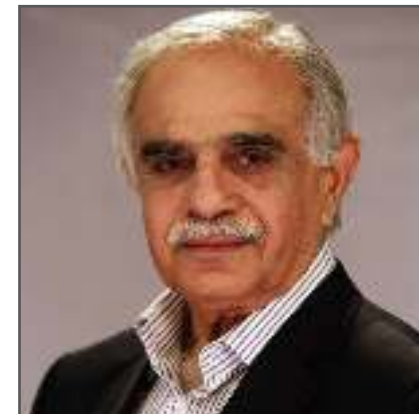
Stratagem

Harsh Realities



Enemy at the Gates

Given the disturbing unravelling of events globally, it may be time to seriously start examining even conspiracy theories



**By Lt. Gen (R)
Ghulam Mustafa**

The writer is a prominent defence analyst. During his long and distinguished military career, he held a number of command positions.

What's common between Entebbe Airport, the Munich Olympics, *Two Minutes Over Baghdad*, and the fake Hindian air strike at Balakot? It's a no-brainer really. Let me add to these if you haven't cottoned on yet; Trump, Jared Kushner and the Deal of the Century! Still wondering? The answer in one word: Israel.

Of the many reasons for and consequences of World War Two, the creation of Israel must rank among the top few, whichever way one looks at it. This aspect of the perpetually ongoing Great Game makes for a very absorbing and fascinating study. While the Deal of The Century appeared to have fallen through, Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, leading this campaign, had other moves up his sleeve. Moving Israel's capital to Jerusalem was one, conceding internationally recognised Syrian territory, the Golan Heights to Israel another, and brokering the Abraham Accord was the last, but not the least, of gifts bestowed by the 'Leader of the Free World' to an extremist religious state.

So what does this tell us? That the unbridled application of raw power is again the new normal, and human or any other rights are just sticks with which to flog those who don't fall in line? And it is not over yet, not by a long shot. Pakistan, however, appears to believe it is of little or no consequence, notwithstanding the politically motivated rhetoric of "yaho-di ka agent" hurled indiscriminately at whoever happens to be on or even off the horizon.

It doesn't end there. The Trump Administration did more. It changed the nomenclature of its theatre-based armed forces command immediately after assuming office. The Pacific Command was re-designated as the Indo-Pacific Command. Innocuous sounding to most, but very meaningful. It wasn't only to keep India amused. Consider the four ma-

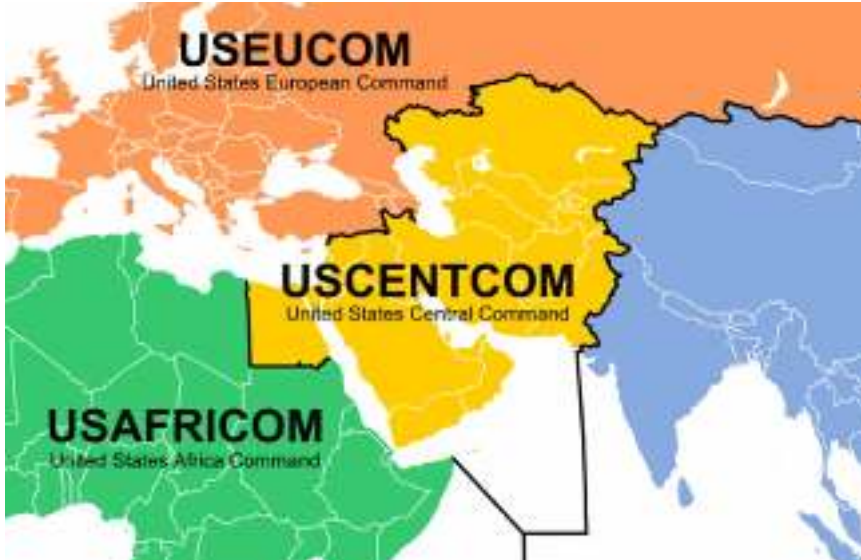


Is the US positioning India and Israel to tilt the Asian balance of power in its favour?

ajor agreements starting with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in September 2016 to the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in the first week of November 2020. And should we believe that it is only India's boundless cuteness which has made it the fourth member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) – the US, Australia and Japan being the other three? Or do we read these developments together to come up with other theories? Conspiracy theories?

Enter the Biden Administration in January 2021. After a flurry of optics improving executive orders, the new POTUS expands United States Central Command (CENTCOM)'s area of responsibility to include Israel, previously under European Command. Is it merely a routine change or does it mean something more substantive? Why now?

My imagination might be in overdrive, but humour me and look at the world map. The area of responsibility of the Indo-Pacific Command stretching from China to India, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and partially also the Indian Ocean is getting warmer, and it is not because of summer. In addition to hem-



The expansion of CENTCOM to include Israel should have set alarm bells ringing in Islamabad.

ming in China's seaward area of influence which includes the entire Far East, it can effectively block the Straits of Malacca, thus severing China's westbound sea lines of communication beyond its legitimate claims, one of the key elements in this game. Apparently, China was aware of these strategic developments, and as part of One Belt One Road (OBOR), had moved to gain freedom of action by including Myanmar, Sri Lanka and more recently, Bangladesh, as the pivots of its sea linkage. Is it just a coincidence that these three countries are under some kind of bind, and that too of India? No wonder the US wants to keep it "amused!" As is evident from developments in this region, it is an ongoing conflict area, part of a future battleground if and when this kind of latest Cold War gets upgraded to kinetic levels. The Indo Pacific Command has quite a task on its hands – bottle up China within its exclusive economic zone and cut off OBOR's sea routes, almost all of them.

Now to CENTCOM, which today extends from Pakistan to Israel and to everything in between, including Afghanistan, the Middle East, part of Africa and more importantly, all entry and exit routes from the Indian Ocean. The addition of Israel with an enhanced perimeter of security as a result of the Abraham Accords should have raised a few eyebrows in Pakistan. However, barring the odd article in the print media, it is all quiet on the home front. Israel is now physically present in India, Afghanistan, the UAE, Oman, Egypt

The addition of Israel with an enhanced perimeter of security as a result of the Abraham Accords should have raised a few eyebrows in Pakistan. However, barring the odd article in the print media, it is all quiet on the home front.

and Sudan. This development should have set alarm bells ringing in Pakistan, but one doesn't hear anything. It can mean either of two things. One, I am hallucinating and there's nothing to worry about. Or two, we don't want to face the harsh realities simply because we can't do much about them. What if Israel were to go it "alone" against Iran as it declared recently? Will that have consequences for Pakistan? Very, very serious ones. What would we do then? Side with our brotherly Islamic countries of the Middle East? Stay neutral even if there is a spillover into the country? Help Iran defend itself

against aggression?

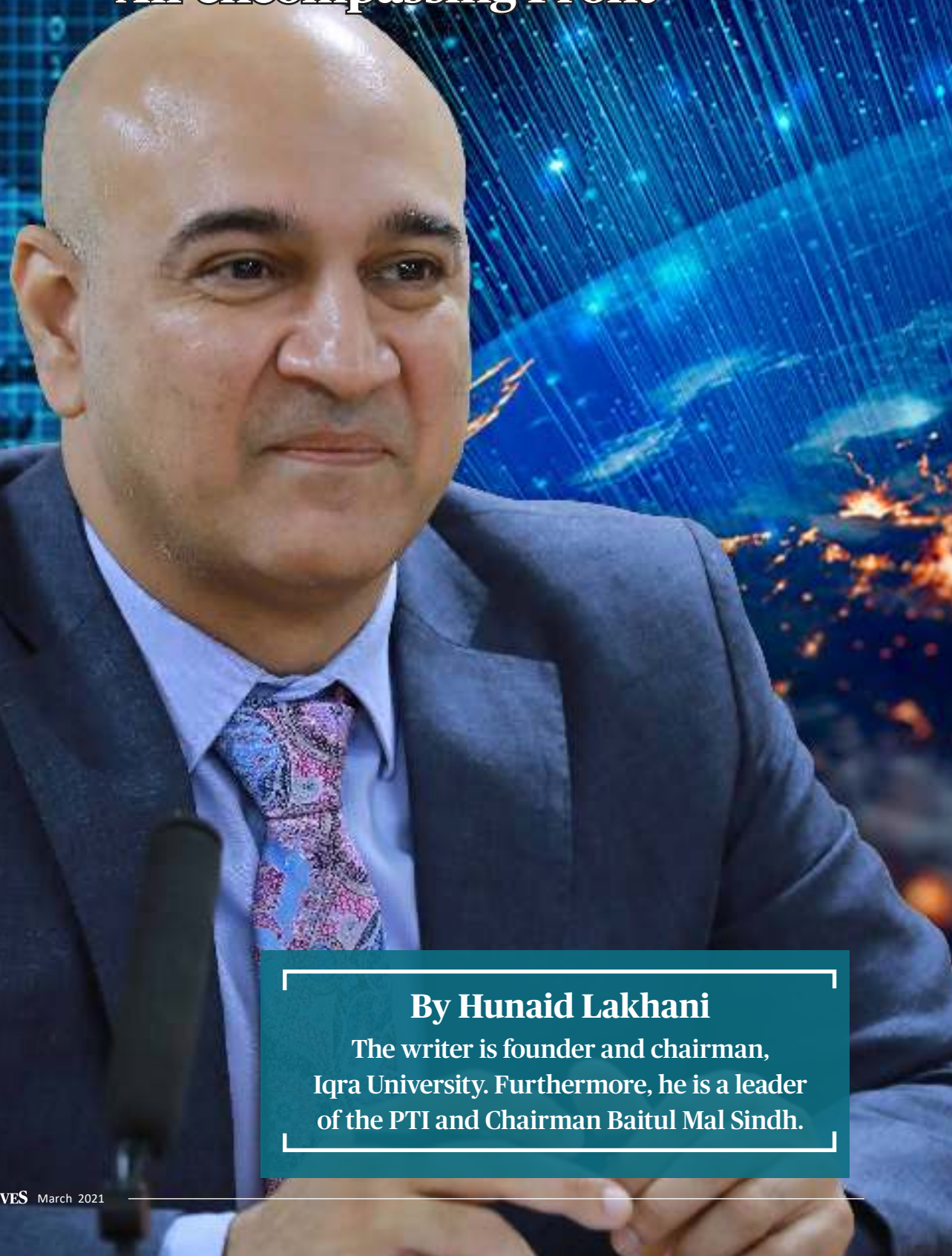
OBOR's sea route will link with its southern land route, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to be precise, at Gwadar. This jewel in our crown will still be the central pivot even if Iran joins. China is laterally linked to the Eurasian land mass through its neighbouring Central Asian countries, but this strategic zone can reach the Indian Ocean only if Afghanistan settles down. It is only then that we will see OBOR blossoming into an interconnected and interdependent economic juggernaut needed so very badly by all the linked countries. That will actualise the prophecies of sages who had predicted that the 21st Century would belong to Asia and that whoever controls the Indian Ocean would have the decisive say in this regard. Going this route could also raise hopes for a peaceful and just resolution of the Kashmir Issue. Otherwise, as is happening in the case of Palestine, Kashmir will continue to fester.

It suits the powers-that-be to keep Afghanistan on the boil, allow India to absorb Kashmir completely through whatever means necessary, and wear down an economically weak and politically unstable Pakistan, again through whatever means necessary, into giving up its major strengths. Squeeze Pakistan out from OBOR, weaken its armed forces, create an unbridgeable divide between its forces and its people, de-nuclearise it and bring it down to just being a pathway. Increasingly, the title 'Enemy At The Gates' starts making sense, more so because this enemy in connivance with the enemy within is already waging a hybrid war against Pakistan.

One could disregard this entire hypotheses as the figment of an overactive imagination of a subjective mind. I have no beef with that, so long as it is proven wrong on the ground. Till then it can work as another conspiracy theory laced with a few undeniable facts or even as a crude attempt to employ fear as the key to compel people to listen. Either way it would have served its purpose. After all, there has to be a strong reason for the various developments mentioned earlier, almost all impacting our region, especially Pakistan. There has to be a reason for this sudden onslaught on the 'Establishment' by some of its favourites in the years gone by. Figure that out and let's get our act together before it is too late. ■

Viewpoint

All-encompassing Front



By Hunaid Lakhani

The writer is founder and chairman, Iqra University. Furthermore, he is a leader of the PTI and Chairman Baitul Mal Sindh.

Perception Warfare

5th generation war and the way forward For Pakistan

Pakistan is a country that holds critical geopolitical significance in the region, a double-edged sword to be exact. Moreover, the situation is further exacerbated as Pakistan faces multiple overt and covert adversaries and a continuously evolving threat both directly and indirectly. However, recently the term '5th generation warfare' has been extensively accentuated by the country's civilian and military leadership, most notably from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), which compels one to explore this phenomenon and the significance it holds for Pakistan.

Before discussing 5th generation warfare, it is imperative to know that 'warfare' has been categorized and divided into four prior generations: First – ancient war with phalanxes and other formational techniques. Second – the emergence of the rifle, breech-loading weapons, early machine guns. Third – the rise in World War I of nonlinear battlefield tactics with typical manoeuvres. And, fourth – when countries took on non-state actors (terrorists, insurgents) and the development of 'asymmetric/guerrilla warfare' with extensive exploitation of socio-economic power/circumstances, politics, and media.

5th generation warfare has emerged as the latest and probably the most potent type of war in recent years due to its subtlety, extensive influence, and infiltrative nature.

Understanding 5th Generation Warfare (5GW)

The term 5th generation warfare has emerged in the last decade as an evolution of fourth-generation warfare. It refers to the coercive and directional use and exploitation of mass media platforms (electronic, social media) to propagate a specific narrative in pursuance of desired goals and objectives. It incorporates propaganda, disinformation, cyber-warfare, cultural-invasion, hacking, the dark web, and fake news.

Colonel Liang and Xiangsui of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), in their book '*Unrestricted Warfare*' define 5th generation warfare as: "Warfare that uses all means whatsoever – means that involve force or arms and means that do not ... to force an enemy to serve one's interests," 5th generation warfare is essentially the battle for hearts and minds,' i.e., propagating one's narrative and countering that of the adversary to win the perception warfare.

Expressing his views on 5th generation warfare, Dr. Steven Bucci - a US Army veteran and a former senior Pentagon official, argues that; "We now require an integrated simultaneous approach that has soldiers who can do development and intelligence gathering, who know the psycho-social dynamics of the people among whom they live and move. It requires information operations that range from paper leaflets to the most sophisticated cyber campaigns, and it must be completely immersed in the overall policy thrusts of the nation's leaders."

5th generation warfare is a combination of various elements/aspects, namely, new domains of conflicts, changing nature of adversaries, and evolving nature of objectives.

This new generation of warfare incorporates rapidly changing and evolving domains of conflicts with continuous strategic shifts to keep up with the adversary. These 'conflict domains' are further divided into physical, information, cognitive and social domains – all of which need to be synergised to gain the upper hand in 5GW. Furthermore, another critical prospect of 5GW is the continuously changing nature of adversaries followed by evolving objectives to tackle them effectively and conclusively. The changing nature of goals is further accompanied by respective alterations and adaptations in the use of force, tactics, and strategies to achieve desired results.

In 5GW, intelligence agencies cooperate with terrorist groups to coordinate



'Unrestricted Warfare' defines 5GW as using both lethal and non-lethal tactics to make the enemy serve one's own interests.

and disseminate terror. The terrorist groups bomb a building or kill a civilian, and then the intelligence agency broadcasts photos, videos, and information about the number of martyrs.

The Element Of 'Fake News'

5GW primary revolves around utilising and exploiting propaganda tools to strengthen one's narrative and negate that of the adversary. 'Fake News' – a relatively modern term, has emerged as one of the most potent tools/aspects of 5GW. Nations have resorted to employing comprehensive propaganda campaigns to disseminate a particular narrative and tackle that being circulated by the adversary. The role of media and information is an essential tool for gripping power and implementing policies in today's world. Everything depends on how people perceive things. Negative and positive perception can be moulded by cultivating information as shear propaganda or white



A 5GW attack on Pakistan: Indian news sites fabricate a civil war in Pakistan to discredit its Army.

propaganda, thereby achieving changes in desired targets' behaviour.

Fake news and far-right conservative media platforms played a decisive role in the 2016 US Presidential elections via the deliberate circulation of false and misleading information regarding the Democratic Party and its candidate Hilary Clinton, which eventually resulted in Donald Trump being elected as US President. BREXIT (Britain's exit from the European Union) is another notable example of how an organized media campaign with effective utilization of propaganda tools can 'instil' a specific narrative into people's minds when then shapes domestic socio-economic and political dynamics.

Threats To Pakistan

Pakistan has been subjected to an extensive 5th generation war waged by

Indian media, with the blessing of the Indian state, has continuously churned out false and baseless propaganda regarding Pakistan's domestic issues in its bid to stir unrest in the country.

multiple adversaries, both overt and covert, via linear and nonlinear means. Non-state actors, terrorist organisations, and separatist insurgents collaborate with foreign agencies to undermine Pakistan's peace and stability. Banned outfits such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have close links with the Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). They have been waging a coordinated 5GW against Pakistan.

Furthermore, Indian-sponsored anti-CPEC propaganda is also a key example of 5GW threats faced by Pakistan. The attack on the Chinese Consulate in Karachi to the nefarious false propaganda campaign launched by insurgents under the umbrella of Indian patronage threaten Pakistan's socio-economic and political stability and future. Organizations such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) are, in fact, frontline tools of the 5GW threat faced by the country as they not only challenge the state's narrative and supremacy but also intend to negate its ideological foundations. PTM and like-minded organizations have spewed anti-army and anti-Pakistan propaganda as part of their 'political subversion' to challenge the state's writ and narrative.

The apprehension of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav is also a critical case study to assess the threat posed by 5GW to Pakistan. Mr. Jadhav alias Hussain Mubarak Patel was apprehended by Pakistan's security forces in Balochistan's counter-intelligence operation in 2016. Investigation revealed that Mr. Jadhav was a serving officer of the Indian Navy and worked for India's RAW to stir unrest in Balochistan via espionage and support to banned terrorist and separatist organi-



Infusing the academic curriculum with the state narrative is crucial to buffering young minds against 5GW propaganda.

sations, a particular focus on targeting CPEC related activities, personnel, and projects.

Indian 5GW Against Pakistan

Collaboration with banned outfits to wage 5GW against Pakistan is only one aspect of India's offensive, as our eastern neighbour has been waging a direct and more threatening 5GW against us. Indian media, with the blessing of Indian state institutions, has continuously churned out false and baseless propaganda regarding Pakistan's domestic issues in its bid to stir unrest in the country. For instance, mainstream Indian media outlets claimed a 'civil war' was being fought between Pakistan Army troops and civilian law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in Sindh in October 2020 last year. Indian media claimed a specific death toll and injuries due to the 'civil war' situation in its largest city. Meanwhile, a gas explosion in Karachi's residential complex was also portrayed as a result of the 'fictitious' civil war in Pakistan.

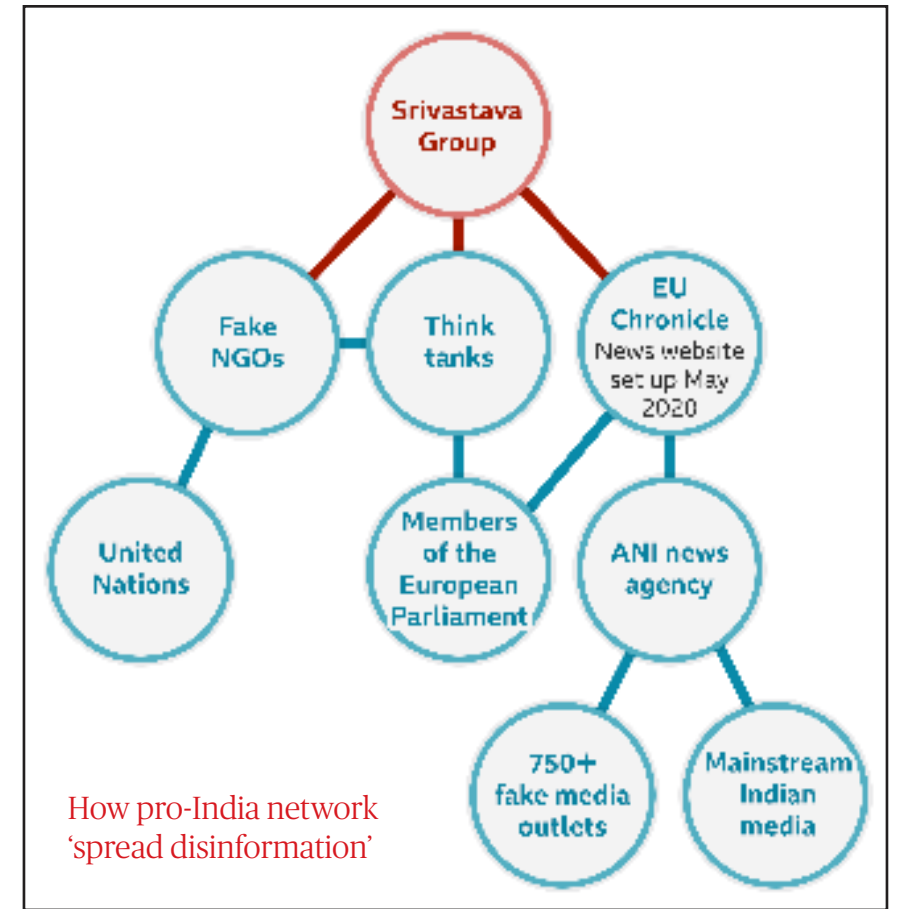
The fake news campaign that was widely circulated on electronic and social media in India was an elaborate scheme to present and propagate an 'alternate narrative' with a one-point agenda of discrediting Pakistan's armed forces and Pakistan's success against terrorism.

Most notably, the recent EU Disinformation Lab report unearthed the comprehensive network of the Indian 5GW campaign against Pakistan. The report revealed that many fake NGOs and media organizations were carrying out a targeted fake propaganda campaign against Pakistan under Indian patronage. It was revealed that 750 Indian-sponsored websites covering 119 countries were a part of the orchestrated propaganda war against Pakistan that started 15 years ago in 2005.

Moreover, these fake websites and media outlets were sponsored by India's Srivastava Group. These fake news and propaganda pieces were further 'boosted' by India's Asian News Agency (ANI); 10 of these fake NGOs were directly linked to the Srivastava family.

Way Forward For Pakistan

Pakistan needs to formulate and adopt a comprehensive counter-strategy to address the evolving threats posed by 5GW. Substantial policy changes need to be made regarding content that is circulated on both electronic and social me-



The state narrative should be inculcated into the academic curriculum to prevent the country's youth from falling prey to adversaries' propaganda.

dia platforms to effectively identify and counter the anti-state narrative being propagated by the country's adversaries. Additionally, comprehensive regulatory laws need to be implemented via a joint effort between state institutions and social media platforms.

Furthermore, the country's cyber-security must be drastically enhanced to address the rapidly evolving threats posed by cyber-warfare.

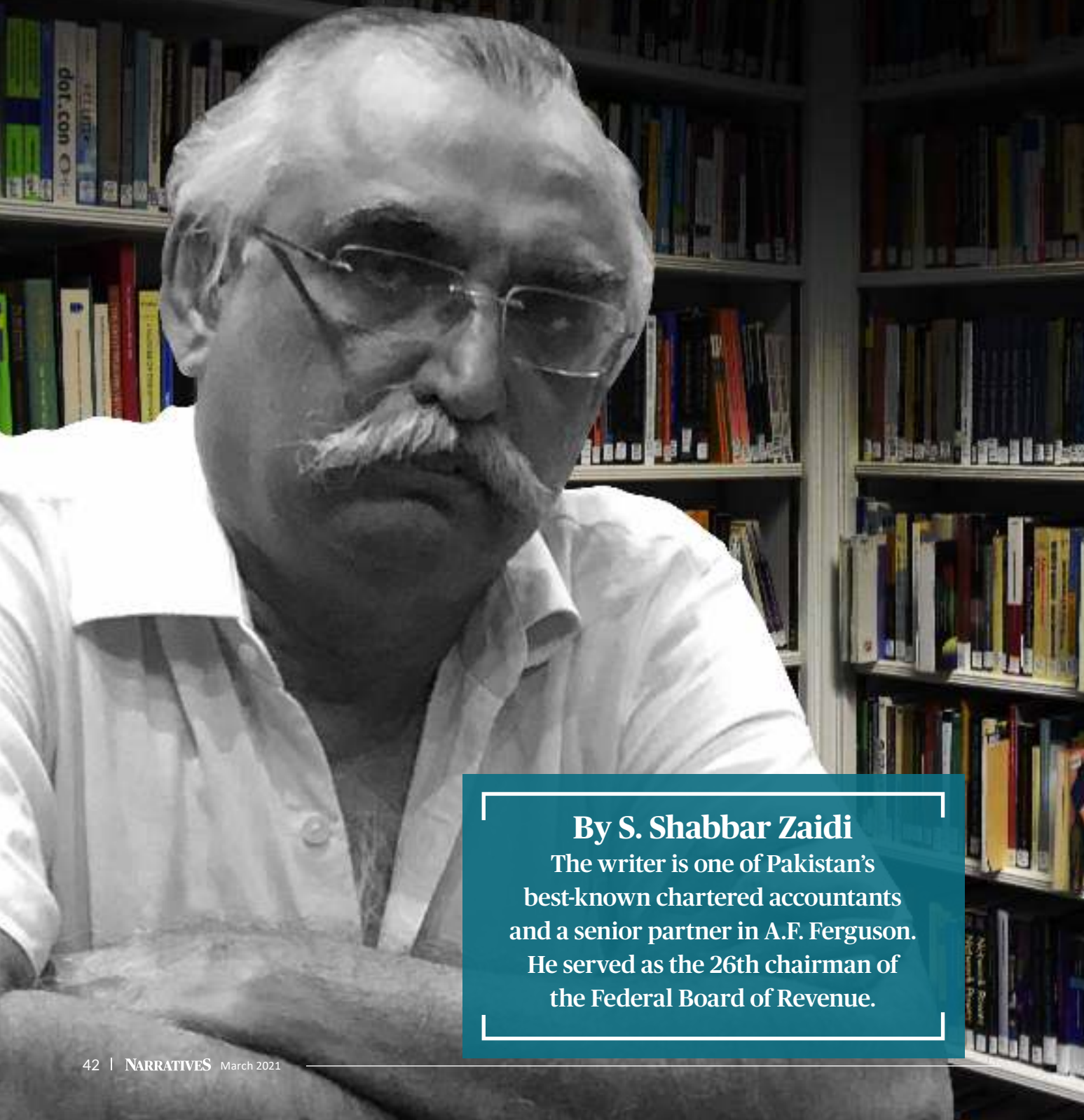
Here are a few essential prerequisites to successfully address Pakistan's emerg-

ing threats in the wake of 5GW.

- At the state level, we must first realize the threats posed by 5GW in various forms and domains at the state level.
- Establish specialized government bodies/departments/institutions specifically equipped to tackle and counter adversaries' 5GW tactics.
- Identification, comprehensive analysis, and categorisation of various forms of 5GW being waged against the country.
- Provision of synergised efforts at every level to strengthen the country's 5GW capabilities.
- We should also formulate and implement laws provisioning preservation of state narrative and national interests.
- The state narrative should be inculcated into the academic curriculum to prevent the country's youth from falling prey to adversaries' propaganda.
- To duly counter the threat of 5GW, Pakistan's civilian and military leadership must join hands with the country's social, religious, and academic elite for their input is an essential prerequisite for providing a sound national policy tackling adversaries 5GW and waging one's own. ■

PERSPECTIVE

Predatory Lending



By S. 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.

Tackling Usury – Rationally

Interest and usury are socio-economic subjects and can be handled by the human intellect

I am a believer in the evolution and development of human intellect aimed at establishing a just society. Interest and usury are socio-economic subjects and can be handled by the human intellect. My research shows that there has been a stagnation in the thought process while applying divine revelations on this subject. Human intelligence has identified solutions that need to be read and divine revelations for a workable solution. There is an urgent need to recognise developments over time and appreciate various societies' corrective actions to curb usury and limit its negative impact. In this flat world, no state can operate in isolation from a well-knit international financial world. Therefore, this article attempts not just to open debate but also to propose a way forward.

Informal Banking and Exploitation of the Masses: Pakistan, which has a high prevalence of cash economy, faces the real menace of usury because of informal banking, where the monthly interest rate ranges between 2.0-5.0 percent. This is the leading cause of financial degradation of agricultural communities and high margins for intermediaries, who undertake the multiple businesses of money lending and trade. I term it as *Arthi* mafia. This system has not changed for centuries, and even today, our state of affairs remains like medieval societies. Unfortunately, as a society, we indulge in debates about the prohibition of *Riba* without understanding the evolution of the financial world, which is integrated. I am not a scholar of Islamic *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), but I consider myself a reasonably good student of finance. In my view, it is the subject of socio-economic behaviour and not of *Fiqh*.

In the following paragraphs, I will dilate on this issue with particular emphasis on the evolution of commercial bank-



ing and "*Ijtihad*" (interpretations) after considering the development of human intellect, which was ratified by divine revelations. However, such interpretation should be made by economic, financial, and accounting experts rather than by those who correlate irrelevant traditions from unauthenticated sources. Many enlightened and practical persons, including Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, took up this important subject in the late 19th century, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

To understand the system of implied usury, it is essential to illustrate a transaction. There are money lenders in the market who provide loans to agriculturists. These money lenders do not recover interest on their loans. While giving loans, they agree that they will buy the product cultivated at a price minus a sum. That sum is the implied interest on that loan. For example, if Rs. 500,000 are lent, the transaction is of an advance purchase of crop at a price to be decided at the time of delivery. Suppose the market price of

a product is Rs. 600,000. Under this contract, it will be Rs. 600,000 minus interest accrued on Rs. 500,000 at the rate of 3 percent per month from the date of the lending to the date of delivery.

In this manner, the moneylender acquires the product at say Rs. 550,000 and sells it at Rs. 600,000 at the minimum. Fake scholars of sacred texts declare Rs. 50,000, thus earned by the moneylender as a kosher transaction. This is a common practice and currently covers around 80 percent of the agricultural product market. The problem is not the role of these fake scholars, who give a wrong interpretation of the sacred text, but as with the masses, who are ignorant. Even in the 60th *Hijri* (Islamic calendar year), there were such scholars who approved the rule of Yazid. Even then, the dispute was about substance versus form. An unjust de-facto ruler cannot claim de-jure authenticity.

Condemnation of Usury is Universal: All the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – prohib-



The majority of Pakistani farmers are victims of unfair lending practices.

it interest (or excess interest). However, many human societies took up the issue of prohibition much before these divine revelations appeared. The divine revelations adopted many just principles, which were already in vogue in primitive societies. The Abrahamic religions also reflected upon this concept, intending to establish just communities. Indeed, the divine corroborates the human intellect if it is for the common good. This may be the reason for a short description of the subject in religious texts, limiting itself to punishments for the people who indulge in usury. The issue itself has been thrashed out in most societies as they reached one conclusion that usury is harmful. The following paragraphs discuss this briefly.

The concept of “usury” has a long history and has been understood as ‘the practice of charging financial interest over the principal amount of a loan.’ However, in some instances, especially in recent times, it has been interpreted as ‘interest above the legal or socially acceptable rate.’

Accepting this broad definition for the moment, the practice of usury can be traced back to approximately 4,000 years ago. It has been repeatedly condemned, prohibited, scorned, and restricted mainly on moral, ethical, religious, and legal grounds. The Abrahamic holy texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam continued this tradition. Hinduism and Buddhism have also been among usury’s most visible and vocal critics. Ancient Western philosophers and politicians and various modern socio-economic reform-

God “permits trade, yet forbids usury.” Profits are the result of the initiative, enterprise, and efficiency. The result after a definite value-creating process. Not so with interest.”

ers can also be added to this list. There is the history behind this critique of usury which carries on even in today’s predominantly interest-based global economy.

The earliest such record derives from the Vedic texts of Ancient India (2,000-1,400 BC), in which the “usurer” (*kusidin*) is mentioned several times and interpreted as any lender who charges interest. More frequent and detailed references to interest payment are to be found in the later *Sutra* texts (700-100 BC) and the Buddhist *Jatakas* (600-400 BC). It is during this latter period that the first sentiments of contempt for usury are expressed. For example, Vasishtha, a well-known Hindu law-maker of his time, made a particular law, which forbade higher castes of *Brahmanas* (priests) and *Kshatriyas* (warriors) from being usurers or lenders at interest. Also, in the *Jatakas*,

usury has been mentioned in a demeaning manner; “hypocritical ascetics are accused of practicing it.”

By the second century AD, however, usury had become a more relative term, as is implied in the Laws of Manu of that time: “Stipulated interest beyond the legal rate being against (the law), cannot be recovered and called a usurious way (of lending).” This dilution of the concept of usury seems to have continued through the remaining course of Indian history. Today, while usury is still condemned in principle, it refers only to interest charged above the prevailing socially accepted range and is no longer prohibited or controlled.

Ancient Western philosophers, who condemned usury, include Plato, Aristotle, the two Catos, Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. These thoughts are reflected in the civil law of that period. For example, the *Lex Genucia* reforms in Republican Rome (340 BC) outlawed interest altogether. Nevertheless, in practice, ways of evading such legislation were found, and by the last period of the Republic, usury was again rife.

It was the democrats in Rome, who rededicated themselves to the cause of those suffering the burden of debt, and under the banner of Julius Caesar, a ceiling on interest rates of 12 percent was set, and later under Justinian, lowered to the level of 4 percent to 8 percent. This may be the first Central Bank discount rate concept. We cannot reject what Caesar and Justinian did. They were democratically elected rulers of a civilised society of that time.

The aforesaid historical record demonstrates that humanity faced the challenge of usury over thousands of years, and rulers like Caesar were so advanced that they prescribe a ‘maximum’ rate of interest. Therefore, it is so unfortunate that in today’s Pakistan, people still face this injustice. Some 1,400 years ago, Hazrat Ali (AS) had said that a society could survive with *kufir* (infidelity), but not injustice.”

Everybody knows about the problem, but like an ostrich, we bury our heads in the sand. We divert attention from this social issue through the incorrect and incomplete interpretation of divine revelations. This is social treachery, which is not a new phenomenon in human history.

Modern Economists and Usury: Some may be surprised to discover that

Adam Smith, despite his image as the “father of free-market capitalism” and general advocacy of laissez-fair economics, came out strongly in support of controlling usury. While he opposed a complete prohibition of interest, he was in favour of the imposition of the interest rate ceiling. This, he felt, would ensure that low-risk borrowers, who were likely to undertake socially beneficial investments, were not deprived of funds because “the greater part of the money, which was... being lent to prodigals and projectors (investors in risky, speculative ventures), who alone would be willing to give an unregulated high-interest rate.”

The great 20th Century economist John Maynard Keynes believed that; “the disquisitions of the schoolmen [on usury] were directed towards elucidation of a formula, which should allow the schedule of the marginal efficiency to be high, whilst using rule and custom and the moral law to keep down the rate of interest, so that a wise government is concerned to curb it by statute and custom and even by invoking the sanctions of the Moral Law.”

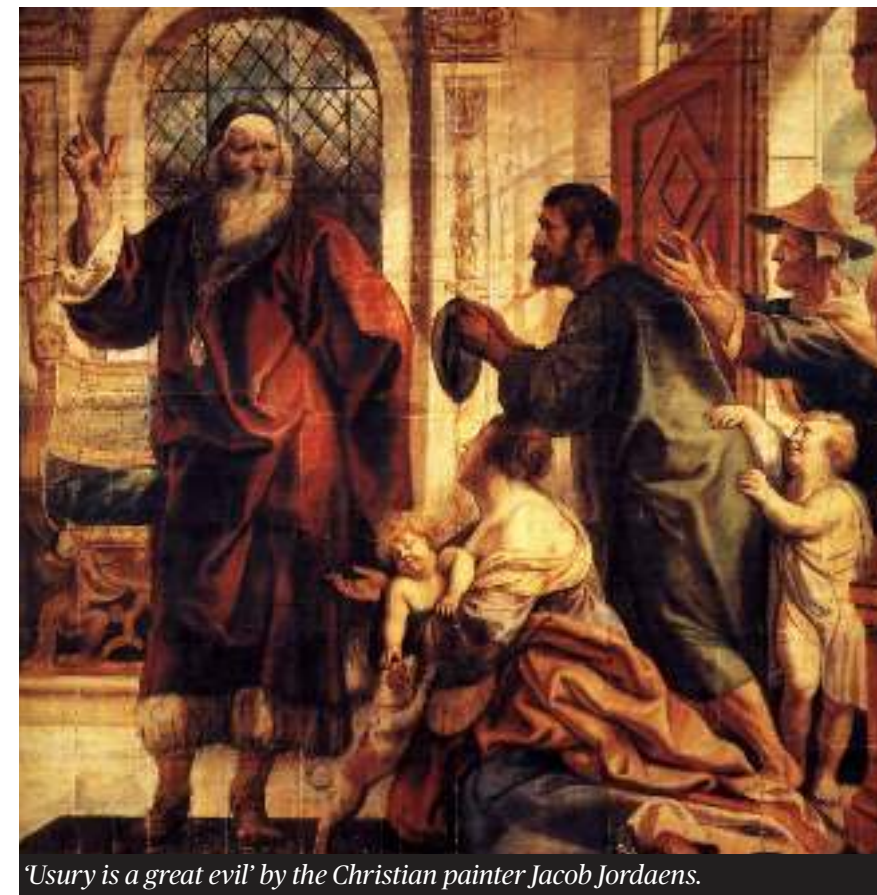
Another lesser-known anti-usury economic reformist was Silvio Gesell – a successful 19th Century merchant in Germany and Argentina. They condemned interest because his sales were more often related to the ‘price’ of money (i.e., interest) than people’s needs or the quality of products. His proposal of making money a public service, subject to a use-fee, led to widespread experimentation in Austria, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States under the banner of the so-called “stamp script movement.” But these initiatives were squashed when their success threatened the banking monopolies.

Margret Kennedy, a German professor, is one of the most vocal contemporary critics of interest, who builds on Gesell’s ideas, believing that “interest ... acts like cancer in our social structure.” She takes up the cause for “interest and inflation-free money” by suggesting a modification of banking practice to incorporate a circulation fee on money, acting somewhat like a negative interest rate mechanism.

Finally, another school of modern critics of interest has roots in the complementary work of socio-economic reformists of the early 20 Century, including Douglas, Fisher, Simons, and Soddy. Their chief familiar premise was that it

is wrong and unacceptable for commercial banks to monopolise the money or credit creation process. For banks to then charge interest on money, which they had in the first place created out of nothing and having suffered no opportunity cost, amounted to nothing less than an im-

what is Caesar’s,” he tellingly first questions to be shown a coin and inquires, “whose image and superscription hath it? (Luke 20:24).” In other words, “what power structure legitimises this currency?” Jesus’ response said much more than “pay your taxes.”



'Usury is a great evil' by the Christian painter Jacob Jordaens.

moral and fraudulent practice. The original authors proposed various alternative systems carried forward by their modern-day torch-bearers, such as the Social Credit Secretariat and the Committee on Monetary and Economic Reform.

Human Society’s Quest to Abolish Usury: This shows humanity’s constant struggle against usury and attempts to balance its oppressive nature and money and banking. Therefore, the so-called evils of usury must be understood as connected with money and a socio-psychological construct legitimised by the power dynamics of a given political economy, which may or may not be democratically and consciously justifiable.

This can be seen in the Christian tradition, where Jesus is asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar? Before uttering the famous words, “render unto Caesar

Usury & Money: Usury marks the distinction between money being only a socially contracted abstract mechanism to meet supply and demand and money as an end in itself. As an end in itself, money as a commodity legitimised tax economic activities through usury, thus short-circuiting the natural process of living by the sweat of one’s brow. The money thus becomes self-perpetuating power in itself rather than just a mediating agent. And it is the relentlessness of compound interest in the face of adversity that sets the potential cruelty of usury apart from equity-based return on investment. One can see how it is the love of money as an end in itself, not the use of money, that is the root of all evil. It was in recognition of the need to have corrective feedback mechanisms that Islam not only adjuncts usury but also imposes *zakat* (wealth tax).

More radical still, the Old Testament proposes a complete economic readjustment through the “Jubilee” process every fifty years (Leviticus 25). However, there is no evidence that such whole-scale redistribution of wealth in all forms was ever carried out. Perhaps it is a prophetic vision whose time has yet to come.

This is also the reason why in Islam, God “permits trade, yet forbids usury.”

“The difference is that profits are the result of initiative, enterprise, and efficiency. The result after a definite value-creating process. Not so with interest.” Also, “interest is fixed, (while) profit fluctuates. In the case of interest, you know your return and can be sure of it. For-profit, you have to work to ensure it. Perhaps Aristotle had a similar idea in mind when he argued that “a piece of money cannot beget another.”

Logical Arguments Against Usury: The Church’s most straightforward and perhaps earliest objection to usury was on the basis that it constituted unearned income. This idea stemmed from its general doctrine of “Just Price.”

The Lateran Council of 1515 clearly expressed the Church’s interpretation; “Usury, when the gain is sought to be acquired from the use of a thing, not in itself fruitful (such as a flock or a field) without labour, expense or risk on the part of the lender.” Birnie reinforces this point by noting that “to live without labour was denounced as unnatural, and so Dante put usurers in the same circle of hell as the inhabitants of Sodom and other unnatural vices.” Here, we should not forget that there is a clear statement that the last text is the continuation of earlier texts.

The condemnation of usury in charging for loans to the poor and needy is a recurring theme in several traditions. The medieval usury laws’ original target was the medieval equivalent of the loan sharks’ [but] “the medieval theory was unsatisfactory because it could not distinguish the helpful loan from the oppressive.”

Sir Syed’s school in Islam similarly interprets *riba* as the primitive form of money-lending when it was advanced for consumption purposes.” In the Indian tradition, this understanding of usury can also be found, as is evident from this 20th Century quote; “It is usury – the rankest, most extortionate, most merciless usury – which eats the marrow out of the bones

of the *raiya* [cultivators] and condemns him to a life of penury and slavery.”

A 1992 Policy Studies Institute report concludes that the poor pay more in absolute terms for their money while seeking credit only for absolute necessities rather than finance the acquisition of luxury goods, which they cannot afford. The National Consumer Council’s 1995 study on financial services and low-income consumers says, quoting a respondent

A major part of politico-historical events in the world is directly or indirectly revolts by borrowers against the lenders. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the masses suffer from both – a high informal, implicit or actual interest rate on borrowings and excessive direct and indirect taxes.

that “it’s like being caught, gotcha, and then they [the banks/lenders] start winding you in.”

A modern parallel argument relates to the devastating social impact of the so-called “Third World debt crisis,” a situation which even Pope John Paul II acknowledges in his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* when he states that “capital needed by the debtor nations to improve their standard of living now has to be used for interest payments on their debts.”

In this context, it is fitting to observe that a critical feature that distinguishes financial economy from nature’s economy is that the one operates on a compound interest basis, whereas the other on simple interest. Money deposited in the bank may yield 10 percent plus interest on the compounded sum next year, but in na-

ture, if you leave this year’s crop of apples on the tree, you are unlikely to pick a compounded heavier yield next year. Accordingly, usury permits a disjunction between the financial and ecological economy. The result is either the progressive destruction of nature or in the absence of redistributive social justice, an inbuilt necessity for periodic financial crashes. The illustration well makes the point that if Judas Iscariot had invested his 30 pieces of silver at just a few percentage points compound repayable in silver as of today, the amount of silver required would be equivalent to the weight of the Earth.

Interest & Usury: The standard definition of interest in return, profit, or gain, whereas ‘usury’ is defined as extortion, overcharging, and daylight robbery. I have intentionally not tried to explain the term ‘*Riba*’ because by divulging in that issue, we will lose sight of the central point of exploitation of humanity by usury, which other societies have also tried to address.

Similarly, I have restrained to enter into the distinction between interest and usury. What is to be said is implied in the following paragraphs. The secondary question that arises in our case is whether isolated abolition of interest can be done within a financial framework of the state. The world at large is built on the money concept and value of capital. Any isolationist approach will either die intrinsically or compromise on the principles for which the whole structure is deemed to be built. The primary objective of any society is the establishment of social justice. Usury ranks first on this list. This objective has been achieved through a logical process in almost all developed societies. It is necessary that we also follow the advanced civilisations’ route, avoiding uneducated interpretations of divine revelation.

The simple question is whether an ordinary farmer in Europe faces the same situation as a Pakistani farmer. If the state stands impartial on this exploitation, then it means there can be no justice in the society. If so, divine revelations remain just a text. There is a need to understand what has been done in advanced countries to end exploitation. Now, this is our job how we do it as there will be no more divine revelations.

History & Human Intellect: It is es-

tablished that usury is harmful to society. Now the question is whether human civilisation has come up with any solution? The answer will be found in pure economics and not in historical traditions.

Need for finance: In every society, there is always a need for financing to match the gap between the expenses incurred over time and the income arising with intervals. In simple terms, in the case of agricultural activities, there are constant outflows by the farmer on consumption and cost of inputs. In contrast, receipts are delayed for over six to seven months. This gap is bridged by various means of financing. The historical manner was borrowing from ‘*Banias*’ (moneylenders). Like any other economic activity, the financial strength of the borrower versus the lenders determines the cost of financing.

In most societies, the cost of this kind of borrowing is generally high, exploiting the borrowers. A major part of politico-historical events in the world is directly or indirectly revolts by borrowers against the lenders. This is one of the reasons for the holocaust in Europe in the 1940s. Another cause of social unrest had been high and discriminatory taxes.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the masses suffer from both – a high informal, implicit or actual interest rate on borrowings and excessive direct and indirect taxes. We are still passing the rudimentary stages of civilisation compared to the developed world, where all these issues have been settled. Unless these two basic economic issues are not sorted out, there cannot be sustainable peace.

Artificial Person & Limited Liability: Here, I will discuss human intellect’s results in trying to resolve this issue. The most important, apparently unrelated development for the avoidance of usury from the market was introducing joint-stock companies with limited liability and the concept of an artificial juridical person. There is a basis and a sense behind the evolution of this concept, which has a direct relationship with the elimination of usury. Under the idea of joint-stock companies, an artificial person with limited, perpetual liability is created. That

person is not an individual but an existence recognised under the law. All the societies in the world, including Pakistan, have adopted the concept of joint-stock companies. The place where the joint-stock companies idea links up with eliminating usury is the concept of ‘limitation of risk’ and ‘pooling of funds.’ One of the



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main reasons for the high cost of lending was the risk related to the amount’s non-recoverability. This risk has been limited to the amount of capital invested in that joint-stock company, being a lender, by an individual. Thus, in this manner, the artificial person, actually being a shock absorber, has been inducted between the borrower and the lender. In the case of the borrower, the risk of loss of personal property has been eliminated by inserting a limited liability company. Since the amount contributed by an individual may not provide sufficient funds, a concept of pooling of capital is ingrained in every joint-stock company, which is engaged in lending is generally called a ‘bank.’

When the element of non-recoverability is limited to the amount of capital invested in that company or the amount lent is borrowed through deposits, then the effective cost of financing naturally balances with the market situation, and usury is automatically eliminated. The difference is called the bank’s spread.

Transactions in these cases are between two artificial juridical persons with limited liability. Therefore, the question of usury does not arise. This is the primary measure through which usury was eliminated substantially in the developed societies. This method is kosher as the primary issue of high interest and exploitation is intrinsically eliminated. The concept of usury does not arise between two artificial juridical persons. And the concept of limited liability cannot be ignored. This is the essence of the modern financial market.

Another Artificial Person – The State: Constitution of another artificial person – the ‘State’ – is also essential. The state replaces Caesar. All states make it mandatory that only the instrument issued by her will be used as a medium of exchange. Also, the state is entitled to borrow from the people, repaid by printing more currency. Lending to the state is directly related to the value of money. This ‘complicated equation’ is reflected by the discount rate, which an artificial person, the state, pays to the lender. There can be a rate as high as 20 percent and above, whereas states also prescribe zero or negative rates. The primary question is whether such borrowing can be avoided? If not, then whether such borrowing with a guaranteed interest can be termed usury or *Riba*? The answer is an emphatic no. A state is an artificial person, represented by all citizens. If we take out the state’s concept from modern finance, then the entire system will collapse. One state in the world is a dream. Human prejudices and contradictions do not allow it. The European Union has contracted over a period of time. Instead of a utopia, we should live in reality. This positively requires interpretation of divine revelation instead of adopting a rejectionist approach.

Economics of Interest: What is interest? In economics, the rate of interest is the price of credit, and it plays the role of the cost of capital. In a free-market economy, interest rates are subject to the law of supply and demand of the money supply. One explanation of interest rates higher than zero is the scarcity of loanable funds.

Over centuries, various schools of thought have developed explanations of interest and interest rates. The School of Salamanca justified paying interest in terms of the benefit to the borrower and the lender's interest in terms of a premium for the risk of default. In the 16th century, Martin de Azpilcueta applied a time preference argument saying that it is preferable to receive a given good now than in the future. Accordingly, interest is compensation for the time the lender forgoes the benefit of spending the money.

On why interest rates are usually greater than zero, in 1770, a French economist proposed the theory of fructification. By applying an opportunity cost argument, comparing the loan rate with the rate of return on agricultural land, and a mathematical statement, using the formula for the value of infinity to a plantation, he argued that the land value would rise without limit, as the interest rate approached zero. For the land value to remain positive and finite, keep the interest rate above zero.

Adam Smith also propounded theories of interest rates. Swedish economist Knut Wicksell in his 1898 work, 'Interest and Prices,' elaborated a comprehensive view of economic crises based upon a distinction between natural and nominal interest rates. In the 1930s, Bertil Ohlin and Dennis Robertson refined Wicksell's approach, which became known as the loanable fund theory. This proves that the human mind is continuously looking for equity and justice. Divine does not interfere.

What's the Cost of Loan? In simple words, three fundamental reasons determine interest.

a) First, when people lend money, they no longer use it to fund their purchases. The interest payment makes up for this loss.

b) Second, a borrower may default on the loan, and the lender loses the money. Interest helps to make the risk of default worth taking. Generally, the greater the risk of loan default, the higher the interest

rate.

c) Finally, and most importantly, lenders demand interest because while the borrower has the money, inflation tends to erode the loan's value or purchasing power. In this case, interest maintains the real value of the balance due.

There is an argument that abstinence from any other use of the loaned amount and compensation for the lost opportunity cost is a trade and one factor of production. This resolves the issue of trade ver-

The simple question is whether an ordinary farmer in Europe faces the same situation as a Pakistani farmer. If the state stands impartial on this exploitation, then it means there can be no justice in the society.

sus lending. By charging an interest rate at least equal to the rate of inflation, this problem is corrected. The effects of inflation and the interest rate counteract each other so that the money's real value stays the same, even though the nominal value of the money increases.

If we become ultra-conservative, then we will have to eliminate the concept of a fixed return on savings from society. But is this utopian model workable? Another question; is it our divine duty not to ask for a little return on savings? This would mean that all savings have to be used for trade with unlimited risk. In my opinion, a fixed return from an artificial person such as a bank or the state, is not against any divine revelations. In other words, what the developed societies designed remains closer to divine revelations than any different concept based on invalid and incomplete traditions. There is no guilt in my mind on this subject.

Checks and balances: There can be arguments for and against the prem-

ise above. However, all civilised societies have evolved four primary tabs checks on interest to avoid exploitation. The first check is that lending and borrowing have been placed in the hands of artificial juridical persons or corporate bodies with limited liabilities. For this reason, in every civilised society, there are different norms for 'personal loans.' The result of this evolution is that the chances of personal exploitation get limited to the business's amount, and personal assets remain secured.

The second check is control of interest rate by another juridical person through the Central Bank. The rate charged by that institution is a universal benchmark for that society, and institutions can only add a cost factor to that base rate. The Central Bank regulates the loanable capital through various measures like capitalisation of banks etc.

The third aspect is the prohibition of any private lending that is tantamount to the equivalence of banking. In contrast, the last element is the common law prohibition through the 'Contract Act' according to which any exploitative agreement is ab-initio void.

These four checks remain in place in every civilised society and settle the centuries' old usury issue. They may not be perfect, but the quest for perfection continues. This subject must be examined holistically. Divine revelations give broad guidelines but do not indulge in the nitty-gritty. They only say that usury is to be universally condemned, which means that economic caveats, as discussed above, have to be placed to avoid exploitation of individuals, which is the divine objective.

Way Forward: Under these circumstances, the State Bank of Pakistan should immediately stop informal banking in the name of trade against the advance paid to the grower (i.e., advance purchase at a price less than the market). This absolute usury should not be acceptable. Instead of spending time designing transactions not complying with the principle of substance over form with Arabic names, efforts must be made to abolish the prevalent menace of usury being done in the name of trade. Such agreements are ab-initio void. The state should protect borrowers. If this is not done, then it would mean that we as a nation are neither law-abiding nor following the divine revelations. ■

INFCIS

Troubled Waters



The Brewing Water Wars

Despite the Indus Waters Treaty, India consistently threatens to use water as a weapon against Pakistan, which already faces severe water shortage



By Ali Mahmood

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

Agriculture produces a quarter of Pakistan's GDP, employs almost half of the country's labour force, and is a major contributor to its exports. The Indus River provides the water to make this possible; 90 percent of its water is consumed by the agricultural sector. Pakistan experiences rain mainly in the monsoon months of July and August. Since the rains coincide with the snow melt in the mountains that feed the Indus, Pakistan suffers droughts most of the year, and floods after the rains.

Between 1847 and 1947, the British developed the Indus Water Irrigation Basin. Pakistan inherited the system and has developed it further in the 70 years that followed. But now the ageing Indus Basin Irrigation System is beset with serious problems.

- The hostile relations between India and Pakistan create water insecurity.
- The snow melt and the monsoon rains

come together, causing destructive floods.

- The arid conditions that prevail in the rest of the year, require more storage for water.
- The flat plains, which descend by a foot per mile into the sea and have no drainage, are consumed by waterlogging and salinity.
- Bad water management aggravates the shortages and wastes.

In 1948, within a year of Partition, disputes erupted between India and Pakistan on the sharing of the waters of the Indus and its tributaries. In 1960, under the supervision of the World Bank, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) which gave Pakistan the rights to the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab rivers, and India the rights to the Ravi, Sutlej and Beas rivers in perpetuity.

Between 1960 and 1980, two major dams were built at Mangla and Tarbela, together with major link canals to substitute water from Pakistani rivers for the water lost to India as a consequence of the accord. The system comprising two major dams, barrages, link canals, and a huge network of canals and watercourses was estimated to have a replacement value of \$60 billion.

India started the construction of a series of run-of-the-river hydro projects, which has led to serious concern in Pakistan. The first of these was Baglihar, completed in 2009, but many more are on the anvil. Though India is entitled to undertake such projects as long as they return the water back to the river, Pakistan is worried that in times of crises these could be used to close their supply source. On the west, Afghanistan is also considering projects on the Kabul River, which will increase the need for a water accord between the two countries, before the matter develops into a crisis.

Pakistan is short of water for most of the year, but heavy monsoon rains, combined with snow melt from the mountains, often lead to damaging floods.

The worst year was 2010, when much of Pakistan's farmland was flooded, thousands died, 20 million were displaced, and the losses caused by the flood were estimated at \$43 billion.

Terrible damage has been caused by flooding, year after year:

- 2003: In Sindh, Karachi and Thatta, 484 people died and 4,476 villages were affected.
- 2007: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan were badly affected by floods that killed 1,000 people.
- 2010: Massive flooding resulted in 2,000 deaths and affected 20 million people.
- 2011: 361 people were killed, over 1 million homes affected, and 1.7 million acres of land were inundated.
- 2012: 100 people died, thousands of homes were destroyed, and thousands of acres were inundated.
- 2020: Floods disrupted life in Karachi, which was totally inundated.

Part of the solution to repeated flooding is to build adequate storage along the Indus. Pakistan lacks storage facilities. Its storage capacity is sufficient for 30 days, as compared to India's 320-day capacity and Egypt's 1000-day capacity. Every year Pakistan dumps water to the tune of \$21 billion into the sea because it has no facilities to store it. Pakistan needs to build three times as much as the storage reservoirs at the Mangla dam, to avoid this massive waste. The extra storage will ensure water availability during the dry months. At present, Pakistan wastes 50 percent of its water by inefficient use and by letting unused water flow into the sea. It has the lowest crop yield per unit of water and has not developed any modern irrigation methods such as drip irrigation.

Additionally, two of the biggest problems of agriculture in Pakistan are waterlogging and salinity. They affect 43 percent of the area in the Indus Basin irrigation system, which amounts to 7 million hectares. Sindh is the worst affected, with over half of its irrigated and produc-



Indian hydro-projects like the Baglihar Dam could choke off Pakistan's water supply.

tive land converted into a wasteland. Due to the lack of natural drainage, the rising water table brings the salt up, rendering the land unfit for cultivation. The solution is to build an effective drainage system to remove the saline water and lower the water table. This requires money, which Pakistan has not committed so far. However, the critical nature of the issue necessitates that we act on it without any further delay.

Pakistan's water management is poor. Thirsty crops, such as sugarcane, which consume a lot of water are farmed without giving any thought to the cost of the water. Pakistan uses more water per unit of the GDP produced than any other country in the world. In making crop choices, our farmers do not take into account the cost of the highly subsidised water. Moreover, no attempt is made to use modern irrigation methods. The entire system is badly in need of maintenance, but funds allocated for repairs are eaten up as a consequence of the collusion between corrupt irrigation officials and crooked contractors.

The work required to refurbish and repair the irrigation system, eliminate waste, better manage water usage, and cut down waterlogging and salinity, requires domestic rather than foreign investment. This would generate employment, and have a fast payback in larger harvests within a year or two. China's massive water projects demonstrate its capability in this field. Joint ventures can be undertaken with Chinese companies, with Pakistan putting its reclaimed land to use for farming with Chinese capital and management. Public-private partnerships can provide money and management and,

additionally, eliminate corruption, which has been a stumbling block in reforming the irrigation system in Pakistan.

The Gilgit-Baltistan area of the Northern Territories is the most suited for building dams, hydropower projects, and water storage facilities. This area has remained unexploited due to India claiming the disputed territory as part of Kashmir. Due to India's objections

and claims, the World Bank, the IMF, and other multilateral banks and donors have refused to finance these projects. Also, the latter are opposed to large dams for environmental reasons. Since 1980, India and the international lending institutions

The construction of a series of run-of-the-river hydro projects in India has led to serious concern in Pakistan that in times of crises these could be used to close their supply source.

have stood in the way of construction of dams in Pakistan's Northern Territories. In the period 1980 - 2010, Pakistan has lost over 1000 MAF (million acre feet) of water due to lack of storage.

However, the good news is that with China's support, Pakistan is currently working on five dams in the North Indus River Cascade, which will cost \$50 billion and provide 40,000 Megawatts (MW) of hydel power and provide storage for 15 percent of the annual river flow of the Indus. The cascade will create a series of lakes that will store water and help expand Pakistan's agriculture base. The investment on these projects will come mainly from China and will be equal to the investment made in CPEC.

The Diamer-Bhasha Dam project will address the problem of water storage, flood mitigation and hydro power, and is budgeted to cost \$14 billion. Construction will begin in 2020 and end in 2029. It will be Pakistan's third large dam project. The Diamer-Bhasha Dam will add 1.2 million acres of land for agriculture. All these projects are inspired by China's megaprojects such as the Three Gorges project and the South-North Water Transfer project.

For 70 years, the development of water storage and hydro projects was stalemated on account of the hostile relations between India and Pakistan. Now, after the Indian action in Kashmir, Pakistan, with China's aid, has moved forward in tapping its potential in the Gilgit-Baltistan area. Once completed, these projects can unleash a take-off in agricultural production and stimulate the economy by boosting its most important sector: agriculture. However, increased water supply and storage must be combined with education of the farmers community in modern, efficient water-management techniques. (See box)

The most dangerous development in the world has been the use of water as a weapon of war. In the subcontinent, for instance, the growing water dispute between Pakistan and India, one of the world's most heavily populated regions, poses the greatest nuclear threat to the world.

Initially, the IWT of 1960 was honoured in letter and spirit and survived three wars. However, the situation changed as relations between the two grew more hostile. In 2003, the Jammu and Kashmir legislature called for the revision and abrogation of the Treaty. India looked for some justification to revise or break the treaty, quoting Article 6 of the Vienna Convention which states that the use of terrorism is reasonable ground for withdrawal from the IWT, and the International Court of Justice ruled that a treaty can be dissolved because of a fundamental change in circumstances.

In 2016, after an attack killed 19 Indian soldiers on a military base in Kashmir, Prime Minister Modi threatened to scrap the IWT. Pakistan warned that this could be a declaration of war. In 2019, after the Pulwama attack in which 46 Indian soldiers were killed, India decided to stop the water flow to Pakistan from the eastern rivers; Pakistan responded by saying,

"This is actually India's water. If it is available, we use it; if not, it's no problem."

Despite having the largest glaciers in the world, Pakistan is expected to face serious water scarcity in the coming years because of climate change, a burgeoning population, poor maintenance of the water infrastructure, and a total disregard for modern water conservation technology. China is providing the support to construct new dams and develop the water infrastructure, but Pakistan must combine this with widespread education on water conservation and policies that prevent wastage of water. In the opinion of the World Economic Forum, the water crisis poses the biggest threat to Pakistan, moreso than terrorism. Over 90 percent of the water in Pakistan is unfit for human consumption and is a carrier of diseases.

At present, Pakistan wastes 50 percent of its water by inefficient use and by letting unused water flow into the sea. It has the lowest crop yield per unit of water and has not developed any modern irrigation methods such as drip irrigation.

India has opted for an aggressive posture because Pakistan's rivers, the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, pass through Kashmir before entering Pakistan. The Indus actually starts its journey in Tibet, China and then passes through the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, before entering Gilgit-Baltistan and then flowing through Punjab and Sindh down to the Arabian Sea. However, the Brahmaputra River of India flows a longer distance through China than it does in India itself, and is called the Yarlung Tsangpo in China. Consequently, China has brought a certain measure of balance into the water conflict between India and Pakistan. Now India has to think twice and factor in China's response before making any aggressive moves against Pakistan's rivers and its water supply. ■

Learning from Israel

Israel has led the way in providing solutions to the global water crisis

Population growth and reduction in poverty levels is adding to the worldwide water crisis and could lead to instability and war, if better water management practices are not introduced. Water shortages are already costing the global economy half-a-trillion dollars a year and soon, more than half-the-world will be facing water shortages. However, the dangerous problem of water scarcity can be solved, and interestingly Israel has been the world leader in providing the solutions. By 2013, Israel's annual water technology exports were more than \$2 billion.

Flood irrigation and sprinkler systems were the traditional form of irrigation. In the early 1930s, Simcha Blass a Polish-Israeli engineer, noticed that one tree of a row of them on a farm was much taller and stronger than the others. He walked over to find out the reason and discovered a tiny leak in a metal water pipe near the tree. So just by accident, Blass discovered that a tiny amount of water in the right place could make a plant grow much bigger and faster than a large amount thrown at it by rain, floods, or sprinklers. The new drip irrigation method developed by Blass revolutionised modern irrigation in Israel and later, elsewhere. Drip irrigation not only cut the traditional water consumption by half in farming, but also doubled the crop yield.

An American-Israeli chemical engineer, Sidney Loeb, discovered that salt and minerals could be separated from fresh water by pushing the sea water through membranes. This method, called reverse osmosis (RO), cost half as much as other methods. By 2014, RO plants produced half of Israel's drinking water. Incidentally, the price of an RO desalination plant is equal to that of a few fighter jets. Desalination has proved to be a major step forward.

Israel is a desert in which the sub-

soil water is often brackish. Israeli scientists discovered that there are many types of crops that do not need fresh water, but thrive on brackish water, producing smaller but sweeter fruits and vegetables. Israel led in the world research on genetically modified seeds, specialising in water-efficient crops such as short-stalked wheat and closely bunched tomatoes.

It looked for ways to stop wastage of water. Excessive eating of beef, instead of vegetables, was discouraged since the production of one pound of beef consumes as much water as 17 pounds of vegetables. They invented ways to cut down waste in urban water distribution systems and created one of the world's most advanced water systems in Jerusalem, where GPS-guided mini-robots crawl through sewers, looking for and fixing leaks without digging and without sending human teams into the sewers. Jerusalem's water losses amount to 11 percent as compared to Europe's 20-40 percent, and Cairo's 60 percent. Israel is now working in India to revolutionise the New Delhi water system through technology.

In many countries, sewage waste pollutes rivers and lakes. In Israel, 85 percent of highly purified waste is recycled and reused for agriculture. And today, half the water used for agriculture in Israel comes from highly purified waste. While the world believes that water and air are free, God's gift to mankind, Israel's most important discovery was that WATER IS NOT FREE; the state pays for it and recovers the money in taxes. A realistic appraisal of the cost of water greatly reduced waste and resulted in better usage of water. Israel's desert land saw an agricultural revolution with its drip irrigation, reclaimed water, drought-resistant seeds, recycling of sewage water, and water-conservation policies. Pakistan needs to learn from Israel. ■

—Ali Mahmood



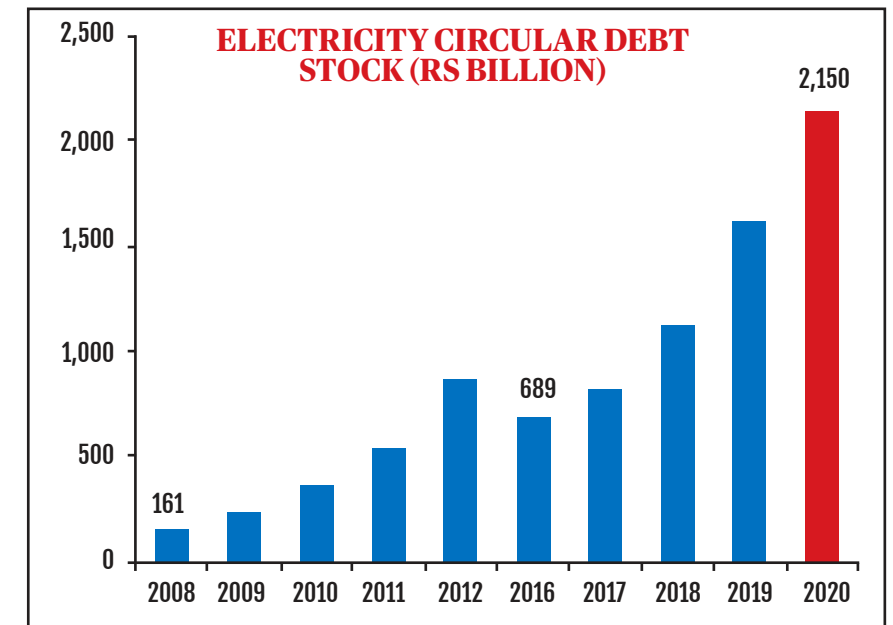
The Cost of Power

The multiplying circular debt in Pakistan's energy sector poses a grave challenge to the country's economy



By Sakib Sherani

The writer is a former member of the Prime Minister's economic advisory council and heads Macro Economic Insights (Pvt.) Ltd, a consultancy based in Islamabad.



Pakistan has been in the grip of a crippling power crisis since the 1990s, which has intensified since 2007, imposing punishing costs on the country. In my recent report published by Macro Economic Insights, I stated that the power crisis has cost \$82 billion in lost GDP between 2007 and 2020. In per capita terms, the power crisis has cost each Pakistani Rs. 43,504 during this period, lowering the rupee per capita GDP by 23 percent as a result.

The lower GDP growth cost approximately 0.9 to 1.6 million jobs a year, on average, between 2007 and 2018. At the lower bound, this amounts to a cumulative 10.9 million jobs that could have been saved and/or created during the 12-year period. Fiscal costs to the budget have amounted to a further 1.2 percent of the GDP each year, on average, between Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 to FY 2019. Total

budgetary support to the power sector has amounted to Rs. 3,202 billion (\$31.4 billion at the average exchange rate). The combined welfare costs of the power crisis are likely to be significantly higher.

Over the years the nature of the crisis has evolved from one of chronic power supply deficits to one where there is excess installed capacity but not enough cash flow in the system to run it. The latter gives rise to the circular debt issue. Specifically, the circular debt in Pakistan's energy supply chain refers to the cash flow shortfall incurred in the power sector from the non-payment of dues by consumers, distribution companies, and the government. It has continued to grow in size over the years, rising from 1.6 percent of the GDP (Rs. 161 billion) in 2008, to 5.2 percent of the GDP (Rs. 2,150 billion) as of end-June 2020. It has risen since to an estimated Rs. 2,400 billion as of end-December.

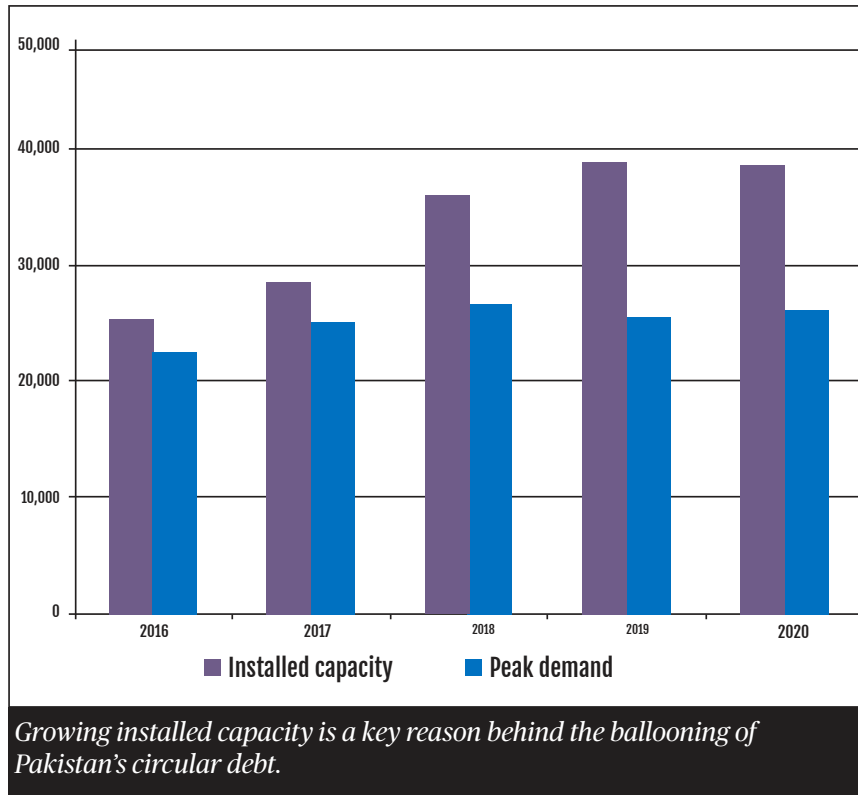
The circular debt stock has increased 3.5 times (250 percent) since 2016 alone. This sharp accumulation has been on account of the following:

- An increase of nearly 13,300 Megawatts (MW) (52 percent) in new generation capacity since 2016. Coupled

with the steep devaluation of the rupee in 2018-19, this has led to a sharp increase in the total payments to IPPs, (Independent Power Producers) from Rs. 724 billion to Rs. 1,496 billion in FY 2020 (a 106 percent increase).

- An increase of approximately 76 percent in cost of generation versus a circa. 39 percent increase in the average tariff during this period.
- A drop in recoveries from 94 percent to 89 percent over this period. Recoveries have deteriorated partially due to waivers and forbearance in bill collection from April/May 2020; however, the trend does not appear to have been favourable even prior to the COVID-19 situation.
- The inability of the present government to pay off the circular debt stock due to lack of fiscal space.
- The incurring of higher financing costs due to a larger base of outstanding circular debt, and sharply higher interest rates in 2018 and 2019.

Given its linkages with the rest of the economy and large negative externalities, in conjunction with its magnitude and trend, the accumulation of electricity's circular debt can rightly be termed as one of Pakistan's foremost macro-eco-



economic challenges. The build-up of circular debt has undermined the viability of the country's energy sector, hurt industry and exports, and impacted new investment and job creation. It has also destabilised Pakistan's fiscal management and imposed prohibitive opportunity costs in terms of pre-empting government spending on infrastructure and social expenditure, as well as credit in the banking system.

The underlying structural causes for the circular debt include the high cost of electricity-generation; tariff anomalies, including a significant difference between cost-recovery and notified tariffs; high transmission and distribution losses coupled with low recoveries; unaddressed governance issues in the sector; and delays in tariff notification, as well as release of tariff subsidy/cash infusion by the government. A circular debt issue has built up menacingly in the gas sector too. Combined, the twin problems pose an existential challenge to the economy.

At the heart of the problem is how ultra-generous incentives, tax-breaks and sovereign guarantees have been provided by various governments not just to attract investment in the power sector, but in various other sectors of the economy at different times since the 1990s (poly-

The build-up of circular debt has undermined the viability of the country's energy sector, hurt industry and exports, and impacted new investment and job creation.

ester fibre, fertiliser, autos and sugar, to name a few). The purpose of these incentives and sovereign guarantees, especially under the umbrella of 'take-or-pay' contracts, is to provide a safety net to private investors by transferring virtually the entire risk to the government (and taxpayers), while setting up a perpetual stream of guaranteed, US\$-indexed profits to a small group of business people. Broadly speaking, this business model has had serious unintended consequences for new investment, public finances, as well as the economy.

The drive to seek private investment in the power sector and introduce reforms was spearheaded by the World Bank in the 1990s. The iron-clad sovereign guarantees and take-or-pay contracts were the handiwork of the Bank. While the intention was justified, the means used were not. To compound the problem for Pakistan, overly-optimistic economic growth projections were used to justify the excess generation capacity – and politicians happily made hay from the 1994 as well as the 2015 power policies in ways that are well-documented in the economic as well as corruption literature.

Unfortunately, the medium-term outlook for the resolution of the electricity circular debt issue is not very promising. While the government's landmark agreements with a significant number of IPPs to re-negotiate the terms of power purchase will help reduce the flow at the margin, unaddressed governance issues and a continuing high level of inefficiency in the sector, combined with the addition of a further 12,478 MW of installed capacity by 2028 that is in the pipeline, will ensure that the circular debt stock continues to increase.

Mitigation measures will need to include, inter alia, the deferment of the planned new power-generation capacity, increased utilisation of existing installed capacity, retirement of older GENCOs (generation companies), and improved overall governance of the sector. In the medium term, increasing the share of renewable energy in the generation mix, and privatising the DISCOs (distribution companies) should be the objectives. In the longer run, the only sustainable resolution will come from moving from the current state-led, single-buyer model (monopsony) to a competitive, multi-player market with the private sector in the lead.

While tariff increases are inevitable, a singular focus on mitigating circular debt will be self-defeating. Improved efficiency is likely to lead to more sustainable progress in reducing circular debt in the power sector.

Given its linkages with the rest of the economy and large negative externalities, in conjunction with its magnitude and trend, fixing the energy sector can rightly be termed as one of Pakistan's foremost macro-economic challenges. ■

SPECIAL REPORT

Catch-22

K-Electric Chairman Shan A. Ashary speaks ...

Power Games

Until it can resolve the issues plaguing it, not all of its own making, there seems to be little light at the end of the K-Electric tunnel

By Amir Zia

There is always another side to every story. For detractors, the K-Electric (KE) may appear as a huge villain because of the frequent power outages in the megalopolis, but the fact is, the company's management is mired in the proverbial Catch-22 situation – for no fault of its own.

The government and state-run utilities, including the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), complain that the KE owes them around 110 billion rupees, which includes over 90 billion in interest charges. But the KE management also has a woeful story to tell about the unpaid bills owed to it, amounting to at least net 230 billion rupees. The KE cannot charge interest even if its payments are being delayed.

"I blame myself for the situation," says Chairman KE Shan A. Ashary. "The agreement says that the government has to clear our dues within 30 days. But we should have added a clause regarding what would happen if the dues weren't cleared within the stipulated time. We believed that since it is the government, it will be fair. It will surely pay us in 30 days, if not, maybe 60 or at the most 90, or in 120. After all, it is the government. But some of our dues are still outstanding for the past many years – a real risk we did not foresee."

Ashary was appointed KE chairman in September 2020 – barely six months ago – but his association with the power utility spans more than 15 years. Prior to assuming the position of chairman, he had been the longest-serving director on the KE board.

Ashary is a Karachiite, but has spent all his professional life abroad, working for big Middle Eastern investors for the last 30 years. He played a pivotal role in the privatisation of the power utility in 2005, named the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation (KESC) at that time. Ashary brought Saudi Arabia's Aljomaih Group



Unpaid dues and theft cause persistent blackouts in Karachi.

and Kuwait's National Industries Group (NIG) to Pakistan to buy stakes in the KESC. In 2008, he brought the second chunk of foreign investment for the KE by joining hands with the now defunct Abraaj Group.

But the KE proved the most challenging of all his investment ventures spread over several countries – from North America to Europe and from the Middle East to the Far East. The KE's unpaid dues by the government and its various entities – some dating back to 2005 – are just one of the many issues plaguing the utility.

The other pressing issues include the absence of dividends for 15 years to shareholders and investors, failure to execute the KE's sell-out deal to Shanghai Electric, despite the lapse of more than four years, and delayed settlement of disputes with the government over interest payments. Then, there are the daily operational issues of ensuring a steady electricity supply to a mega city like Karachi, where power theft and encroachments around the high-tension cables and their pylons remain rampant and decision-making difficult because of political and social sensitivities.

But the foremost worry is the non-payment of dues and interest slapped on the KE by the state-run Sui Southern Gas

Company (SSGC) against the principal amount of 13 billion rupees, which has now ballooned to more than 110 billion rupees. The dispute over interest payment shows how a weak regulatory framework and political expediency damage the investment environment and hurt businesses in the country.

According to Ashary, the KE could not clear the SSGC's dues on time because other government departments, including the Karachi Water & Sewage Board (KWSB), did not clear dues owed to the power utility. "This issue has been dragging on for more than 10 years now ... we owed 13 billion rupees to the SSGC, while the KWSB owed us 30 billion. Our position was that when the government cleared the KWSB dues, we would pay the SSGC ... but the situation got complicated as the SSGC slapped interest on top of the principal amount, which multiplies every day."

Although since 2012 all payments are being made on time, the settlement of the disputed amount remains pending.

Another twist in the tale is the federal government's position that after the 18th Amendment, the Sindh Government has to pay the KWSB dues, but the province refuses to take this responsibility. The KE's privatisation, rather than serving as

Encroachments around high tension power lines.



world. But this is the first time he has had to deal with a situation like this.

"In 2005, like many groups the Aljomaih Group also wanted to invest in India, but I told them that being a Pakistani I was not the man to lead an investment there," Ashary said, recalling how the KE's privatisation took place. "I advised the Aljomaih Group to look towards Pakistan."

Those were the days when President Pervez Musharraf was in power. The economy was expanding and the privatisa-

According to Ashary, the KE could not clear the SSGC's dues on time because other government departments, including the KWSB, did not clear dues owed to the power utility. The unpaid bills owed to KE amount to at least 230 billion rupees.

tion programme was being pushed with a new vigour. Ashary arranged the visit to Pakistan of Abdulaziz AlJomaih, the owner of the Aljomaih Group. The visit was arranged meticulously and Al Jomaih was impressed by what he saw in Pakistan.

"We were interested in Pakistan State Oil (PSO), which was up for privatisation at that time, but Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz asked us to bid for the KESC instead," Ashary disclosed. "I got the nod from the Aljomaih Group and by joining hands with Kuwait's NIG, we bought a 71.5 percent stake in the power utility."

But things did not go as expected. The first decision which went bad was the handing over of operations to Siemens. Ashary says that at that time there were problems within Siemens and it could not turn the KE around as expected. "Within two years the funds began to dry out. At that time, the KESC was seeing an annual loss of around \$100 million plus. So, we brought in the now defunct Abraaj, which

injected the equity to our dollar for dollar into the K-Electric, acquiring a 50 percent stake in KES Power, the investment holding company."

"The Abraaj Group replaced Siemens and installed a good management team, which did a great job by turning the Company around. It was good teamwork."

The natural question here would be, didn't the Abraaj Group's troubles and liquidation hurt the KE?

It did not, according to Ashary. "The Abraaj Group was a fund manager like my company (Tricap Investments LLC). Investors simply appoint a new manager in such cases, and this has already been done in the KE's case."

But investment in the KE proved a loss-making venture for foreign investors as besides getting nothing in dividends, they also saw their investment eroding. "The dollar was at around 59 to 60 rupees when we brought stakes in the KE by investing \$361 million in 2005 and then another \$361 million in 2007. Now the rupee has plunged to the level of 159-160 to a dollar."

Then there's the story of Shanghai Electric, which wanted to purchase the KE.

"In October 2016, we signed a sale-purchase agreement with Shanghai Electric, but it insisted on a clean slate and resolution of pending issues, including the dispute over interest," said Ashary.

He added that Shanghai Electric recently wrote a letter reiterating its commitment to buy the controlling stakes in the KE and complete the takeover process in seven months – but reiterated that this would be contingent upon the issues being resolved.

"Shanghai Electric has explained the take-over process line-by-line and now we await action from the government."

Ashary said that the point of concern is why a foreign investor should have to wait that long for dispute resolution. "I am a Pakistani, but also a foreign investor. Officials here don't realise the efforts we made, first to bring foreign investors here, and then to manage their disappointment."

The life of a private equity fund is seven to ten years and after that the life of the fund expires. "Equity funds don't invest with a horizon of 50 years like that of Shanghai Electric. Aljomaih and NIG came as direct investors, while Abraaj came in

as a fund, which had to turn around the Company and make it attractive to someone like Shanghai by 2016, which couldn't be materialised," said Ashary.

Is the Shanghai Electric deal good for KE?

"Yes, simply because Shanghai is a strategic investor with a long-term horizon of 50 years and more," said Ashary. "Shanghai Electric is a utility company, which wants to expand to different parts of the world. They have technical, operational and administrative expertise and financial resources to operate the KE ... Pakistan also has a close friendship with China. You won't find a better investor than Shanghai Electric."

"The government plans to privatise the DISCOs (state-run power distribution companies), but who would come after seeing the experience of the KE?"

With Pakistan generating excess electricity, was there a need for a new power plant?

Ashary says that just a few years ago, Pakistan faced an acute electricity shortage and getting even 650 megawatts for Karachi from the national grid was difficult. "Against this backdrop, the decision to install a 900-megawatt plant was taken five or six years back, which has been materialised with great effort."

In fact, the KE planned two projects – the 900-megawatt plant – and a coal fired 700-megawatt plant, which has been shelved because now the government says that it has surplus electricity.

The KE chairman, however, said that going forward the demand for electricity in Karachi would increase sharply. "Even this new 900-megawatt plant will not be enough ... the government has promised to supply another 1400 megawatts, but there are no interconnections, and it will take at least three years to build them once we know where it will come from."

He maintained that Pakistan has excess power generation capacity, but needs

to invest in transmission and distribution lines.

Against this backdrop, the question arises, what's the takeaway of investing in Pakistan?

"I have been managing the investments of my clients in several countries, including the UK, the United States, Japan, and Malaysia ... being a Pakistani my heart is pained to see that despite such huge potential, the business and investment climate remains testing for foreign investors. My investors' money has been stuck here for the last 15 years. I can't ask them to increase their exposure because of the first bad experience, though there are many potential projects. In fact, when we entered the Pakistani market, I had an investment commitment of one billion dollars from my clients."

Agriculture and Information technology have huge potential and can give quick returns. And yet, he stated, with a 220 million plus population, and a huge market, Pakistan is "under-served" in every field.

"The government plans to privatise the DISCOs (state-run power distribution companies), but who would come after seeing the experience of the KE?" he asks.

As for KE's scorecard after privatisation in terms of services, Ashary said that around \$3.2 billion have been invested on the KE's infrastructure during the last 15 years. "We have doubled the generation, transmission and distribution capacity and halved the line and distribution losses. No other DISCO can match KE's performance. What needs to be done is to improve the regulatory framework to ensure that private players get just and fair treatment."

However, power outages and load-shedding are not going to go away anytime soon. The factors for this range from the non-payment of dues to the KE, to unavailability of gas or its low pressure, and even because of the delay in the import of furnace oil by the PSO, he said.

"We can increase the power generation capacity, if NEPRA allows investment and lets us instal meters in squatter settlements, where almost 60 percent of the population lives, but many don't have the necessary documents required, including National Identity Cards. How can you carry out operations smoothly when there is 40 to 50 percent line loss in many neighbourhoods?" Ashary concluded. ■

a poster-child for attracting new investment, is perceived as a cautionary tale among foreign investors. The absence of a dispute resolution mechanism, the procedural and approval delays and the policy-makers' lacklustre response to addressing this issue is eroding Pakistan's reputation as an investment destination

The KE's dues pending with the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) and the Finance Ministry are estimated at around 190 to 200 billion rupees, according to Ashary. "The delayed determination and notification of the KE's tariffs by almost two years have had a major impact on the company's sustainability and financial viability."

Under the agreement, NEPRA has to approve payments in four months and the Finance Ministry has to release them within two weeks. As the KE is not getting its dues on time, it cannot clear the NTDC's (National Transmission & Despatch Company) bills, which, like the SSGC, has

also slapped interest on the principal. The NTDC needs timely payments for Independent Power Projects (IPPs).

It is "a vicious cycle," said Ashary. "For state-run distribution companies, it is called circular debt, but for the KE it is commercial debt. On a principal to principal basis, if the disputed amount is settled against 230 billion rupees... even then the government owes KE at least 90 billion rupees."

He continued, "We have to borrow from banks to maintain liquidity ... last year, the KE earned a profit of 16 billion, but had to pay 18 billion rupees in interest to banks against loans. The net result – a two billion-rupee loss to the Company. If we get our dues on time, we won't have to borrow."

The KE was Ashary's first, and is so far, his last major investment in Pakistan. Before the KE, in his 30-year-long career he managed the funds for his Middle Eastern investors in various parts of the

BalanceSheet

Bitter Pill



IMF's Post-Covid Prescription

The IMF diagnoses the key challenges confronting Pakistan's economy post-COVID-19 and offers a prescription, but the question is: will we take the required vaccine?



By Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri

The writer is Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute.



The IMF staff are seeking an approval of \$500 million for Pakistan, a quarter of what we had hoped to get.

Pakistan's 22nd engagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – and its 15th since 1980 – i.e., its current Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme for over \$6 billion has resumed after a year-long temporary hiatus. Unlike many of the previous IMF programmes that got suspended or prematurely terminated because Pakistan could not keep up with the commitments (structural benchmarks, indicative targets) it made with the IMF, this time the programme was suspended on account of COVID-19.

IMF's second quarterly review could not be concluded in February 2020, whereas the third, fourth, and fifth quarterly reviews could not be done due to the pandemic. These pending reviews were clubbed together and were completed in February 2021. A staff-level agreement was reached, and Pakistan's case is being presented to the IMF's executive board (probably by end March 2021) for release of the next tranche.

Originally, the IMF was supposed to provide over \$6 billion under the 39-month programme ending in September 2022. A tranche of \$500 million was to be released after every review. Thus, Pakistan was expecting a total of

\$2 billion for the four reviews (second to fifth) which got clubbed. However, instead of \$2 billion, the IMF staff is seeking an approval of \$500 million from its Executive Board – less than Pakistan's expectations but at least it would keep Pakistan and the IMF's current programme rolling. In fact, Pakistan's engagement with the IMF enabled us to borrow, through the Fund's rapid financing instrument, an additional \$1.38 billion (over and above the EFF arrangement) for our COVID-19 response right at the beginning of the pandemic.

Subject to the Board's approval, both the IMF and Pakistan have agreed to explore options, either to jack up the size of the tranches for the remaining reviews or extend the programme's timeframe beyond September 2022.

This would also imply a fresh calibration of the macroeconomic framework, as the pre-Covid numbers and baselines agreed upon between the two parties are no longer relevant. Many of the reforms that Pakistan had committed to undertake may have to be put on hold (due to their transition costs to the masses) till COVID-19 recedes. Change in the reform calendar would imply a change in the EFF review schedule too.

It was not only our COVID-19 re-



Pakistan's tax to GDP ratio reflects its dismal revenue mobilisation.

sponse that was dependent on the IMF. Unsustainable economies like ours are also in need of a seal of confidence from the IMF (a letter of comfort) to prove our creditworthiness to engage with other multilateral creditors. That is the context in which the resumption of the EFF was good news for Pakistan's macroeconomic stability.

In the words of the IMF, "Pakistan has been facing long-standing economic challenges, including low revenue mobilisation, high fiscal deficit and indebtedness, low spending on education, health, and social programmes, and a weak external position (balance of payment, and foreign currency reserves)." The IMF further suggests that the above-mentioned economic challenges reflect the legacy of uneven and pro-cyclical economic policies in recent years aiming to boost growth, but at the expense of rising vulnerabilities and lingering structural and institutional weaknesses." The IMF not only diagnoses the key challenges facing Pakistan's economy, but also offers a prescription to address those challenges.

One of our chronic issues is the energy sector's circular debt. The IMF wants the government to make the power sector financially viable by recovering the complete cost of energy. For this purpose, along with management improvements, cost reductions and recovery, and adjustments in tariffs and subsidies, it has asked for energy regulators, i.e., the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA), and the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), to be given autonomy.

Low revenue mobilisation (read tax to GDP ratio) is another chronic issue denting our macroeconomic sustainability. It

One can differ with the IMF's solutions, as they seemed to be prescribed repeatedly, without bringing any long-term macroeconomic stability. However, the IMF's prescriptions were, arguably, never really implemented.

is a known fact that a narrow tax base, higher tax rates, and whimsical tax concessions are all problems that need to be addressed to avoid fiscal deficit. The IMF maintains that Pakistan needs to improve revenue mobilisation and ensure a more equitable and transparent distribution of the tax burden. In its opinion, to do the needful, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) should eliminate income and sales tax exemptions, reform the structure of corporate taxation to make it fairer and more transparent, and broaden the tax base to collect close to Rs.5.9 trillion in the next fiscal year (One trillion rupees higher than the current year's revenue target).

Loss-making state-owned enterprises is yet another issue confronting our economy. The IMF is stressing upon a comprehensive cost recovery and plugging of the

fiscal haemorrhage of state-owned enterprises through better management, human resource rationalisation, and by following the principles of value for money.

Pakistan is fully committed to exit the grey list of the Financial Action Tax force (FATF). Grey-listing has no direct consequences on Pakistan's borrowing ability from the IMF. However, its economic consequences could include higher costs of borrowing for the private sector on foreign financial transactions. The IMF has a structural benchmark that Pakistan completely address all the 27 action points prescribed by the FATF. Pakistan would not only have to address them to exit the FATF grey list, but also do so within a stipulated time period to meet the IMF's indicative target.

Debt sustainability and transparency is another issue affecting our economy. The IMF has already been provided information on Pakistan's public debt and loans from other countries (including China), in support of a comprehensive Debt Sustainability Analysis, which is a key component of an IMF-supported programme. Pakistan needs to ensure that its bilateral partners maintain their exposure throughout the EFF programme period and that the new financing is consistent with debt sustainability objectives. The IMF also emphasises that Pakistan remain within its pre-agreed primary deficit (difference between government revenue and expenditures, excluding interest payments).

The currency exchange rate, and the State Bank's policy rate are the two major variables that, directly or indirectly, affect all walks of life. In six years (2013 to 2019), the State Bank sold almost \$42 billion from its reserves in the open market to keep the conversion rate of the rupee against the dollar stable. On the advice of the IMF, the State Bank adopted a market-determined exchange rate. The IMF is asking for further autonomy for the State Bank of Pakistan, so that monetary policies remain unaffected by the federal government's political considerations.

The IMF foresees that acting upon its advice, Pakistan would be able to free up resources for spending in priority areas such as health, education, human capital development and reducing poverty.

It is difficult not to agree with the IMF's diagnosis of the challenges facing Pakistan's economy. The Fund has been

identifying these issues since 2008, when the PPP Government approached it for a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). One can differ with the IMF's solutions, as they seem to be prescribed over and over again, without bringing any long-term (or some argue, even medium-term) macroeconomic stability. However, the counter-argument arises whether the IMF's prescriptions were ever implemented in letter and spirit at all.

Before moving forward, let us do a quick recap of Pakistan's last two programmes with the IMF. In 2008, the PPP approached the IMF for an SBA amounting to \$7.6 billion. The three major conditions imposed by the IMF for that SBA included reducing the fiscal deficit, levying value added tax and eliminating subsidies in the power sector. Fulfilling those conditions would have eroded the popularity of any government. So, like its predecessors, the PPP Government, too, in the run-up to General Elections 2013, prematurely terminated this SBA, holding down electricity tariffs, suppressing the fuel prices and adding to the fiscal deficit.

Economic challenges compelled the PML(N) government to approach the IMF in 2013 for a \$6.4 billion loan. This was one of the rare engagements with the IMF that Pakistan successfully completed. However, the completion of this programme never translated into sustained macroeconomic stability. This was due to the fact that, with the political turmoil over the Panama Papers and some high-profile judicial verdicts, Pakistan had, once again, entered general election mode. Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's government, too, had to resort to popular measures: holding down electricity tariffs, suppressing the fuel prices, relaxing the income threshold for taxation, and manoeuvring the currency market to externally stabilise the value of the rupee versus the dollar. All of those measures reimposed the economic challenges which further got aggravated due to the uncertainty surrounding the PTI government's indecisiveness regarding whether to go or not to go to the IMF, during its first year in power.

Resultantly, Pakistan had to approach the IMF, once again in 2019, for the current EFF. The same old diagnosis, the same old prescription. The only difference was that this time the potency of the medicine (conditions and preconditions)

has multiplied, and the relief (tranches of loans) would come in piece-meals.

Finally, let us examine how the resumption of the IMF programme, and implementation of its prescriptions for macroeconomic stability could hurt the microeconomic stability of the masses.

Elimination of the energy circular debt, through comprehensive cost recovery, and an autonomous OGRA and NEPRA would mean that regulators would not have to wait for the nod of the cabinet or the Prime Minister, before

In the absence of any plan "B," the only option left for Pakistan to achieve macroeconomic stability is to follow the IMF prescription in letter and spirit.

changing the price of energy. They would raise and reduce the domestic prices in keeping with the changes in international fuel prices.

An increase of 1 trillion rupees in the revenue collection target, without broadening the tax net, would mean that either the existing tax-payers would have to pay more, or the reliance would be on indirect taxes, which are regressive in nature and lead to inflation. Ending tax-exemptions and concessions would hurt certain influential interest groups, who would resist this change.

Plugging the fiscal haemorrhage of loss-making, state-owned enterprises would require revamping those organisations, staff rationalisation, public-private partnership, and or complete privatisation. The three major political parties tried to rule out these measures when they came to power, but vehemently opposed any such move when they were in the opposition.

One of the positive outcomes of Pakistan addressing the 27 action-points of the FATF is the renewed efforts towards documentation of the economy that is helping to bring informal economic ac-

tivities into the formal regime. However, these measures are unpopular among certain interest groups, who are flourishing in the informal economic regime.

Due to weak resource mobilisation, the federal government had to start its fiscal year with a deficit. The federal share of the divisible pool is hardly sufficient to meet debt-servicing. All other expenditures (defence and security, pays and pension, subsidies and grants, and PSDP) are to be met through borrowed money. A cap on the primary deficit would mean that the government would have to prioritise debt-servicing over all other expenditures, most possibly compromising on the PSDP (Public Sector Development Programme).

A market-based exchange rate would make our imports (read petroleum products, palm oil, soybean oil, pulses, tea, etc.) more expensive, every time the rupee loses value against the dollar.

In the absence of any plan "B," the only option left for Pakistan to achieve macroeconomic stability is to follow the IMF prescription in letter and spirit (and not lose its benefits through a spending-spree in the run-up to the next general elections). In the medium- to long-run, Pakistan would free up enough resources to be spent on social development. However, the cost of transition from the existing state of the economy to its macroeconomic stabilisation would be too high and must not be borne by the common man.

This would require a parallel strategy for social protection, which should help alleviate the effects of stabilisation on the vulnerable groups, particularly the poorest. Currently, there is a component to strengthen social protection measures in the EFF. This can be further beefed up by shifting from an "across the board" subsidy regime to "targeted subsidies."

The Pakistan Government is updating its National Socioeconomic Registry (NSER) for the Benazir Income Support Programme through a wellbeing survey. Triangulation of NADRA data with the wellbeing score of a household, would help in identifying those who should be getting the benefit of any targeted subsidy on a priority basis. Use of technology and data, in the tech-savvy "post-Covid" world, for reaching out to those who need to be protected in pursuit of macroeconomic stability, is the way forward. ■

MOOD OF THE MOMENT

Prospects for the Economy

Politics of confrontation: Is it hurting the economy and dampening the business sentiment?



Shariq Vohra

President Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI)

“The economy has never been a priority for any government in Pakistan. The political parties are merely concerned with breaking or making governments.”



Despite the political tussle that the country has experienced over the last year, local, export markets and specially the stock market have done well – they have gone up right from September/October last year. Export markets have not been negatively affected since there has been no disruption in production; neither the workers nor owners have faced trouble in running their industries.

It has been a year since the PDM movement began. The scenario is not new in Pakistan, although the media have made much of it. However, foreign direct investment may have suffered.

The government, on its part, is trying to create a feel-good impression through the media. However, industry has remained the same over the last four years, except for the one year when government intervened and started restricting imports and the construction sector. It also changed the interest rate from 6 percent to 13 percent. Therefore, in actuality, the government dented the economy itself. Realising the error, the government has reversed the interest rate back to 6 percent, and allowed the construction industry to function as it did during previous governments, while also offering an amnesty – a no questions asked kind of a situation. Therefore, the policies of this government are more or less the same as those of previous governments.

The government reckons that inflation is around 9 percent, but to me, inflation in Pakistan is different compared to many other countries. This is because our non-food inflation is on the lower side, and our food inflation 6 percent – on a high – which is bad for the economy and would affect the poor the most, who have to fill their stomachs at the end of the day. Hence, it can be said that inflation is definitely bad news for the people and if it is not handled properly, there will be downsides to it in the form of shortages of sugarcane, cotton, and all agricultural products, making way for further unemployment.

Some are of the view that the current Senate Elections results – with finance minister Hafeez Sheikh losing – would matter to the IMF, but I beg to differ. According to me, the IMF is not concerned if an elected or unelected person grabs a seat in senate or parliament. The results make no difference to the IMF. However,

in general, there has been trouble where the courts have ruled that an unelected individual cannot serve as a minister.

I would like to add that the economy has never been a priority of any government in Pakistan. The political parties are merely concerned with breaking or making governments. This applies to both, the opposition and the ruling party.

The ruling government hardly has a vision for the economy; they have little to no ideology and that holds true for other mainstream political parties as well. The only political party that had or has some semblance of a political ideology is the Pakistan Peoples Party; they seem to have a basic understanding of politics. On the other hand, when the PTI was running its political campaign for the elections, they mainly and primarily spoke of getting rid of the corruption of the Sharif and Zardari governments. This means that their bid to gain power was not based on the economy or any concrete vision, but relied mainly on creating animosity towards the previous governments. This approach is damaging for a political and democratic system – for any country. The potential political instability damages foreign investments and affects the confidence of domestic investors and industrialists.

There needs to be a robust economic plan to take the country forward. Both the opposition and the ruling government should sit together and formulate a consensus based long-term charter for the economy. In the short-term, they should come up with a bold industrial policy, giving tax relief to the industries, just as they did for the construction sector.

The government needs to buck up, stop maligning the country's institutions, and create economic reforms instead, as we see them mostly embroiled in rhetoric or power politics rather than focusing on the economy. ■

Attique Mir

Head of Anjuman Tahjirin

“We see that there is inflation because of the existing corruption. If the government is able to fulfil its targets and control corruption, it would achieve something that hasn’t been done in the last 50 years.”

In the past few months, there was a strict lockdown because of which people suffered material losses, and it seemed that it would take time for things to stabilise. However, we saw that the textile and garment sector witnessed a boom and other export industries also took a relatively better turn.

However, political instability and talk of another lockdown have instilled fear within all the provinces. These factors taken together, affect the economic situation negatively. According to me, things can get better if political instability is controlled.

I must also add that the aims of this government are much better than those of previous governments and we may call them resolute and tough, to a large extent. This government wants to get rid of corruption prevalent in the country and crush the corrupt mafias. This is a difficult task. Every sector in the country suffers from corruption. We see that there is inflation because of the existing corruption. If the government is able to fulfil its targets and control

corruption, then it would achieve something that hasn’t taken been done in the last 50 years. Although this depends on the government being able to curb mafias and their corrupt practices that we see in all sectors.

The corrupt mafias are not scared of the courts or of the government; these are battle-hardened people, because of which I see this as a monumental task for the present government.

On the other hand, the government’s measures for the export industry are commendable. The dollar rate had risen previously but has been controlled along with imports. The government has also controlled the trade deficit to a large extent while establishing new industries. Moreover, investments have increased. Establishing new industries is a very good sign that brings hope to the industrialists and the workforce. If the government succeeds in controlling inflation, especially with regard to the basic needs of people such as food staples, it will have done



In my view, Pakistan could become a haven for foreign investors. Karachi could soon become the economic hub, if federal policies are formalised and are stable.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Senate is good news for exporters, investors and traders. When any government, good or bad falls, it affects the economy and it takes considerable time for it to stabilise. If this government falls, we will face an impasse.

In my view, Pakistan could become a haven for foreign investors. Karachi could soon become the economic hub, if federal policies are formalised and are stable.

Lastly, the current government has a commendable vision. In Pakistan, most people in power have been corrupt and there is a deficit of sincere politicians and leaders in our society, in general. The PTI government has people who want to take the country forward, while the mainstream traditional parties include discredited individuals. Hopefully, the well-intentioned people in PTI would turn things around and achieve the desired goals. Over the next two to three years, we can hope for betterment on the economic side. ■

well.

Moreover, whenever there is political instability, it affects the economy, stock markets suffer, investors are disappointed and may lose hope. The media today is insinuating that the current government is under pressure and would collapse any given day with mainstream parties ganging up against it. This will definitely have a detrimental effect, if the government is unable to handle the current rhetoric. If the government tries to handle the situation in a focused manner, trouble could be forestalled.

The election of the PTI’s nominees for

Atif Zafar

Chief Economist and Director Research at Topline Securities

“Because of political unrest, the government might hesitate to take tough measures, since there will be some pressure from PDM with the long march commencing from 26 March.”

If we compare today’s situation to two months ago, the economic situation has worsened. For example, current accounts were in surplus, inflation was easing off but has risen to 9 percent, while international oil prices have increased. Even the current account deficit is expected to exist for another three months. Primary factors that have negatively impacted the economy are inflation and an increase in international oil prices.

An important development has been the IMF and Pakistan agreeing to continue with the programme. Because of this programme, the government has increased power tariffs up to 30 percent. There have also been a few amendments with respect to the State Bank so that it becomes autonomous and independent. Once the executive board meeting takes place at the end of this month, Pakistan will be able to get 500 million dollars. In June there will be a further increase in the power tariff and gas prices may increase. All this will add to inflation.

The other important thing is that the IMF has trimmed down this year’s revenue collection targets. However, the target for next year is Rs6 trillion. To achieve this, the government will have to increase taxes with the next budget. This would be an important move on the part of the current government.

From the economy’s perspective, the next two to three months are a little tricky and challenging for the government. Because of political unrest, the government might hesitate to take tough measures, since there will be some pressure from PDM with the long march commencing from 26 March. Hence the IMF, international oil prices, and political unrest may together bear a negative impact.

The PTI government is markedly different from the previous government. The ruling government is focused on welfare



The PTI government is markedly different from the previous government. The ruling government is focused on welfare and social spending whereas the previous government was more business-friendly which had a trickle-down effect on the masses.

and social spending such as the Ehsaas programme during Covid, whereas the previous government was more business-friendly and business oriented which had a trickle-down effect on the masses. The present government also aims to bring relief to the marginalised classes, hence improving the poverty index. For this measure, the government would face some constraints such as a decrease in the education and health budgets. Therefore, there are two schools of thoughts. One is more welfare oriented and the other, business oriented.

Generally, political unrest has a detrimental effect on local and export markets as well as the stock markets and industries. The government is responsible for policy making and if there is ambiguity, a businessman will

be affected by that ambiguity while considering the changing situations every few months due to a political tussle. Investments stop coming in, which then affects policy making. When the economy is hit, it affects the stock markets.

Lastly, the upcoming few months are challenging for the government, where it will have to take difficult decisions like increasing electricity charges and the gas tariff. If the government continues doing this, it will have a positive impact on the economy. If the current government is able to sustain itself, I’m hopeful about the positive turn the economy will take. ■

MUSINGS

Perception vs Reality



Demystifying diplomacy

The language of diplomacy is a dictionary of double-speak, wile, craft, politics and nationalism

By Ibrahim Sajid Malick

I had the privilege of reading two notable books by former Pakistani diplomats last month; *Pakistan's Foreign Policy – A Reappraisal* by Shahid M. Amin; and *China, West, and the Islamic World* by Syed Hasan Javed. I am not reviewing these books because neither adds anything substantial to the theory of diplomacy – a political activity and a significant power component. The main aim of diplomacy is to help states uphold their foreign policies' goals without using force, propaganda, or law.

Although every international organisation comprises both big and small states, we know relatively little about small states' activities within these arenas and their prospects to influence policy outcomes. It is, therefore, refreshing to read two books concurrently by Pakistani authors. Less resourceful states like Pakistan encounter significant obstacles in different negotiation settings.

At the heart of the theory of diplomacy is the notion of communicating, interacting, strengthening contact, and mediating with states and other global players. Many diplomatic processes, possibly the outcome of expedience or simple practicality, were institutionalised over the years and became formal international law. Religion has been, and will continue to be, a decisive contributing factor in violent conflict. Therefore, it is disheartening to note religion and religious actors are often not included in diplomatic efforts.

Recounting a story in his memoir, *Independent Diplomat*, American diplomat Carne Ross writes; "In 2001, the UN Security Council (New York) had a debate, not a post-modern philosophical discussion; they were trying to agree on

becoming international law. They aimed to get a concession on the conditions of what they called the "rollover" of the Oil-for-Food program in Iraq." One thing Ross later realised about the debate was that they chose the "facts" to suit the policy, not the policy to suit the reality on the ground. If presented with the irrefutable facts of experience, they would not have found it so easy to make that policy. This problem is common to all foreign policy;

Diplomacy is not democratic, even in democracies. Those impacted by the verdicts have only a slight idea of what the diplomats are doing in their name, or even who they are.

despite the abundance of "information" in today's digital world, it seems it is not getting better. No matter how descriptive it is, all information embodies a selection and reduction from reality. A plethora of accessible information must do ineluctable 'filtering' to get 'essential' information for policy decisions. And the further away diplomats are from reality, the worse the tendency to make bad or inappropriate decisions.

There is an assumption in government that policymakers sit at the zenith of a pyramid of information. No one in government believes that they know eve-

rything. Still, they are convinced that as the information about reality at the base of the pyramid is moved up, only its unnecessary elements are discarded, leaving only the necessary "facts" for those at the apex on which to base their decisions. Sometimes, what is relayed to the decision-maker may not be germane to the matter at hand. Indeed, it may be the very thing discarded. It is a problematic diplomacy deficit that specific information types should be exempted.

One particular feature lacking in the dialogue of international relations is the ability to differentiate between description and reality. Decisions made based on a story – which cannot correctly capture what is going on – are most often unsuitable for the people experiencing the challenge firsthand. Diplomats have to find ways to account for the ineffable and essential elements of what makes us human and defines our reality. Furthermore, they should approach information eclectically and allow room for acknowledging and evaluating emotion and non-measurable aspects of reality.

Diplomacy is not democratic, even in democracies. It is assumed that diplomats are a distinct elite free to negotiate policy with little outside investigation, influence, or responsibility. Those impacted by the verdicts have only a slight idea of what the diplomats are doing in their name, or even who they are. Even in presumed democracies, it is tough to know what envoys are doing on behalf of the masses. It is all but impossible to gain access to them or spur on their decisions; if they make errors, which will undoubtedly happen, it is only very seldom possible to hold them responsible. Like the world, the policy is knotted and complicated.

Policy-making is not beneficial when done in secrecy or privacy. Information is not credible unless it is constantly reexamined, reviewed, and tested against re-

ality. Other people, especially those most affected by a policy, must be entitled to participate.

The designation between the ambassadors and their nation is an incorrect and arbitrary one. When you become an ambassador, you ought to submit yourself to the collective state: your personal “I” becomes “we.” Members of the diplomatic elite are encouraged and trained to consider themselves their country’s im-

legacy – that many people seem to approve should ignore them from the negotiation of their affairs internationally.

However, it is possible that it also serves their interest. There is an implicit, unacknowledged agreement at work: the negotiators continue dealing with the world, whatever the outcomes, and the masses get to live and enjoy their lives. It is a kind of interchange of irresponsibility or, more succinctly illustrated, an

stakes are in antagonism, sometimes armed confrontation must ensue. Self-interest is perceived as the underlying factor of international relations. It is an echo of modern economic philosophy that the maximisation of welfare lies in individual self-interest protection. However, just like that philosophy, such a line of thought about international relations yields unsatisfactory outcomes that may have nothing to do with the combined (or even individual) interest of humanity. This norm may have been fitting for a time when the joint parts of society were relatively less evident than they are now.

Another challenge of modern diplomacy is that it is very unfair and unbalanced at a more fundamental level. Its machinery and procedures are monopolised by influential and wealthy states whose economic and political influence is bolstered and augmented by their less-recognised diplomatic power. Prominent, affluent, and established governments have large calibres of professional, well-trained, and well-resourced representatives who are equipped to dominate negotiations. On the other flank of the negotiation table, poorer and less experienced nations struggle to get their viewpoints acknowledged and talk more about being accepted. Undoubtedly a drawback for the less powerful, but it does not serve the powerful either, although they may wrongly assume so.

There are some ways to address the deficit of democracy in international affairs. First, the discourse of diplomacy needs to be simplified. The grandiose and rambling vocabularies of prudence must be simplified, and if possible, rejected. When discussing globalisation, it might be easier to talk about the homogenisation of transnational cultures, the liberalisation of capital markets, the trend of labour, or whatever it is we mean by the word instead of one that is bandied about without clarity. Rather than talking about WMD, we should speak of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons and their broadly diverse characteristics and capacities, instead of a term formulated to confuse and frighten. The UN Security Council should refer to “private meetings” in place of “informal consultations of Council members.” And its public discussions should indeed be general. ■



The Iraq War: the fallout of a misinformed, unaccountable diplomatic elite.

age. The rationale for such a designation – that the diplomats embody the government representing the state whose population has voted the government in – is flimsy. In actuality, the appointment is a facade for erratic, contrived, and unexplainable decision-making. When an ambassador talks as “we,” that assertion only very scarcely has anything to do with the actual collective desires of the nation involved. The “we” is also tricky in that it enables individual ambassadors to subsume their subjective morality into that of the nation. Consequently, this allows an amoral attitude since, by traditional understanding, the country has no character and is free to do things that the individual is not open to doing.

Despite the fallacy of the elite’s adoption of the nation’s concerns as their own and the allotment to themselves of the right to determine what is best for that nation, the populace involved often seems to accept this role. The inactivity of the public is the necessary result. This passivity may be another chronological

agreement between the unaccountable and the careless.

This model may have worked when the world was less integrated than now and when a country’s affairs touched only issues that are less connected to ordinary people’s interests. But today, when our existence is inextricably attached to the lives of the other residents of the world, this model is inapplicable. Both sides’ irresponsibility strengthens and encourages the unfavourable competitive model of international relations to everyone’s absolute disfavour.

The perception diplomatic elites, most newscasters, and columnists have about foreign affairs are once again inherited from earlier history. Nations are seen as discrete players with interests that must be arbitrated and mediated with other nations, sometimes bilaterally, collectively, or multilaterally.

Each government only cares about its interests; peace lies in a harmony of interests, obtained through negotiation and diplomatic communication. Where

MEDIAMATTERS



Muzzling the Media

With arbitrary appointments at the top, PEMRA continues to damage the media in Pakistan



By Shahzada Zulfiqar

The writer is a Quetta-based journalist and a recipient of the Presidential Pride of Performance Award. He is President of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists.

the case of Saleem Baig, who assumed charge of office on June 28, 2018 for a four-year term.

For Absar Alam, the PML-N bigwigs lowered the bar of educational qualification to Bachelors from Masters, while for Saleem Baig, they changed the key condition that requires the candidate to be a Masters in Mass Communications, Business Administration, Law, Finance or Economics. Saleem Baig's Masters' degree was in Political Science but the PML-N government got around that by scrapping the original condition.

Similarly, Baig was given a special relaxation when it came to experience. The PEMRA job required 20 years of hands-on experience of governance and management in administration, finance, media or marketing, according to the advertisement published in the newspapers. Saleem Baig, who was principal information officer before taking charge of PEMRA, did not have the relevant experience. Another major breach in rules and regulations occurred when he was appointed to PEMRA the day he retired from the government job.

In a nutshell, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's government made substantial changes in the eligibility criteria for the post through a second advertisement, published specifically to suit Saleem Baig. The selection committee, headed by the PML-N stalwart Sartaj Aziz, and representatives of the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), rushed through interviews of more than 60 candidates in a single day to select Baig for the job. But of course, he was already marked for this position and the interview exercise was just a formality.

In both appointments, the PML-N trampled on rules and regulations to post its own man on this important slot. However, the irregular mode of appointment was questioned in court. The Lahore High Court declared Absar Alam's appointment illegal on December 18, 2017,

forcing his ouster, while Saleem Baig's fate hangs in the balance in court. Senior lawyers say that if principles laid down by the Supreme Court in the M. Yasin case and the Lahore High Court's judgement in the Absar Alam case are applied, Baig's appointment would also be declared illegal.

Even the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had objected to Saleem Baig's appointment, the summary of which was approved by then president Mamnoon Hussain on May 29, 2018, on the advice of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi – just two days before the caretaker government had to take charge. An ECP statement issued at that time said that the government had sought permission for this appointment, which was refused, but still went ahead. At that time, the ECP had imposed a ban on appointments in government institutions to ensure transparent elections.

Absar Alam, when contacted, claimed that he wanted to run the institution independently, and refused to toe the government line of favouring TV channels propagating its policies, while controlling those who were critical of them. "That was the

In a nutshell, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's government made substantial changes in the eligibility criteria for the post through a second advertisement, published specifically to suit Saleem Baig.

The post of chairman Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) requires the skills necessary to regulate the media in a fair and transparent manner. Unfortunately, both the incumbent chairman, bureaucrat Muhammad Saleem Baig, and former chairman journalist Absar Alam, were appointed top watchmen of the electronic media in an arbitrary fashion by the last PML-N government, giving scant thought to the requirements of the job.

Like his predecessor, the current Chairman PEMRA faces allegations of being appointed to this key slot in sheer violation of the laid down rules and regulations. If the former PML-N government changed the basic eligibility criteria while appointing Absar Alam chairman PEMRA in December 2015, the same was done in

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reason, I was not allowed to complete the four-year term," he said. Regardless of Alam's claims, which are challenged by many seasoned journalists, appointments in PEMRA, especially for the top slot, have become controversial. Instead of selecting a candidate on merit, almost every government wants its own man to hold the position of chairman PEMRA.

As a regulator, PEMRA is supposed to work independently, but continuous political meddling transforms it into an institution focused on witch-hunts and victimisation of channels that refuse to toe the line.

PEMRA – a brainchild of former President Pervez Musharraf – was set up through a presidential ordinance in 2002. Despite several inherent statutory flaws and lacunas, it played a key role in the opening up of the electronic media in Pakistan, especially in its initial years. From the one state-run Pakistan Television (PTV) channel and Radio Pakistan, the sector experienced exponential growth. The number of television channels and radio stations have now crossed the 100 and 250 mark, respectively. According to Gallup Pakistan, the quantum of annual advertising revenue for the television sector increased from 0.3 billion rupees in 2002, to approximately 40 billion in 2017-18. Since then, it has taken a dip because of the slowdown in the economy.

But as the electronic media expanded and started to play a dominant role in narrative building, the interference of successive governments also increased. The situation deteriorated as one elected government after another came to power. The PML-N bluntly used PEMRA to victimise and punish news channels in the forefront in highlighting the corruption of then prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, and his family.

The hangover of the PML-N's legacy of targeting the media continued under the



Controversial PEMRA Chairman Muhammad Saleem Baig.

The PML-N's legacy of targeting the media continued under the PTI government. In his war against news and entertainment channels, Saleem Baig took a series of one-sided harsh steps, from suspending licenses of news channels to banning news shows, television dramas and even advertisements.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) government. Although senior PTI leaders tried to distance themselves from Saleem Baig, saying that he was a gift from the past that could not be removed due to the fixed term, it is Prime Minister Imran Khan who has garnered bad publicity because of the reckless, and often illegal and illogical actions of the PEMRA chairman.

In his apparently personal war against news and entertainment channels, Saleem Baig took a series of one-sided harsh steps, ranging from suspending licenses of news channels to banning news shows, television dramas and even advertisements. In 2020, Baig suspended licenses of NEO TV, 24NewsHD and Bol News, one after the other. His orders could not stand the test of trial before the superior judiciary, which came to the rescue of news channels. However, the suspension of transmissions for days and in some cases weeks resulted in huge financial losses. Baig continued to take vindictive steps behind the scenes, which included forcing cable operators to change positioning of channels from the top 10 or top 20 to the bottom of the list. "Keeping our channel's position at its original place is a constant battle with PEMRA, which refuses to take responsibility for behind the scenes arm-twisting of cable operators," confided a senior executive of a private news channel.

Similarly, entertainment channels, including HUM and ARY Entertainment, were also targeted by PEMRA in a bizarre manner and one each of their popular drama serials was banned. Ironically, one of the serials had completed its first round of airing, while the other one was almost halfway through its first run. Here again, the judiciary came to the rescue, but the damage was done – hurting both the perception about Pakistan when it comes to media and creative freedom and inflicting losses to the channels. Baig's unilateral decision raised a storm among artists and producers who declared it an assault on creative freedom. The scribe tried to contact Saleem Baig several times, but he was not available for comment.

PEMRA's inability to act as an independent regulator can be attributed to the inherent flaws that were seeded in at the time of its establishment. In principle, a sectoral regulator should be independent, autonomous and inclusive. It must operate fairly and under laid down rules



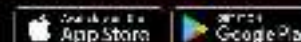
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and regulations developed with the input of all stakeholders and experts. As a watchdog, PEMRA should certainly have powers to act if any channel resorts to libel or defamation, acts against the country's interest or breaches national security. But to do this effectively, PEMRA must be free from political interference and not just appear independent and fair, but also act as such.

Ideally, PEMRA has to ensure that neither the government nor market forces curb the citizen's right to know. Yet, it does not mean sensational or irresponsible reporting. This delicate balance can only be maintained if appointments in PEMRA are made on merit. Only above board officials as regulators can encourage and facilitate self-regulatory mechanisms and implementation of the code of ethics by media houses. In case of a breach, they may act against those responsible decisively and fairly.

Another challenge is that the PEMRA law pre-dates the existing media market, where there has been a convergence between traditional and social media. While the world has moved to online media, most of the television transmission and distribution in Pakistan is still on the analog system.

In the third decade of the 21st century, most parts of the country do not have

As a watchdog, PEMRA should certainly have powers to act if any channel resorts to libel or defamation, acts against the country's interest or breaches national security. But to do this effectively, PEMRA must be free from political interference.

access to a digital cable distribution network. The DTH (Direct-To-Home) – the digital content distribution system – that has replaced the analog cable distribution system around the world, remains a dream in Pakistan.

Governmental control over PEMRA is

another serious drawback that hampers the regulator from operating independently and impartially. While the government may have representation on the board of the regulator, the principle of independence requires that it should not have any role in appointment of members of the regulatory authority. This should be done through an impartial mechanism, led by the judiciary. Moreover, like the judiciary, the regulator must have financial and operational autonomy. Nevertheless, under Section 05 of the PEMRA Ordinance, the federal government can issue policy directives to the regulator. Besides that, the federal government has sole authority to appoint private members, including the chairman of the authority, and this is how it uses PEMRA as its tool to control TV channels.

Reforms under PEMRA require a lot of political will and the first step would be placing the right man at the top position of the regulatory authority. The PTI government might get a chance to do what is needed if the court disqualifies Saleem Baig. But until the verdict is out, Baig will continue to stoke trouble for independent channels and damage the reputation of Pakistan, where the media functions at the mercy of a retired bureaucrat. ■

A Channel for Memons

TNN founder Sattar Habib's latest project aims to connect Memons with each other and the world with Memons



By Sami Subhani

The writer is a staff member.

Until recently, community was something that Sattar Habib did not pay much mind to; in fact all he did was, try and avoid it. "My mother would always encourage me to contribute towards my community and society: 'Qaum ke liye kuch kaam karo,' she urged, but I would always try and run away from my community," says Habib. Paradoxically, 'running away' is not an act those acquainted with Habib would ever associate with a man whose career repeatedly thrust him into life-threatening situations.

In a media landscape dominated by the scions of wealthy families, mostly men who have never filed a story or risked life and limb to get the perfect shot, Sattar Habib is the unlikely of moguls, a man who worked his way up from the grassroots to build his own pioneering network. Habib started out as a photojournalist in 1973 and got his first major break in 1988, when VISNEWS, a TV news agency jointly owned by Reuters, NBC and the BBC, selected Habib as their cameraman for the Pakistan-Afghanistan region. The following year, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan and Habib was among the first few journalists to cover the war-torn



ARY CEO Salman Iqbal and Farooq Sattar join Sattar Habib to inaugurate Global Memon TV.

country as a frontline cameraman.

In addition, Habib's work in Pakistan coincided with some of its most turbulent years, rife with political and sectarian violence. Through it all, Sattar Habib never let the dangers of his profession compromise the quality of his work, bringing viewers as close to the pivotal figures and moments of that era as was possible.

By 1995, Reuters had become the sole owner of VISNEWS, which subsequently became Reuters TV, and needed someone to handle their TV operations in Pakistan. Having proven his credentials, Sattar Habib was chosen for the job and requested to establish Pakistan's first privately owned TV news company, TNN. Over the years, TNN has grown into a thriving multi-media platform, providing services ranging from news feeds to studio production to news channels both in Pakistan and abroad and runs two web-based news channels.

It was upon his mother's recent passing that Habib had a change of heart and resolved to lead TNN in a new direction: "I finally decided to make a change and do something to give back to my community. After consulting with a friend who is prominent in the Memon community, I decided to launch a network that would spread greater awareness about

the Memon community across the world, while also helping connect the different groups and sub-communities within the Memon community." This idea became the genesis of Global Memon TV, officially launched on February 9 this year under the TNN umbrella. "This network will be not-for-profit and will focus exclusively on problem-based and humanitarian-based news; we will not delve into politics," says Habib.

To better understand this endeavour, it is perhaps useful to know a thing or two about the Memon community. Originating from the north-western regions of India, the Memons are primarily a mercantile community. During the colonial era, their trade networks expanded beyond the borders of India, leading to the development of Memon communities in Africa, the Middle East, Sri Lanka and East Asia. Over the previous century, Memon communities would establish themselves in Europe and North America as well, their expertise in trade and business assuring them a prominent place in commercial circles wherever they went. They are represented on the global stage mainly by the International Memon Organisation (IMO) and the World Memon Organisation (WMO).

However, this success has not been



Where the journey began: Habib during his days as a cameraman for Reuters.

ubiquitous, there are still many Memons around the world who struggle to make ends meet. “However, within the Memon community there is a strong stigma against asking for help,” says Habib. “By focusing on these people and broadcasting their interviews, we can connect them to those who are willing and able to help, whether it be for their daughter’s wedding, their children’s education or starting their own business.” Aside from encouraging charitable giving, Global Memon TV also seeks to offer help directly. Under a segment titled Faryad, the network has produced and broadcast programmes that offer training to young women in various skills, which include cooking and a beautician’s course.

Additionally, Global Memon TV aims to bring greater exposure and cohesion to the activities of Memon groups like the WMO and IMO, thereby helping boost their success. “In the Memon community there is a saying that, ‘if the right hand gives, the left hand shouldn’t know.’ I disagree with this saying as it unnecessarily limits the amount of help available for the needy,” says Habib. “For instance, soon after the launch of Global Memon TV, a fire broke out at a warehouse in South Africa and the WMO provided aid to help put out that fire and to those affected. Through our presence, the WMO felt that this effort had been highlighted before a global audience and would receive more attention, encouraging many people to become involved in offering help in future incidents

“Within the Memon community there is a strong stigma against asking for help,” says Habib. “By focusing on these people and broadcasting their interviews, we can connect them to those who are willing and able to help.”



of this kind.”

Along with charity, Global Memon TV seeks to foster stronger ties between the Memons in different countries. Habib says, “We want to centralise the activities of the Memon community by creating a

unified platform. Until recently, there was not much awareness within the different sub-groups of the Memon community about the state of Memons in other countries, our network wants to change this. The All-India Memon Jamaat, which represents India’s 1.5 million Memons, wrote us a letter supporting our initiative and acknowledging that they finally felt as though they would be able to engage with Memons from outside of India.”

While the Memon community is clearly at the core of the Global Memon TV project, Habib dispels any notions that the help on offer is exclusive to them. “All those who need help or are willing to help are welcome, that is why we have chosen to broadcast this network in Urdu and English, not Memoni. We want to spread awareness about the Memon community to the world – and not just within the Memon community.” This has the potential to benefit Pakistan as a whole. “By highlighting the success that many Memons have had in the business and industrial realms, we can increase opportunities for foreign investment and partnerships as well,” says Habib.

When asked what challenges he foresees as he takes the network forward, Habib immediately points to the pressure he was under to convert Global Memon TV into a satellite TV channel. “In my opinion, we are technically not a TV channel, we are an online video broadcast (OVB); since our launch, some of our prominent backers have been pushing us to become a 24-hour satellite TV channel. But it will be hard to fill 24 hours with content pertaining to the Memon community; there is a risk of diluting our content and drifting off-course. So we have yet to decide whether this is the right step or not.”

Given how saturated Pakistani TV channels are with repetitive, politicised, and uninformative content, it would be a delight to see a network with Global Memon TV’s ethos make an appearance on our screens. However, even if it remains on its current online platform, Global Memon TV’s refreshing approach to the news is sure to

leave a positive impression on viewers, while alongside enabling them to educate themselves about their own society and make a contribution towards the welfare of their community. ■

DEFENCELINE

AMAN-21



An Exercise in Success

Aman-21 shows Pakistan's importance to global security and cooperation



By Muhammad Azam Khan

The writer is a freelance journalist who contributes on maritime and security related issues.

“From now onward Pakistan will only partner with another country in peace; we will not become part of any other conflict, we will not join any other country in its conflict”

*Prime Minister Imran Khan
World Economic Forum, 2020*

With its tag line, “together for peace” resonating powerfully in the far reaches of the Indian Ocean region and beyond, the 42-country multinational mega biennial exercise AMAN (PEACE)-21 of the Pakistan Navy concluded this February 16. A grand international fleet review was held in the North Arabian Sea on the culminating day. With dozens of warships representing wide-ranging countries, stationed in a massive formation natively called, ‘AMAN formation,’ denoting “unity and collective resolve,” the imposing finale was witnessed by the President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Minister for Defence Production, Chief



Minister Sindh, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of the Army Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff. Emissaries of various countries in Pakistan were also present.

Some of the proceedings on the final day were also reviewed by dignitaries while on-board the PNS MOAWIN. The name of the ship, PNS MOAWIN, itself signifies collaboration, or coming together. Commissioned in October 2018 and jointly constructed by the Pakistan navy and a Turkish firm at the local Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works (KS&EW), the ship is a pride of the nation, aptly symbolising the spirit that underpinned AMAN-21.

“I often queried why my success should come as someone’s failure or why my success would mean that someone must lose. There has to be a way where we all can win. But because this goes against the established thinking and psychology, what is needed is a paradigm shift. Let’s come together, understand each other, and fight the common enemy,” was the clarion call given by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi on the occasion of the curtain-raiser for AMAN-21 on February 12. On this occasion, a record number of naval and marine officers, ships and air unit crews

as well as observers from various countries witnessed the stirring flag-hoisting ceremony at the Pakistan Navy Dockyard, Karachi. These included representatives from, China, Russia, Indonesia, the United States, United Kingdom, Iran, Sri-Lanka, Turkey, Malaysia and other ASEAN states as well as those of the African Union, the EU, GCC and NATO.

The most striking feature of AMAN-21 was the presence of the Russian Navy. It was an ice-breaking moment as alongside was its arch-rival, the United States Navy. The last time the Russian Navy had conducted joint military drills with NATO members was in the “Bold Monarch” exercise in 2011. The spirit of the truly global AMAN-21 did not go unnoticed. Tributes were aglow, even from across the border. “I must commend the Pakistan Navy for holding such a large-scale exercise in the post-Covid period. One of your (the Pakistan Navy’s) greatest achievements, that everyone must learn from, is having brought Russia and the United States together on a single platform; for that alone Pakistan and the Pakistan Navy deserve rich tributes ... the two countries (Russia and the United States) that have been at odds since 2014 – and this is for you (the Pakistan Navy) another jewel in your crown,” said Lt. Gen. (R) KJ Singh of the



The different exercises conducted during Aman-21 made for an impressive show.

Indian Army during a live video conversation on a private television network.

AMAN-21 was split in two phases including harbour and sea. In the former, seminars, symposiums, discussion sessions, international get-togethers, and cultural festivities to showcase Pakistan's rich culture with its great traditions were profitably held. In the next phase, tactical manoeuvres and exercises such as anti-piracy, counterterrorism and search and rescue missions etc. were conducted at sea.

AMAN-21 aimed to strengthen and develop cooperation among the world's navies in order to promote regional stability and to counter common maritime threats. It was a rare opportunity for participating countries to rub shoulders with global counterparts, putting aside their differences to work towards a common cause, develop synergy and doctrinal inter-operability to fight unconventional threats that may appear.

The acme on closing day was the international fleet review in which a formation of ships conducted manoeuvres while marine and Special Forces and air elements displayed their skills. There were para jumps, and a fly-past by Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Air Force aviation teams. Aircraft from participating countries also flew over the AMAN-21 formation.

Earlier, during the opening ceremony of AMAN-21, the message of Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Niazi was read out. In his message, the Admiral warmly welcomed the participants of the exercise, the sev-

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enth edition in the AMAN series commandeered by the Pakistan Navy since 2007. "AMAN-21 will provide a medium to develop doctrinal synergy to tackle maritime security challenges and to enhance inter-operability amongst navies at different pedestals of technological prowess to come together and secure a sustainable maritime environment," read the message.

On February 13, Admiral Niazi paid on-board visits to the crews of the participating Indonesian, Russian and Sri-

Lankan naval ships. He was welcomed by the senior and commanding officers of each of the vessels in a befitting manner. They expressed deep appreciation for the enduring efforts of the Pakistan Navy in mustering global navies and working towards a shared commitment of maritime peace, stability and legitimate order at sea.

The highlight of the first phase of exercises from February 13-15 was devoted to the International Maritime Conference (IMC-21). The conference brought together a wide array of distinguished international and national scholars as well as subject matter experts. The scholars addressed large multinational gatherings. Under the overarching theme, 'Development of the Blue Economy under a Secure and Sustainable Environment: A shared future for the Western Indian Ocean,' the erudite speakers proffered creative solutions to oceanic problems afflicting the region. Notable luminaries included Secretary General International Maritime Organisation, President Jammu & Kashmir, Dr. Gunter Pauli and Senator Sherry Rehman. Commander US Naval Forces, Central Admiral Samuel Paparo delivered his keynote address. His talk, 'Enhancing Regional Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean Region through Effective Mechanisms,' was instructive. Dr. David Brewster of the Australian National University talked about the challenges and opportunities in changing the maritime dynamics of the Indian Ocean region and its implications for regional states.

On the second day of the conference, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National security, Dr. Moeed Yusuf was chief guest during the pre-lunch session. Eminent speakers shed light on the 'Need for Maritime Security and Sustainable Growth – A Shared Vision for the Western Indian Ocean region.' In his keynote address on, 'BRI and its implications on maritime security in the Indian Ocean region,' Dr. Nong Hong, Executive Director of China America Studies, USA, underlined the need for stability in the region in the wake of non-traditional security threats where the interests of multiple stakeholders converged. In the second session, the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Syed Ali Haider Zaidi was the chief guest. Scholars presented their thoughts on the 'Development of Pakistan's Maritime



Officials from the participating navies present salute during the Flag Hoisting Ceremony.

"AMAN-21 makes a mockery of India's aspiration to be a 'net security provider' for littoral states in the Indian Ocean."

Sector and Blue Economy.'

In the last session on February 14, the discussants alluded to the 'contemporary strategic environment related to the Indian Ocean region and opportunities for regional cooperation.' Renowned Senator Mushahid Hussain shared his views on, 'Building strategic partnerships.'

With progressing geopolitical shifts in the Indian Ocean region and its peripheries, maritime security has assumed a distinctive significance for Pakistan. A stable order in the region has now become an indispensable need for the country. With the upcoming port of Gwadar projected as a regional hub and transshipment port in the wider Indian Ocean and given the external machinations against the CPEC, maritime security has never been as critically important to Pakistan as it is now. Gwadar is tipped to become the hub of trade, connecting South Asia, Middle East, Africa and Central Asia.

Perhaps the finest tribute to AMAN-21 came not from within Pakistan but



Chief of the Naval Staff Amjad Khan Niazi being briefed on board an Indonesian ship.

from outside, from its eastern neighbour. "India's Pakistan policy seems to have landed in a cul-de-sac. It lacks credibility and has no future. A course correction is overdue. AMAN-21 makes a mockery of India's aspiration to be a 'net security

provider' for littoral states in the Indian Ocean. The participation of Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka in AMAN-21 speaks for itself," asserted Ambassador M.K. Bhadrakumar in his column on February 17, 2021. ■

Your Life & Health

Fighting the Pandemic



The Road to Survival

With the spread of COVID-19, human ingenuity comes into play to combat the scourge



By Dr. Javed Akram

The writer is a distinguished medical professor. Currently, he serves as Vice Chancellor, University of Health Sciences, Lahore and President, Pakistan Society of Internal Medicine.

Microbes and viruses have shaped the lives we live today. There is not a time when our immune systems are not fending off microbial insult(s). The constant battle between Mankind and our 'invisible attackers' has led to debates and theories for centuries, starting as early as 1025 AD with Ibn Sina.

It's due to nature's marvellous gift of immunity that an individual, a community or even the entire geographical region, evades regular threats posed by microbiota around and within us. While working silently but constantly, these biological defence mechanisms are remarkably adaptable in recognising the invader and confer lifelong immunity against them. Balanced diets and lifestyles are probably the most practical means to keep immune systems healthier.



Historic outbreaks have taught mankind to stay abreast with biological mechanisms underlying human immune systems, to combat the ever-changing potential of harm posed by microbes. Public health practices of today owe their emergence to such outbreaks such as the London Cholera outbreak of 1848-49, which the "Father of Epidemiology," John Snow, documented. Public Health guidelines and practices continue to evolve to maintain the interactive equilibrium between humans, the causative agent(s), and the environment.

The ongoing SARS-COV-II (COVID-19) pandemic has catalysed fusion of what is currently known to what might be in scientific terms. The pandemic has galvanised medical researchers, scientists, and administrators to collectively test ideas. From off-label drugs to vaccines, a plethora of research activity has been documented on clinical trial registries in the last one year. The traditional linear chronology of new drug/biologic product development has run a different course this time with each trial phase running in parallel. The orthodox expectations of vaccine production would be anywhere from 5-18 years and cost \$200-\$500 million to develop. Correspondingly, a record num-

ber of Emergency Use Authorisations (EUA) have been issued. Thus COVID-19 might end up shaping the manner and time it takes to develop new drugs and biologics. This new global understanding of a need for change was highlighted in the WHO's Global Research Roadmap 2020 as "a moral obligation to learn as much as possible, as quickly as possible."

Successful understanding of immune mechanisms has led to the concept of vaccine – introducing potentially harmful microbes (wholly or in part) within the human body to develop a lifelong immune response. Edward Jenner is considered the founder of vaccinology when in 1796 he inoculated a 13-year-old-boy with *vaccinia* virus (cowpox), and demonstrated immunity to smallpox. Although the Smallpox vaccine was undoubtedly a turning point in human history, Eastern cultures in India and China had been practicing a form of inoculation with a method that involved grinding up smallpox scabs and blowing the matter into the nostrils since as early as 200 BCE.

Successful implementation of modern day vaccination has saved countless lives over the last two centuries. In 1951, Max Theiler received the Nobel Prize for his discovery of an effective vaccine



Pakistan became one of many LMICs to contribute to large-scale vaccine trials.

against Yellow Fever. He joined a historic fraternity of other groundbreaking vaccine scientists such as Jonas Salk for Polio and Albert Calmette and Camille Guérin for Tuberculosis. From high-tech labs mostly in the industrialised world, research is being constantly translated into injectable compounds that find their way into communities across the globe through complex financing mechanisms and efficient supply chains. Traditionally, a whole microbe that has been weakened in the laboratory is introduced in the body to elicit a defensive response. These are referred to as live-attenuated vaccines with MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) as an example. Compare live attenuated to inactivated vaccines like inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) where a virus incapable of replication is injected. Acellular or recombinant protein-based vaccines use only a viral protein to be introduced in the body through a harmless vector – spike protein in the case of corona virus – to develop effective antibody response through disrupting the mechanism of viral action by denying it attachment to healthy cells. The ongoing pandemic has opened a relatively new frontier of vaccines based on messenger RNA (mRNA).

mRNA platforms are often considered superior in terms of their apparently simpler mechanism. So far used against diseases such as cancer, they simply aim to teach the body the making of antigenic protein to develop antibodies against it, while self-destroying the initial (mRNA)

For the first time, Pakistan recruited a total of 18,000 volunteers for the CanSino BIO vaccine candidate. A future where LMICs can participate and eventually lay their own groundwork for cutting edge research will close the gap in experience between them and often hegemonic Western institutions.

code along the way. mRNA vaccines had previously not been approved for general use in people. They are now being administered under EUAs in different countries, although comprehensive data based on large-scale clinical trials is still awaited. Ultimately, this new biotechnology promises benefits in not only COVID-19 related

vaccines but all past and future vaccines as a sort of “plug and play” approach. The technology is sophisticated and could offer a new way of developing vaccines, besides promoting precision medicine further. The challenge, however, lies in making this cutting-edge technology more accessible and equitable. As exciting as many new discoveries in the fight against the global pandemic may be, the ultimate goal of sustainable solutions for the greatest global good needs to be seen as the gold standard for care for all.

Unlike before, medical fraternities in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) have also contributed to large-scale vaccine trials. Biologic products from Chinese laboratories have found unprecedented interest in LMICs that have historically remained out of Western countries’ pharmaceutical sphere. For the first time, Pakistan recruited a total of 18,000 volunteers for the CanSino BIO vaccine candidate from the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology. A total of five reputed institutions participated nationwide with the National Institute of Health Islamabad as the national Principal Investigator. University of Health Sciences Lahore, the only public-sector recruiting site, and Shifa International Hospital Islamabad, both ended up recruiting over 5000 volunteers each. This represents a breath of fresh air in a gloomy past year. The opportunity could open up markets and avenues that have remained elusive so far. Another vaccine candidate, ZF-2001, was also recently approved for testing across 10 centres in Pakistan, under the framework of Good Clinical Practices. A future where LMICs can participate and eventually lay their own groundwork for cutting edge research will close the gap in experience between them and often hegemonic Western institutions.

Invisible microbes, both new and old, challenge our way of life from time to time. The unifying of professionals and communities during COVID-19 might provide a silver lining. A change in attitudes in the medical research community has led to a future based on collaboration, not competition. One can expect it to save more lives and reduce health disparities as new and more infectious agents inevitably emerge in future. The collective human spirit is now stronger than ever. Our curiosity thrusts us into innovation, built on the basic human desire to survive. ■

ACADEME

Going Online



A Stitch in Time

How an educational institution kept one step ahead of the pandemic



By Talib S. Karim

The writer is the President of the Institute of Business Management (IoBM), which is one of Pakistan's leading private sector universities.

When we took the strategic decision at the start of our Spring 2019 Semester to adopt Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) as an essential part of the Institute of Business Management's (IoBM's) campus-wide technology upgrade, we did not imagine that it would soon become so integral to our operations. Our original plan envisaged achieving three clear objectives within two years viz. uploading of courses designed for online teaching, integrating our digital library system into LMS, and more importantly, initiating faculty training by Fall 2019. The latter objective worked propitiously to our advantage, when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the country in February 2019, sending shock waves across all sectors, including the education sector. Enthused by the small advantage we had, we decided to speed up the rollout of Moodle LMS, as we clearly envisioned greater reliance on technology for education, in the months and years ahead.

With a complement of 400 permanent and visiting faculty members, split almost evenly down the middle, faculty training on online teaching techniques in addition to LMS, became our top priority. We knew that it would entail skill

development in the areas of designing of online courses, preparing materials and digital videos, and achieving optimal student-faculty engagement. It was obviously a challenging task but one that we were reasonably well equipped to handle. We therefore decided to put all our internal resources to bear, and at the same time collaborate with at least one strong external partner to achieve our goals.

Hence, apart from pulling out all the stops to get our faculty members trained on LMS by September 2020, a year ahead of schedule, we set up a video recording facility where both permanent and visiting faculty could book time for recording their lectures and presentations, and we obtained an institutional license from Coursera, so that our faculty members could also register for one or more of the thousands of short duration online certificate courses available on the platform. Coursera courses, we knew, were offered by top universities in the world.

Next, in order, to carefully monitor progress on LMS training at the departmental level, we assigned the heads of departments of every programme in our four colleges, the responsibility for assessing, monitoring, and reporting on faculty readiness. The Academics



Despite the pressures of Covid, IoBM's class of 2019-20 was one of the few able to graduate on time.



The early adoption of online learning systems allowed IoBM to adapt to the new normal.

Department was concurrently charged with overseeing the process, and developing various reports in collaboration with the IT Department.

We realised that in order to achieve our ambitious objective, we would have to gain complete buy-in and integrate our efforts at the pan-institutional level, so that progress continued unhindered. We therefore took the important step of establishing an Online Academic Council or OAC around mid-June 2020, comprising the Rector, Deans, and Heads of Departments to meet with me once a week, and monitor progress on our "Covid Action Plan" and deliberate on any change in policies or procedures that may be required, for its meticulous on-ground implementation.

As a result of these concerted efforts, we as an institution came up to speed much sooner than most other higher education institutions, as was observed during the series of Vice-Chancellors' meetings organised by the Higher Education Commission, where we shared our efforts and achievements with other leading universities.

We had taken every care to meticulously plan our journey of LMS technology assimilation, and as a result, we reached our desired degree of readiness well in time. A major consideration in that

Our original plan envisaged achieving three clear objectives within two years: uploading of courses designed for online teaching, integrating our digital library system into LMS, and initiating faculty training by Fall 2019.

regard was that we wanted to close our academic year 2019-2020 on time, so that the graduation of nearly 1400 students, expected to complete their degree requirements, was not delayed.

Meanwhile, we kept a sharp eye on Higher Education Commission (HEC) Policy/Guidelines for Universities and Degree Awarding Institutes, reflecting the decisions of the National Core Committee (NCC), the government's lead agency in the anti-COVID-19 campaign,

charged with reviewing the status of the pandemic and taking critical decisions for its containment. Finally, the decision to reopen educational institutions, including schools and universities, that had been under discussion since April 2020, came on the 15th of July, 2020, allowing the resumption of on-campus classes in phases, starting from the 15th of September of that year.

Throughout this time, the Academics Department at IoBM remained on guard, overseeing the scheduling of classes, student assessments and uploading of results, as well as faculty and student attendance, in close coordination with the heads of different programmes, and concerned departments, primarily IT and Examinations. Once on-campus classes started, Academics had to readapt their plans and schedules to accommodate nearly 40 percent of the student body, who were identified for attending classes on campus, given the need to strictly comply with guidelines issued by the HEC, while keeping the rest of the classes online.

On the LMS front, while it had become standard practice by the time Fall Semester 2020 classes commenced, heads of departments focused on monitoring the progress of classes as well as student engagement. Specific reports were prepared by Academics in collaboration with IT, for the review of the Rector, Deans and Associate Deans, so that any opportunity for further improvement in the learning process could be grasped.

Apart from the onerous task of maintaining institutional performance at its optimal level, a heavy responsibility on our shoulders was to constantly communicate with our students in order to keep them focused on their education, yet give them space when they were stressed out, and manage the concerns of parents – in short, manage the psychological impact of the uncertainty and chaos created by a pandemic that showed no signs of relenting any time soon.

Yet, it feels good to know that we were able to meet most of our targets in what was unquestionably a very challenging year, and also organise our Convocation 2019-2020 successfully in a hybrid format, to send out our Silver Jubilee Class in high spirits, to shape their careers with courage and confidence, even under a lingering pall of uncertainty. ■

A Life Cut Short

A brutal twist of fate marks the end of a rich, beautiful life

I think it was Friday, February 12 when I last heard from Maliha Khan. It was her last day in office before she bid farewell to *Narratives*. She was set to start a new job at an advertising company on Monday. That Friday Maliha came in to say goodbye to her colleagues and to make sure she had left no assignment undone. As always, that day too she was focused and responsible, meticulous in her duties, and about clearing her desk and wrapping up.

In the tough and often rough world of journalism, there is usually little room for sentimentalism or polite discourse. So, that Friday, it was a brief, matter-of-fact exchange of information between us. I wished her luck in her new assignment and said goodbye. But I did add that I hoped her separation from journalism would be a brief one. “We cannot afford to lose a fine journalist like you to the advertising world,” I told her. She politely responded that she would wait for an offer.

Of course, a new, struggling magazine could not match the salary and package offered by an advertisement firm, but being the die-hard optimist I am, I thought one day we could lure her back into journalism.

That, however, was not to happen.

Maliha took up her new assignment on February 15. The very next day she met with a deadly road accident. She was put on a ventilator, but slipped away after only a few hours. Her head injury proved fatal.

My first reaction was to question the terrible senselessness of Maliha’s death. She was so young, so talented, so full of life, and she worked so hard to fulfil her dreams.

I met Maliha during my first stint at

Bol News – some time between the end of 2016 or at the beginning of 2017. She was part of the programming team at Bol, petite, delicate, jeans-clad, but hijab-wearing. In the crowd of many bold, loud and aggressive youngsters, she could have easily gone unnoticed. But she slowly made her presence felt as a calm, responsible and thinking part of the team, to emerge not long after as the leading member of the pack.

What made her stand apart from most of her peers was her reading habit. There was always a book in her hand. And she would waste no opportunity to discuss those she could access with her seniors, ask them about new titles or old ones they recommended. Constantly focused on improving herself, Maliha was among the very few members of the team who was equally fluent in both Urdu and English.

I left Bol News in early 2018 and moved to Islamabad for a couple of years. Maliha kept the contact alive and visited my office a few times when she visited the capital. By then, she had herself moved to ARY News’ web desk.

In 2020, when *Narratives* magazine was being launched as a journalist-led venture, she joined the team – juggling many balls at the same time, from writing and editing to managing the magazine’s



website and social media site. And whatever work she did, she did to near perfection.

Though she had ventured out into the advertising domain, if she had lived, I am 101 percent sure that the lure of journalism would have drawn her back. Because Maliha Khan was a journalist at heart, and that too an ‘A’ class one. Her untimely death is not just an irrecoverable loss to her immediate family, but to the small family she left behind at *Narratives*, to all her friends and colleagues. It is so difficult to come to terms with the sad fact that Maliha – the wonderful little girl with big dreams which were all within her reach – has gone. May she rest in eternal peace. ■

- Amir Zia

BOOKSTORE

Riveting Read

Owen Bennet Jones' searing look at the Bhutto family, warts et al, reads like a thriller peppered with facts



By Maheen Usmani

The writer is a journalist and author of The Mercurial Mr Bhutto and Other Stories.

The *Bhutto Dynasty* is one of those rare books which is akin to a chocolate lava cake whose every bite makes one pause to savour the burst of chocolate on the tongue. This book demands one's undivided attention as it unveils itself, page after riveting page. Every chapter is a story in itself. This is not to say that the words do not flow or that there is a chasm between the chapters. The story of the Bhutto dynasty ebbs and flows and one is carried along with the tide.

In many ways, the story of the Bhutto family is the story of Pakistan: it is Shakespearean with its soaring highs and crushing lows; heroes and villains; successes and failures; triumphs and tragedies; murders and assassinations; feuds and alliances; arrogance and insecurities.

The degree of polarisation that bedevils Pakistan today was brought home to me when I wrote my book, *The Mercurial Mr Bhutto and Other Stories*, that featured a story on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. I was told off by an irate woman, "why did you write on Bhutto? He ruined our country!" while another smilingly said that she had preserved all of Bhutto's speeches and was his biggest fan.

This inability to see our leaders in shades of grey, instead painting them starkly as either black or white, could be the reason why Pakistani writers generally refrain from writing incisive biographies on statesmen. It is left to the foreign lens to scour our political leaders and provide the definitive portrait. Cases in point are Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan*, Zulfi Bhutto of *Pakistan* and Sheila Reddy's *Mr and Mrs Jinnah: The Marriage that Shook India*. To this list, comes the valuable addition *The Bhutto Dynasty* by Owen Bennet Jones, which is a searing look at this famous family, warts et al.

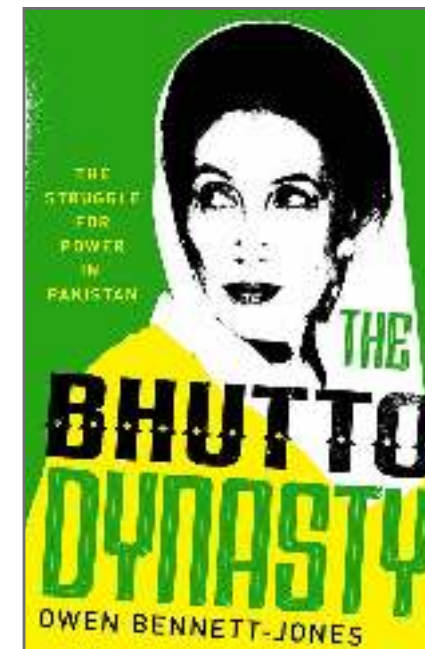
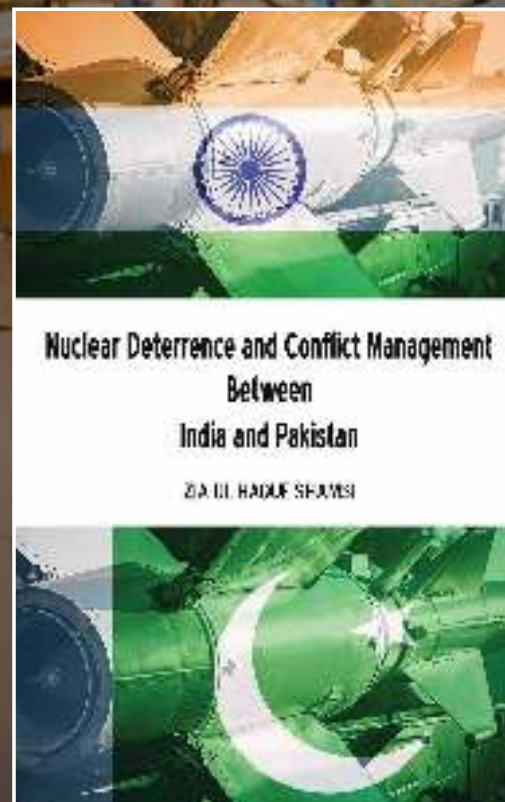
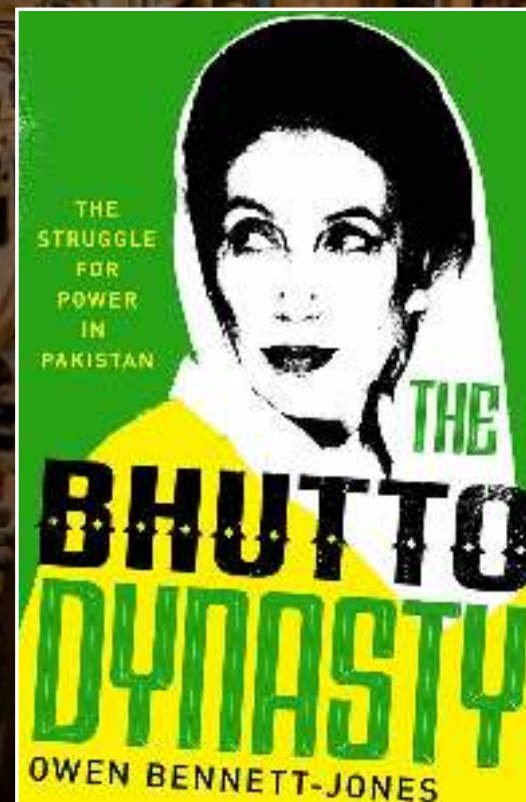
Owen Bennet Jones has reported for the BBC from over 60 countries. He is the

author of *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, and his podcast on the murder of Benazir Bhutto, *The Assassination*, won gold at the British Podcast Awards in 2018. Now Jones trains his skilled investigative eye on the Bhuttos, from the colonial era to the present. Based on his painstaking research and decades-old documents, he traces the family's origins to Hindu Rajputs.

Jones lays bare the contradictions inherent in the Bhuttos. He mentions how Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) and his daughter, Benazir, publicly clashed with the military; however, when it suited them, they closed ranks. Coupled with his research are his nuanced observations: "Zulfikar's espousal of Islamic socialism and land reform, his disdain for obscurantist clerics and his moments of anti-Americanism have led many to view him as leftist and a liberal. His reading habits suggested something else. His fascination with Napoleon is well known. But, as Oriana Fallaci pointed out after she saw his library in 70 Clifton, there were also volumes on Mussolini and Hitler, which were not only in pride of place but also sumptuously bound in silver. Their provenance is unknown, but even if they were gifts rather than purchases, Zulfikar felt no embarrassment in displaying them prominently."

Jones reveals exactly what led to Bhutto's infamous fiery speech at the United Nations when he tore up the Polish resolution, thus sealing the fate of East Pakistan. Seeing an opportunity to swing public opinion and cast himself in the role of saviour, Bhutto rehearsed the speech in advance but was nearly given away by Benazir, who was visiting him. While chatting to a friend, Benazir started talking about the drama about to unfold the next day at the UN but before she could reveal her father's machinations, the phone was snatched from her hand by a horrified Bhutto official.

Jones points out how Bhutto once he



The Bhutto Dynasty

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 Price: Rs. 4300



mentions the unsubstantiated report that Benazir was thought to have smuggled nuclear secrets in an overcoat pocket when travelling to North Korea.

In the author's final analysis, though Benazir Bhutto inspired people with great hope, her failure lay in the fact that when in power she was unable to get her agenda pushed through. In that respect, Asif Ali Zardari was cannier, having perfected the art of making deals largely by agreeing to everything anyone wanted. Hence, he was able to complete his term.

Jones busts the popular myth that Zardari was behind Benazir's assassination in December 2007. The Pakistani Taliban killed her, but Jones says that it is clear that there was a cover-up by the establishment.

He mentions that although Benazir was aware of her husband's failings, she could never say no to him. He quotes her as having told Hillary Clinton, in the context of the Monica Lewinsky affair, that "we both know from our own lives that men can behave like alley cats."

The feuding Murtaza, the partisan Nusrat, the flamboyant Shahnawaz, and the outspoken Fatima Bhutto have also been put under the microscope. The book is packed with interesting anecdotes like the time when, at a party in the United Kingdom, Benazir signed her name with the title, "Prime Minister of Pakistan," while Zardari wrote his name alongside hers as "A Nobody."

How the tables have turned!

The book does not dwell on Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and there is a strong sense of him having a long way to go before he can aspire to walk in the footsteps of his grandfather and mother. As Bennet Jones said in a conversation with Shuja Nawaz, "Bilawal could succeed in his ambitions but whether he will have quite the charisma of his mother, I don't know."

Owen Bennet Jones points out that the Bhutto name is the source of power of the party, and their reliance on the cult of martyrdom to gain votes is also a carefully calibrated strategy.

The Bhutto Dynasty is an unvarnished look at a family which has held the reins of power for many years now and the institutions it has had to jostle for space. Insightful and nuanced, Owen Bennet Jones has come up with a fast-paced book that reads like a thriller, peppered with facts. ■

Jones is careful to maintain a balance when dissecting the enigmatic Bhuttos. He admits that Benazir inherited her father's arrogance and his vindictive nature, but alongside he also says that there is no doubt that she was incredibly brave and was the only Pakistani leader to take on the Taliban.

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Jones is careful to maintain a balance when dissecting the enigmatic Bhuttos. He admits that Benazir inherited her father's arrogance and his vindictive nature, but he also says that there is no doubt that she was incredibly brave. She was the only Pakistani leader to take on the Taliban and did not tone down her statements even when she appeared to be in clear and present danger. Jones also

became Prime Minister, played a dynamic role on the world stage. His recognition of Bangladesh was a master stroke encased within the hype of the Islamic Summit in Lahore in 1974. He developed an alliance with China, a friendship that has benefited both countries, and forged ahead with the nuclear bomb. On the one hand, as Jones says, ZAB gave Pakistan the 1973 constitution, but on the other hand, he was unable to capitalise on the exposed frailties within the army in the wake of the 1971 war and lost a golden opportunity to strengthen civilian institutions.

Bhutto's brilliance was undisputed but his insecurities led him to trust the obsequious flatterers that he cultivated. Anyone speaking truth to power soon fell out of favour. He handpicked General Zia-ul-Haq (or as Jones puts it, Charles Dickens' Uriah Heep) as army chief, despite the seniority of other generals.

ZAB was a great orator; none of his family members have been able to match the way he fired up the emotions of the crowd or toyed with them. "To take just one example of how he handled himself at this time, when asked how he, a major landowner, could promise land reform if he was not prepared to give up his own land straight away, he took off his jacket and threw it to the crowd. As people fought to grab it, the jacket was torn to shreds. Then Bhutto spoke: if he gave away his land straight away, that is what would happen and no one would get any. But when there were laws and systems in place, he would happily divide up his land

A Game of Brinkmanship?

Are India and Pakistan's nukes serving as a deterrent against the two adversaries going to war?



By Brig (R) Mehboob Qadir

The writer is Director, Forum for Middle East and Africa (FAME), SASSI University.

The book *Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict Management between India and Pakistan*, written by Dr. Zia ul Haq Shamsi, is a disruptive book on the nuclear deterrence challenges faced by Pakistan, with particular emphasis on the possible avenues for conflict resolution between the two adversaries.

Dr. Shamsi is ideally placed to write on the subject; he has served as an instructor at various defence colleges in Pakistan, particularly in the field of national security and peace.

Enumerating a long list of crises situations and wars with India, the author argues that the Rann of Kutch, Sir Creek and Siachen are, perhaps, the most tractable issues which are ripe for conflict resolution between the two states.

While the initial two chapters outline the genesis of the conflict between

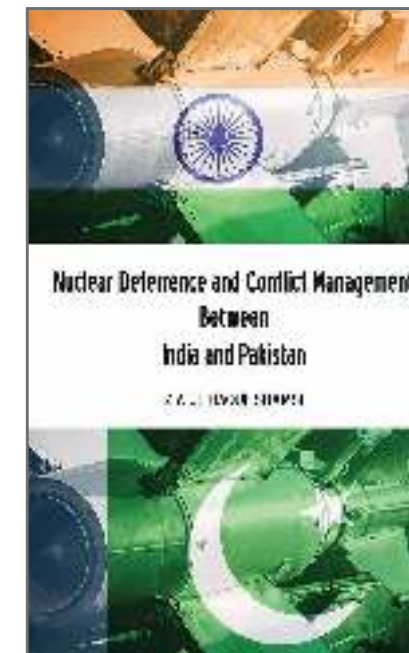
the states, the third covers the periods of stability, followed by a deterioration in relations between 1983-98. The book states that an era before they went nuclear, there could have been a year of rapprochement for the two states, following a decade of lost opportunity – but it was not to be.

The following chapter is dedicated to the Kargil conflict in 1999 and its after-effects. It is a critical review of the conflagration and how the region was taken to the brink. Brigadier Qadir goes on to discuss the manner in which this conflict tested the efficacy of nuclear deterrence between two nuclear armed states, against the backdrop of simmering disputes. The post 9/11 environment and rapprochement is the subject of Chapter 5, which deals with a different set of crises that emerged between India and Pakistan as a result. It includes the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament that led to a year-long stand-off between the two opposing armies. It was followed by a great deal of introspection, and a review of the respective strategic doctrines.

Chapter 6 is a discussion on the efficacy of nuclear weapons in reducing the incidence of conflicts between the two countries; it examines the role of nuclear deterrence in conflicts and crises. The next chapter tests the P2 (Possibility-Probability) model against conflicts like Operation Gibraltar (1965), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and finally, the Kargil Conflict (1999), with a view to build future scenarios and suggest a way forward. Taking the debate further, Chapter 8 deals with the post-Pulwama environment, as the danger of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan grows by the day, albeit as a consequence of the Indian leadership's thoughtless brinkmanship. In the concluding chapter lies the heart of the book. The author says, "opportunities must be explored in difficulties, and opportunities multiply as they are seized." The probability of future

wars between the two, based on whether there is a depletion or perceptual dilution of the nuclear deterrence, are determined against possibilities of peace. Dr. Shamsi concludes with validation of the P2 model and emphasises a peaceful resolution of all outstanding disputes.

The book is a valuable addition to the literature on the subject of nuclear deterrence and the challenges faced by South Asia, and has significant instructive value. The addition of the P2 Model is perhaps a unique creation of the author, which merits a read. ■



Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict Management Between India and Pakistan

Author: Zia ul Haque Shamsi
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