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Monthly 'Narratives'

Published by Amir Zia

D-160/7

Aamra Cottages

Clifton, Block-5

Karachi – 75600

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Printed at

The Times Press

C-18, Al-Hilal Society,

Off. University Road, Karachi

Tel (92-21) 34393 2931-3

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Protecting Pakistani Interests



Ibrahim Sajid Malick
Editor, *Narratives*

The United States has long used covert and overt influence for regime change in the world as a single dominant force. History is replete with American participation in overthrowing and establishing regimes in the Middle East, North Africa, and Latin America.

As the world's dominant superpower, Americans have many tools and techniques to accomplish their goals. Given Imran Khan's proclivity towards China and Russia, official Russian visit and silence on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the charges of American conspiracy are plausible.

While a handful were glued to the screen to watch the live-action from Islamabad, most Pakistanis went about their lives as if the change of prime minister was of no consequence. But those who value lip-service and discussion over action, publicity and advertising over reality, and fantasy over the natural world enjoyed the prime time TV show.

Why have the majority of people turned off the political noise? Alienation implies a feeling of separation from and discontent with society. Politics' feudal and tribal nature has induced a sense of powerlessness among the masses.

The opposition had a lot of freedom to gather and organise because of poor administration and economic mismanagement. As support from the military began to dwindle, Imran Khan discovered the ideal elevator pitch for the next elections by embracing a conspiracy to redeem himself.

To counter the anti-corruption slogan that helped him win the last election, he needed a new one – a new story to replace it.

However, there are significant societal and political ramifications to this. For Pakistan, the United States is a vital strategic and commercial ally. In 2021, the two nations exchanged commodities worth more than \$8.9 billion.

A debt-ridden economy like ours should be alarmed by these numbers.

Many believe that Imran Khan jeopardises a vital but precarious commercial and strategic relationship by portraying a hostile narrative to the United States.

Anti-American political groups have generally been the religious right, with a small voting base. For a good reason, this has not been a popular rallying cry for the people; it might jeopardise a critical economic and geopolitical partnership in Pakistan's best interest.

The inequitable paradigm within which Pakistan-US relations have historically worked does not preclude us from critiquing the US foreign policy. But it's a bad idea to toss away the baby with the bathwater.

Rather than promoting anti-America sentiments, Imran Khan should rally the people toward a more tolerant and inclusive Pakistan – nationally, regionally, and globally. All political parties would be well to keep in mind that progress and antagonism are mutually incompatible.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's new coalition government will have its job cut out. The new government will encounter considerable challenges from the start. A worsening economic crisis, rising political turmoil, and deterioration of relations with Western powers are just a few issues that the country is now confronting. We have no idea if the ruling coalition, consisting of numerous parties and groups with often opposing political and economic goals, will continue until the midterm elections.

Repairing the economy is the most significant challenge facing the Sharif administration. Pakistanis face double-digit inflation largely due to the country's volatile political environment, and much-needed foreign assistance for the country's balance of payments which is currently on hold. Commodity prices, particularly food and energy, have strained the external sector.

What is Sharif and Zardari's long-term plan now after Imran Khan's ouster? All the choices appear difficult.

ZEROING IN



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

PAEC's Feat

The peaceful use of nuclear powers remains a key to the socio-economic development of countries like Pakistan

The 1,100 megawatt Karachi Nuclear Power Plant Unit-3 (K-3), which started its trial-run on March 4, has hit its maximum electricity generation capacity, marking another great leap forward for the country's efforts to ensure energy security through safe, clean and environmentally friendly means.

Had the country not drifted into a political turmoil, perhaps the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) would be making grand plans for its formal inauguration in early April. But leaving politics aside, the good news for Pakistan is that K-3, located near Paradise Point, has been supplying 1,100 MWs to the national grid since March 31.

"The formal inauguration of the plant got delayed because of the political uncertainty, but it is now expected sometime in late April," PAEC Director-General Media Shahid Riaz told *Narratives Magazine*.

The K-3's power generation capacity was gradually enhanced from 50 to 60 megawatts and finally to its optimum level, all within four weeks. The PAEC officials say that this has been done ensuring strict security and safety protocols.

On April 5, the PAEC announced that now all its six nuclear power plants are operational at optimum capacity, generating and supplying 3560 MW electricity to the national grid.

Four nuclear power plants at Chashma in district Mianwali are supplying 1340 MW, while K-2 and K-3 at Karachi are feeding 2220 MW to the national grid. This means that the total share of nuclear power in the country's energy mix has jumped to 18.3 percent from roughly 9.0 percent in early March.

The K-3 nuclear power plant had started operations on February 21, and after safety tests and procedures it was connected to the grid on March 4.

K-3 is the second Nuclear Power Plant



The completion of the K-3 nuclear power plant will help relieve the burden of paying for imported fuel.

(NPP) in Pakistan with a generation capacity of 1,100 MW.

Its addition to the national grid means that low-cost electricity is being added to the country's energy mix. The other one, named K-2 was inaugurated by Prime Minister Imran Khan on May 21, 2021.

"Hydro and nuclear are the cheapest energy sources," said Shahid Riaz, PAEC's Director General (DG) Media.

Pakistan's total installed electricity generation capacity is around 40,000 MW. The reliance on imported fuel is one of the key reasons for the higher electricity tariffs in the country.

The ground-breaking of the K-3 project was performed on November 26, 2013, and the construction started after getting approval from the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority (PNRA). The fuel loading of the plant started in December 2021 after the PNRA's clearance.

The PAEC DG Media said that K-2 and K-3 are the generation 3, latest Chinese reactors with advanced safety measures. "There are double-containment concrete walls protecting the plant," he said. "Even if a plane crashes into it, these walls will sustain the impact and won't allow it to penetrate."

In this Chinese design, even if there is a station black-out meaning zero supply of electricity as happened when a tsunami caused the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 – the plant's passive cooling system would continue to function for 72 hours, providing ample time to manage things, he said.

There are 442 nuclear power plants operating in 30 countries, including Pakistan.

The China National Nuclear

Corporation (CNNC), which built K-2 and K-3 by adapting the Hualong One plant design, declared it a milestone, which "lays a solid foundation for the subsequent commercial operation of the unit."

These two units are the first exports of CNNC's Hualong One, which is also promoted on the international market as HPR1000.

"After each unit of Hualong One is completed, it is expected to generate nearly 10 billion kWh of electricity annually, which can meet the annual electricity demand of more than 4 million households in Pakistan," the CNNC said in a statement the day K-3 started its trial run. The annual power generation of K-2 and K-3 is equivalent to reducing coal use by 3.12 million tonnes annually and avoiding the emission of 8.16 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year, the CNNC said.

The Karachi nuclear site is also home to Pakistan's first nuclear power reactor, Karachi 1 a small 100 MW (90 MW net) Canadian pressurised heavy water reactor, which was shut down in 2021 after 50 years of operation.

The PAEC spokesman said that the initial life of K-1 was 30 years that got completed in 2002, but it was expanded to 20 more years by Pakistani experts and scientists, which remains a feat in itself.

"K-1 produced only 80 MW electricity but we learnt a lot through it. We trained our manpower on K-1 and got confidence to operate it on our own as the Canadians unilaterally aborted the agreement with Pakistan in 1974 and stopped all the supplies and technological help."

This was done by Canada after India conducted its first nuclear bomb test explosion – aka the Smiling Buddha – in May 1974. The Canadian sanctions, how-

ever, proved a blessing in disguise for Pakistan as it was forced to stand on its own feet.

CNNC said the construction of Karachi 2 and 3 helped boost Pakistan's economy and the related industries as the local supply of equipment increased significantly. "During the peak period of the project construction, it has directly provided more than 10,000 jobs for Pakistan,

and indirectly created more than 40,000 jobs through the industrial chain."

There are growing calls in Pakistan to build additional nuclear reactors to help meet the rising energy demands as they curb greenhouse gas emissions and counter the adverse impacts of climate change through low-carbon electricity generation. The peaceful use of nuclear power remains key to the socio-economic

development of countries like Pakistan.

China has played a fundamental role in developing Pakistan's nuclear power generation capacity under a 1986 bilateral cooperation agreement. The two countries enjoy close economic and defence ties which have stood the test of time. The K-2 and K-3 plants are just another manifestation of the rock-solid relationship between them. ■

Dynastic Democracy!

Pakistani democracy, in its essence, remains anti-people, corrupt to the core and inefficient

It can happen only in Pakistan and that too in the name of democracy. A politician accused of billions rupees worth of money laundering and holding assets beyond known sources of income gets elected as the 23rd prime minister on April 11 – the same day he was supposed to get formally indicted in a corruption case. Yes, Shehbaz Sharif's rise to the coveted slot of prime minister-ship adds another dark chapter to the country's checkered history and explains why many Pakistanis do not have faith in the parliament and the constitution as they both can be so easily manipulated and in many cases fail to prevent the rise of the corrupt to the top positions.

And to rub more salt to the wound, and add insult to the injury on the collective conscience of Pakistanis, on April 16, Hamza, who was also supposed to be indicted in a massive corruption case along with his father, Shehbaz, gets himself elected as chief minister Punjab in a controversial vote.

Both Shehbaz and Hamza got their dubious majority in the National and Punjab assemblies respectively by buying votes of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf lawmakers and engineering their allies to change loyalties. Neither the constitution's anti-defection law nor the learned higher judiciary, which in select cases, could open shops in a bizarre and unprecedented manner on a Sunday and that too at midnight, could stop the buy-



Pakistan's institutions have chosen to ignore Shehbaz Sharif and his son Hamza's corruption cases, allowing them to be elected PM and CM Punjab, respectively.

ing and selling of lawmakers or ensure any action against them.

What does it mean? The system is too weak, too helpless to ensure the rule of law and prevent the super-rich corrupt politicians from having their way.

The second disturbing fact that has been highlighted because of the rise of the father-son duo is the suffocating grip of dynastic politics. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – the second largest party – has no other faces to present for key positions other than those belonging to the Sharif clan.

If in the past, the two Sharif brothers held the coveted positions of PM and CM Punjab and appointed their other close relatives or lackeys on important slots, this time it is the father and the son. The veterans within the ranks of the PML-N are only there to play second-fiddle to the house of Sharifs.

The same is the problem with the Pakistan People's Party which is run by the Zardari clan, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami by Maulana Fazl-ur Rehman & family, and the most other smaller politi-

cal, religious and sub-nationalist parties.

At the constituency level, a recent study has revealed that almost 60 per cent of the national and provincial assemblies' seats are dynastic.

This acceptance of corruption and the rule of dynasties explains the dilemma of Pakistani democracy, which in its essence remains anti-people, corrupt to the core and inefficient.

Readers can log-on to <https://narratives.com.pk/featured/not-yet-off-the-hook/> to read in detail how Shehbaz and his family indulged in billions of rupees worth of money laundering through the bank accounts operated in the names of their lower staff members, and even a *paparwala*, and some hawker.

No wonder, the first thing Shehbaz did after coming to power was to get those officers who investigated corruption cases against him and his family transferred. Soon the entire Sharif clan is expected to get a clean chit through manipulation of the investigation, prosecution and the judiciary system. This is what we call democracy Pakistani style. ■

IBA's mega scandal hushed-up

How a handful of students and teachers are pushing an LGBTQ+ agenda at IBA with the support of the management

And yes, there has been a series of LGBTQ+ raves at the “prestigious” Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, under the stewardship of Executive Director Dr. Syed Akbar Zaidi, but the politically-connected and influential management hushed-up this first of its kind mega-scandal by taking a symbolic action against just two students.

On March 30, the IBA's Students Conduct Committee announced that the institute suspended one student for an academic year, while another was barred from entering the campus for the rest of the current academic year following the conclusion of an inquiry into the matter of the viral video of the LGBTQ+ rave organised at its premises. However, the IBA's official sources said that the faculty members, who encourage and patronise such activities, and many students who regularly participate in them, have been let off the hook in a controversial inquiry only

An email written to the IBA management by more than 70 students demanded an “immediate public announcement” by IBA, clearly stating that it “distances itself from ideas of LGBTQ+/homosexuality and vulgar parties.”



Extracts of the student and faculty complaints to the IBA management.



done to ward-off the public pressure.

A video of one of these raves – held at the courtyard of the IBA on March 24 – went viral on the social media, triggering widespread condemnations and even protest by some student, parents and teachers organisations. The IBA sources said that it was the fourth LGBTQ+ rave that was organised with the blessings of the management.

“Many other students, who participated in the event, could have been easily identified through the video, but the IBA management took action against just two of them,” said a senior teacher at the IBA, requesting anonymity. “Even these two just got a slap on the wrist and will eventually get back into the institute,” he said.

He alleged that since Dr. S Akbar Zaidi took charge of IBA in January 2020, LGBTQ+ activists, including a couple of teachers who support them, are openly preaching their agenda, organising gatherings of gays and lesbians and trying that their conduct should be taken as a new normal at the campus.

“It is not possible to hold any event at the IBA campus without management’s permission. Even on March 24, when the campus security officials tried to intervene, students told them that the event had been organised with the management’s permission. That’s the reason no action was taken against the campus security in-charge, Khalid Javed, a retired captain, who would have revealed it all as he had the entire footage of the rave.”

Students told the security that they were allowed to hold this party from the

One of the first few things Dr. Akbar Zaidi did after assuming charge was removing the dress-code board from the campus.

IBA Registrar Dr. Asad Ilyas and ED Akbar Zaidi, he said.

Another faculty member of the IBA said that Dr. Asad Ilyas is the right hand man of Akbar Zaidi, who can’t run the show without him as he lacks administrative experience. “Dr. Asad is currently the most controversial figure at IBA. He was suspended for two weeks from his position of registrar for engineering the expulsion of one student under false charges,” she said. “That student, Mohammad Gibrail, had to be readmitted under intense public pressure and also because charges against him were cooked up.”

Gibrail had raised his voice against the harassment of a female student. When the IBA management paid no heed to the victim’s complaint, Gibrail took the matter to social media.

“Akbar Zaidi has no prior experience of running administration and that is the reason he banks on Dr. Asad,” she said.

Background interviews with a number of IBA students and faculty members revealed that since Dr. Akbar Zaidi had

taken charge, lesbian and gay activists have come in the open and their activities are being encouraged by a couple of faculty members, who have similar sexual orientation.

A female student said that in the pre-COVID-19 days, at least two parties were organised by the LGBTQ+ students, followed by another two after the pandemic eased. “Even in class discussions, some teachers try to defend and portray such activities as acceptable,” she said.

An email written to the IBA management by more than 70 students demanded an “immediate public announcement” by IBA, clearly stating that it “distances itself from ideas of LGBTQ+/homosexuality and vulgar parties.”

And it is not the growing LGBTQ+ activities under the patronage of the IBA management which are raising concerns among students and the faculty members in general, but also the overall change in the campus atmosphere which is raising alarm bells, including the open public display of affection among students and the permission to wear scant and vulgar clothes.

Another female faculty member said that especially in the evenings, she does not try to look at students, who are often found in “intimate and compromising positions.”

“I am not a conservative person...but whatever is being allowed at IBA in the name of liberalism, makes my head bow down with shame,” she said.

One of the first few things Dr. Akbar Zaidi did after assuming charge was removing the dress-code board from the campus. As a result, boys want to attend classes wearing shorts and girls in scant and revealing clothes, she added.

The abolishing of dress code and acceptable behaviour conditions is being hailed only by a small number of students, but the majority remains unhappy and say that it is earning a bad name for their institute.

The email written by students to the executive director also highlights how IBA has changed.

“The most obvious of these changes are: the sheer amount of leniency afforded to students on what they wear, and a similar tolerance by IBA of continuous acts of PDA (Public Display of Affection), and the numerous activities of the LGBTQ+ Group on campus posing with

their flags, while wearing objectionable clothing...and tagging their pictures with very problematic statements like 'Gays are taking over IBA' or 'bringing the gay agenda to IBA' – along with eventually making an Instagram page," students email said.

The email also quoted some statements of Ms. Rahma Mian, one of the faculty members, who was questioned by students about the LGBTQ+ activities at the campus. She was quoted as saying that "gender is a social construct," "we are beyond biological essentialism," "we cannot stop anyone from expressing their feelings" and "gender is a construction of the 18th and the 19th century. You have to decolonise yourself."

"We students came to IBA because of its reputation as a university which highly values positive cultural norms of our society, along with providing quality education; but these recent activities have not only tarnished this image, but has also led to a severe effect on our academic activities, and has concerned our parents too."

The irony is that despite being a public sector university, which in the past was known for its discipline, high values and conduct of its students and faculty, is now being pushed into a direction by the cur-



Akbar Zaidi's tolerance of the LGBTQ movement and other inappropriate activities at IBA has tarnished the reputation of the institute among students and parents.

rent management which directly clashes with the society's basic norms.

A student alliance comprising the Islami Jamiat Talaba, the Imamia Students Organization and the Peoples Student Federation staged protest against the LGBTQ+ activities at the IBA campus and have alleged that the management was

deliberately promoting "homosexual culture" at the campus.

The Karachi University Teachers' Association, while condemning the promotion of gay and lesbian culture at IBA, said that Pakistan is an Islamic Republic where such activities could spark a severe backlash. ■

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The newsmaker



By Amir Zia

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

Toughest New Innings

Every time you think it's game over, Imran Khan pitches a match-transforming inswinging yorker

The template for change currently underway, is one never before witnessed in Pakistan's chequered political history. Never before has a ruling party lost its allies and lawmakers in droves to the opposition camp, as did the Tehreek e Insaf in the run-up to the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan. Never before have the apex courts opened for business on a Sunday, or at midnight, to decide a case against a sitting government, as happened in April 2022.

The chain of many firsts doesn't end there. Never before in Pakistan's history have a father-son duo managed to grab, in one go, the country's two most coveted public offices – those of Prime Minister and Chief Minister of the country's biggest province, the Punjab – giving the suffocating grip of dynastic politics in this land of

the pure a new twist and meaning. This is also the first time that two individuals accused of massive corruption and out on bail, have managed to acquire power, as all the institutions – from the judiciary to the anti-graft investigation agencies, and the mighty military establishment – looked the other way.

In the new federal cabinet, the number of ministers currently on bail in corruption cases surpasses those with clean records. Meanwhile, the quorum of the National Assembly remains incomplete, with more than 120 PTI lawmakers having tendered their resignations in protest against what they maintained was the dubious manner in which the change of government had been brought about. And yes, these two are also among the many firsts recorded in this process of change, which has left Pakistan deeply polarised and teetering on

uncertain ground.

A new government has been put in place, but its legitimacy was being questioned even before birth, thanks to widespread allegations by the PTI and its devotees, of the buying and selling of lawmakers and allies, which they contended engineered regime change, and the claims by former PM Imran Khan that the change had been orchestrated at the behest of the United States.

Such perceptions have increasingly gained currency, and resulted in the rapidly declining support for Imran Khan preceding his ouster, soaring overnight to an unprecedented high across Pakistan, with passionate crowds in tens of thousands attending PTI rallies and spontaneous protests. This *jazba e junoon* (spirited passion) is in stark contrast to the grimness of the mood prevailing in the country's power centres.

Pakistan's most revered institutions, the Pakistan Army and its judiciary are under intense criticism, the first from its own popular support base. This has never happened in the past. But today many Pakistanis think that the institutions' traditional neutrality has tilted – and that too in favour of corrupt politicians. (See the related story on page 18 please)

This is an unprecedented crisis, which has put the credibility of Pakistan's entire system at stake, and has the potential to snowball into full-blown confrontation among the key power players.

The new political order lacks credibility because the majority of its front-line leaders are seen as the living symbols of all that is wrong with Pakistan – corruption, nepotism, misrule, poor governance and oppressive, undemocratic dynastic politics. The new coalition government, comprising once rival political forces, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) and smaller sub-nationalist and ethnic parties, has not been able to instil confidence in the people about its ability to march the country to a better future, let alone pull it out of the political mess it has been subjected to by the powers-that-be.

This is for good reason. Even at the inception of its journey, it is glaringly evident that the members of the coalition now at the helm of power, are not on the same page. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif



The new political order lacks credibility because the majority of its front-line leaders are seen as the living symbols of all that is wrong with Pakistan – corruption, nepotism, misrule, poor governance and oppressive, undemocratic dynastic politics.

wants to stay in power, at least till the current assemblies complete their term. The PPP, which has the Sindh government in its pocket, would also like to do the same. But from within the ranks of the PML-N and its other allies, heard emanating are murmurs demanding early elections in the country, ironically the same demand made by the opposition PTI.

However, the PML-N leadership has announced that this government would complete its terms. Shehbaz Sharif would, of course, like to do away with the corruption cases against him and his family, defang the National Accountability Bureau and reverse the electoral reforms introduced by the previous government.

However, all this appears easier said than done, as Imran Khan is mounting public pressure through massive rallies across Pakistan. The PTI *jalsas* in Peshawar, Karachi and Lahore drew huge, passionate crowds. And in the coming weeks, Imran Khan is likely to build even more pressure through agitation and protest to press for his demand of early elections.

In the process, Imran Khan is reviving his political fortune. The hitherto growing criticism of his poor economic management, double digit inflation, and appointment of questionable team members to important positions, has all been blown away because of the manner in which he was removed from power.

Now people see him as the only leader standing up to the status quo, corrupt politicians, vested interests and even the United States and its dictates. It is also a fact that currently Imran Khan is the only national level leader who is not seen from the prism of any province or ethnic group. His popularity and following is nation-wide.

The new coalition meanwhile, is mired in a proverbial Catch 22 quagmire. Early elections mean facing a politically rejuvenated Imran Khan, riding high on a tsunami of popularity, the magnitude of which, as Khan himself declared, he had not witnessed before in his 26-year-long political career. On the other hand, delayed elections for the sitting government, mean leading the country at a time of a serious economic crunch, forcing it to take all those hard decisions for which Imran Khan was being criticised – from jacking up energy prices to other belt-tightening measures. The International Monetary



Imran Khan's ouster has unexpectedly rejuvenated his popular support, putting the new regime on the back foot.

Fund (IMF), the Western powers and their Middle Eastern allies may throw the new government an economic lifeline, but Imran Khan's anti-west narrative will keep Shehbaz Sharif & Company on their toes.

Whatever flaws his critics highlight vis a vis Imran Khan's politics and personality, it now seems they will likely be soon relegated to the dustbin of fleeting scandals. The Toshakhana affair, relating to official gifts made to the country under the Khan government and their purchase by the First Lady at throwaway prices, for example, is not likely to erode Khan's fan-base. He continues to be seen as the only Mr. Clean of Pakistani politics. Alongside, he has now firmly established himself as the face of defiance and change. Resultantly, he has become the biggest headache for his political opponents and all those who colluded with them to orchestrate his ouster.

This, however, does not mean that the road ahead for Imran Khan is smooth. All the cards are stacked against him. The traditional political parties – aka the political establishment – stand united, at least in bolstering the anti-Imran Khan front. The traditional media overwhelmingly remains anti-Khan because his government squeezed funding for media houses and journalists, in contrast with the generosity of past governments, par-

The PTI jalsas in Peshawar, Karachi and Lahore drew huge, passionate crowds. And in the coming weeks, Imran Khan is likely to build even more pressure through agitation and protest to press for his demand of early elections.

ticularly that of the PML-N. The military establishment with its avowed stance of neutrality appears by its recent actions, to have decisively tilted in favour of the traditional parties – at least for now. The judiciary and the Election Commission of Pakistan have revealed their anti-PTI colours. Above all, Imran Khan's rhetoric has pitted him firmly against the US-led western bloc.

Will Imran Khan be able to write history by overcoming all these odds? It will be a Herculean task, which appears near

impossible. But Imran Khan's fans have firm faith and believe that their hero, their captain, can perform this miracle. Many Pakistanis who remained opposed to the traditional political parties are also putting their weight behind Imran Khan. And former Prime Minister Khan also enjoys considerable popularity among the retired and serving personnel of the Pakistan Armed Forces.

In the final analysis, however, it is the system that decides. And for now Imran Khan remains at odds with the system – at both the domestic and the international level. Right now, he is their target. He is unacceptable because he remains bent upon upsetting the US-devised appletart. He wants to write new rules of the game.

Amid the prevailing uncertainty, the one issue that has clearly emerged is that Khan and his followers are now in a defining struggle, one which will decide the future of Pakistan. It can lead the country towards great chaos, crush all hopes for change, or actually lay the foundation for Imran Khan's 'New Pakistan.' Early, free, fair and transparent elections will be the judge of that.

For now, Pakistan stands on uncertain ground. It is a country riven by more apprehensions and fears about the future, than hope and optimism. Unarguably, the captain's new innings are the toughest he has ever played. ■



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The Khaki Conundrum

The recent political upheaval makes the country's most revered institution, the Pakistan Army, controversial

By Amir Zia

The Pakistan Armed Forces are the country's most respected and trusted institution. Period. From one end of the country to another, they enjoy the overwhelming love and support of most Pakistanis, who see them as the ultimate guardians against both external and internal threats.

In the past, scores of foreign-sponsored campaigns were launched to undermine the forces, especially the Pakistan Army. Such campaigns tried to exploit the country's internal friction, but they failed to create any significant gulf between the barracks and the people. However, whether by design or default, some individuals in the tiny segment of Pakistan's westernised liberals, members of small sub-nationalist groups and shadowy religious extremists, abetted in these efforts.

Not long ago, the Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N), particularly former premier Nawaz Sharif, and his daughter Maryam, also attempted to stoke resentment against the military leadership and the institution, but they failed to make an impact at the mass level.

Negative emotions were, however, raised by the passage of the controversial no-confidence motion against Imran Khan's government. This resulted in an intense wave of criticism against the military leadership and the country's other institutions, including the judiciary. In the days that followed Khan's ouster, this anger against the supposed pillars of this state was glaringly visible on social media sites and in spontaneous rallies staged across Pakistan.

This unprecedented outburst occurred despite the fact that neither Imran Khan, nor the first tier leadership of the former ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had directly

or indirectly criticised the military leadership. In their official and off-the-record media interactions – both preceding and after their ouster from power – Imran Khan and his aides refrained from criticising the army, in spite of probing questions. In fact the PTI's line in this respect has remained consistent: any attempt to undermine the armed forces will only weaken Pakistan.

Following the barrage of anti-army sentiment that started trending on social media, the authorities arrested some PTI activists, but they were released within hours as investigators failed to establish their links with any organised campaign. This indicates that the outburst was organic, not an orchestrated campaign, and it started to dissipate within a couple of days – thanks to the responsible role played by many influencers, leaders of public opinion and PTI officials.

However, how seriously the forces took notice of the anti-military diatribe was visible in the April 14 press conference of DG ISPR, Major-General Babar Iftikhar. He expressed deep concern about the “malicious propaganda” against the army, adding that while “external linkages and fake technology intensify [the propaganda campaign's] impact,” they would not succeed.

An ISPR statement issued on April 17 quoted Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa as saying that misinformation and propaganda threaten the integrity of the state, requiring a timely and unified response to counter speculation and rumours. During his visit to the Lahore Garrison he stated that the army draws strength from the people and “any effort to create a wedge between [the] army and population won't be tolerated...hostile forces have been trying this for a long time, but they won't succeed, Insha Allah.”

The military certainly did right by highlighting the disinformation campaign against it, rather than brush it under the carpet.

Foreign forces do undeniably cash in on our internal rifts, but it is also time to take stock of this first of its kind of home-grown criticism, which has not emanated from small, traditional anti-army elements, but from those who have been the army's ardent supporters. They include not just people belonging to the Imran Khan fan-club, but also retired armed



DG ISPR Major-General Babar Iftikhar holds a presser on April 14, taking notice of the anti-Army propaganda spreading on social media in the wake of Imran Khan's ouster.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), particularly former premier Nawaz Sharif, and his daughter Maryam, also attempted to stoke resentment against the military leadership and the institution, but they failed to make an impact at the mass level.

forces' officials, opponents of dynastic politics and a vast number of apolitical Pakistanis, who want to see the rule of law in their country and accountability of the corrupt.

In a nutshell, Imran Khan's ouster was taken negatively by the very people who comprise the popular support base of the Armed Forces. Therefore, it is necessary to seriously analyse the trend, which emerged following the fall of Imran Khan and the rise of the corruption-tainted political order that replaced him.

The Pakistan Army's massive sup-

port stems from the core values and the symbolism this institution represents. On the external front, the army is seen as the guardian of Pakistan's frontiers against its arch-enemy, India, and as the champion of Jammu & Kashmir's fight for freedom. This perception and belief has been built over decades and serves as the key rallying point for most Pakistanis. The nuclear programme, which Pakistan has sustained through successive governments, and expanded despite all the pressure from western powers, especially the United States, is also tied to the external security paradigm.

On the domestic front, the army – rightly or wrongly – is seen as a bulwark against corrupt politicians and a guarantor that no individual, organisation, or institution will be allowed to hurt our core national interests. The army is, in fact, seen as the last fallback by an overwhelming number of Pakistanis whenever they feel they have been failed by their civilian leaders and institutions.

It is also a fact that unlike the small segment of the liberal elite, the traditional political parties and their allied media – who all constantly pay lip-service to democracy – the majority of Pakistanis are only concerned about the stability, unity and well-being of the country. Many equate the traditional interpretation of democracy with corruption, misrule, poor governance and nepotism and vested interests. That's why every time there has been a military takeover, it has been welcomed by the people, including the last one staged by General Pervez



The Nawaz-Maryam duo spearheaded a smear campaign against the Pakistan Army.

Musharraf in October 1999.

These external and internal roles of the army define the bedrock of its popular support. Any weak signalling and different packaging of messages on any of these fronts by the forces is bound to trigger uncertainty, unease, concern, chaos and criticism in the Armed Forces' mass support base.

For example, the apparently politically-correct posturing of the institution – it's declared "neutrality" and being "apolitical" – has been interpreted by many Pakistanis as a sign of a drawback, even of virtual abdication from its position of being defender of the nation. Many view the fall of the Imran Khan's government amid this buzz of "neutrality" as a switching of sides by the army, or worse, abject surrender to the much-trying, tested and

Imran Khan's position of no talks with India until New Delhi revokes its unilateral change of status in Kashmir, is the minimum Pakistan can do. Any talks now, would only hurt the already compromised Kashmir cause.



Musharraf's bloodless military coup was largely welcomed by the people.

failed corrupt political dynasties in this country.

The public at large remains justified in expressing dismay, frustration and anger, as not long ago "the one-page" mantra was vogue, with the usual critics of Imran Khan and the army calling it a hybrid regime – a taunt which gave comfort to many Pakistanis, who want the civilian and military leaders to work in tandem to achieve common national goals and objectives.

By adopting the posture of neutrality – demanded by the opposition politicians and their allied media – the army has itself shattered the narrative and perception which it had built over the years. Suddenly all that was earlier considered kosher seems to have become unfit, and that which was not, has been declared viable.

The common man, who sees politics and statecraft in broad strokes rather than going into intricacies, appears unmoved by the criticism hurled at Imran Khan, including the charge that he appointed weak team members to key positions, such as the coveted slots of chief minister Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For the majority of Pakistanis, an independent foreign policy, the premise that no talks will be held with India until New Delhi revokes its Aug. 5, 2019 measures in Indian Occupied Kashmir, and the drive against corruption, are the causes closest to their hearts. And they believed the Pakistan Army shared this sentiment.

The result of the institution's stated neutrality went in favour of those whom the military's popular support base thought were not just corrupt, but had worked against the national interest, including betraying the Kashmir cause in a bid to appease India.

For them, it was hard to digest that a man accused of billions of rupees in money laundering had been elected as the Prime Minister, and his son – also an accused – was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Punjab through highly controversial votes in the national and provincial assemblies. This engendered a further loss of faith in the democratic process, Parliament and the Constitution among the people, and as expected, raised questions about the role or lack of role of the army leadership in this political crisis. Simply put, the outburst was not just because of love for Imran Khan, but



Imran Khan's refusal to engage the Modi regime until it reverses its annexation of Kashmir is the minimum Pakistan can do for its Kashmiri brethren.

the disdain for corrupt politicians, who had, once again, grabbed power.

Apart from these current developments on the domestic front, in the recent past the army's top leadership has emitted some signals regarding relations with India that have raised many eyebrows about the packaging of the message of peace, which they believe seems to appear as desperation from the Pakistani side.

While addressing a security conference in March 2021, the COAS called for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute and said that it was time for Pakistan and India to "bury the past and move forward." The statement came when the Indians were resorting to the worst human rights abuses in Indian Occupied Kashmir after unilaterally scrapping the nominal autonomous status of the disputed region. The fact that there are no takers for Pakistan's peace overtures in New Delhi, that these have remained largely unilateral over the years, has been totally ignored.

The seeming wish by those at the helm of the forces to bury the past also betrays a lack of understanding of the historical process, in which a mere desire for peace never yields results. Good or bad, peace comes only when one side decisively wins or a bad stalemate forces the players to put the strategy of give and take on the table. Currently, India's Hindu nationalist government thinks that it has resolved the Kashmir dispute unilaterally in New Delhi's favour. Now it believes, it just has to handle the fallout of

Imran Khan's ouster was taken negatively by the very people who comprise the popular support base of the Armed Forces.

its decision on the ground, before forcing Pakistan to accept the new reality of the merger of Indian Occupied Kashmir with India's union territory.

Imran Khan's position of no talks with India until New Delhi revokes its unilateral change of status in Kashmir, is the minimum Pakistan can do under these circumstances. Any talks now, would only hurt the already compromised Kashmir cause.

Taking the stance that "regions go forward," and therefore, Pakistan should strike a deal with India is a flawed one. Countries need to go forward first, and then they may or may not take the region along. There are many examples where, despite hostile neighbourhoods, countries have progressed. The dominant country in a region exercises might through its military, economic and soft powers. And to achieve this goal, any country has to first establish – by hook or by crook – political stability within its boundaries. If regional connectivity

means opening Pakistani roads to Indian trucks, and the country being reduced to the level of collecting toll tax, it is not a good idea – far from it.

On both the external and internal fronts, there has been weak messaging. And this has happened despite Armed Forces giving a befitting reply to New Delhi in February 2019 by downing two of their aircraft and hitting close to Indian military installations, in the process sending them a significant sign of warning. Pakistan also emerged as the only country that has countered the threat of terrorism on its own in the post 9/11 world.

In a nutshell, perception as well as internal and external messaging counts. Therefore, the army needs to shun fashionable and politically correct causes and continue to carry the cross of national security at any and every cost. In this day and age of hybrid war, the battle starts by building perceptions.

French statesman Georges Benjamin Clemenceau may have said that "war is too important to be left to the generals," but in developing countries like ours, politics is also too important to be left to politicians alone.

Pakistan can hardly afford neutrality from its most organised, modern and disciplined institution. If Pakistan has to be fixed on a war footing, then the army must work with the right and most honest partners to transform the country. Any confusion, wavering, niceties and political correctness will only damage Pakistan. ■

MUSINGS

Imran's Cultural Revolution



The Fight Goes On

For passionate followers, Imran has not come to save us from petty issues such as the rising prices of potatoes and tomatoes, he has come to 'free us from slavery'



By Ali Mahmood

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

Karachi is dazed by Imran Khan's *jalsa*. It was not just big, it was massive, passionate, and spontaneous. Those who thought that Imran Khan is finished, will have to think again. His young supporters adore him as the hope for Pakistan. His audience is better educated, more middle class, with lots of fashionable young ladies. They believe his storyline of a US conspiracy, 'the Letter,' and his attack on corruption, labelling his opponents thieves. He is now a powerful orator and his team has developed a capability in both social media and organising public meetings that has surpassed Bhutto. He has polished his image of being an anti-American, anti-West, patriotic and Islamist figure. His strategy for his return is to explain his ouster as an attack by corrupt parliamentarians, who have been purchased by America. His one demand is for early elections before the impact of the Letter fades and before the inevitable attack on both him and his associates becomes dangerous.

The PDM, successful in removing Imran from the government after a dra-



Imran Khan's anti-American and populist rhetoric runs contrary to reality.

matic no-confidence battle in which both the Supreme Court and the establishment played a crucial part, hardly had time to celebrate before a new battle started on the street.

Imran Khan was down but not out.

He was determined to fight on using

Imran's posters shouted 'Absolutely Not.' This posturing drove his fans wild despite the fact that the US had never requested bases.

the same tactics – the conspiracy, 'the Letter,' the corruption of the "thieves." He was unperturbed by both the Supreme Court and the army stating firmly that there was no conspiracy, no damning letter. He disregarded Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index which clearly stated that the corruption under Imran exceeded the corruption of the Nawaz government that had preceded him. His propaganda went haywire under his spin doctors, Fawad Chaudhry and Sheikh Rashid, whose wild stories matched those of Hitler's Goebbels. False videos became the norm and General Mirza Aslam Baig had to come out with a denial that he had been impersonated and was shamed and angered by the statements that were made in his name in a false video.

Shehbaz Sharif was sworn in and

turned his attention on how to salvage the collapsed economy. His track record in the Punjab as Chief Minister had won him credibility, both in Pakistan and internationally. If anyone could tackle the economy, it was Shehbaz, but suddenly the economy was no longer centre stage, agitation and confrontation had removed inflation from the headlines. On this battlefield, a leader needed charisma and cult following, in which Imran excelled. Shehbaz's capability was of little use here. Shehbaz lived in a world of cold reality in which he struggled tirelessly as a workhorse to overcome problems and to deliver results. Imran lived in a world of fantasy and dreams where he soared like an eagle. Shehbaz, now prime minister, had power and wanted to solve Pakistan's problems. Imran wanted power at any cost and knew only too well that his conspiracy theories and 'the Letter,' alienating America and the West, and his lowering fuel and electricity prices in defiance of commitments made to the IMF would not help Pakistan but could win him back government. But for this to work, Imran needed a fast election. It was now or never.

Imran's posters shouted "Absolutely Not." This posturing drove his fans wild despite the fact that the US had never requested bases, the army high command had firmly denied that any such request had ever been made, and it just was not true. Imran claimed that Pakistan's nuclear assets were at risk due to treacherous leaders under foreign influence. Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa contradicted this, saying the nuclear assets were perfectly safe, irrespective of whichever party controlled the government. Gen. Bajwa declared that the army was neutral regarding the political struggle, Imran replied that only animals are neutral. The DG ISPR announced that Gen. Bajwa would retire in November as planned. If the elections took place after November, Shehbaz would decide on who would be the new chief, giving one more reason for Imran to fight for an early election.

For three years, Imran had smeared the reputation of his political opponents, calling them thieves and sell-outs and persecuting them mercilessly through NAB. Now it was his turn to answer accusations of profiteering by selling 58 state gifts worth Rupees 140 million, watches, jewellery, a vehicle, and a gold-plated

Kalashnikov. His sister-in-law Fara, his wife Bushra, and former chief minister Punjab, Buzdar, were linked to scandals. But the PDM needed time to convince the public that Imran was not the saint they thought him to be. The foreign funding case which had seen over 70 adjournments now started to move forward. This was a sword of Damocles hanging over Imran's head that could disqualify him from participating in elections. Imran was vulnerable, but the wheels of justice take time, and time needs a delayed election.

In the corridors of power, Imran is seen, for now, as history, but in the streets

In the corridors of power, Imran is seen, for now, as history, but in the streets and the hearts of his followers he is embraced as the future.

and the hearts of his followers he is embraced as the future. Imran often sees his politics in Chinese terms. He compares his struggle with Mao, he calls his processions Long Marches after Mao's Long March. He sees his current movement as Pakistan's Cultural Revolution, the revolution in China that destroyed the established leaders when the tsunami of public passion smashed the elite. Many years after the Cultural Revolution there was another mass movement in China against the establishment, which reached its crescendo in Tiananmen Square.

In Tiananmen Square the strength of the street met the strength of the state. Hundreds of thousands of protesters took over the square, attacking corruption, nepotism, and inflation. Protesters held the state to ransom in 400 cities and towns but they had underestimated Deng's resolve. Mao had once told a visiting dignitary, "don't underestimate that little man, single handed he defeated Chiang Kai Shek's million man army." When Deng called out the troops, they were not willing to fire on the protesters.

He changed the commanders and the Tiananmen incident took place, restoring stability and thereby allowing Deng to promote his socialism with capitalist characteristics. Is Imran's movement a Cultural Revolution or will it lead to Pakistan's Tiananmen Square? It is ominous that Imran compares his movement to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, perhaps forgetting the unfortunate impact it had on the Chinese economy, whereas the much maligned Tiananmen incident laid the foundation of an economic surge such as never been seen before anywhere in the world, ending poverty in China and creating an economy that seems set to become the largest in the world.

In the battle that has just begun, Imran has his full team, disciplined and ready for the battle, Shehbaz is struggling alone. He is a great administrator and negotiator for the economy, but he lacks the charisma of his niece, Maryam Nawaz, to take on a mass struggle against Imran. He also needs the return of his brother Nawaz, who has the political will and skill to take on the battle with Imran who is determined to take down the PDM government, whatever it takes. If it costs Pakistan its relationship with America and Europe, he is ready to pay the price, even if Pakistan's funding dries up and export markets contract. Imran and his passionate followers have declared that national honour is more important than the economy. Imran has not come to save us from petty issues such as the rising prices of potatoes and tomatoes, he has come to 'free us from slavery,' to save us from American military bases, and to lead us back to the true Islam. He will not be restrained by constitutional law or economic theory. He does not believe that beggars can't be choosers, but in our international relations taking the path of "honour rather than expediency." In his three years as prime minister, he has alienated America whose President Biden refused him a phone call, alienated Europe by his arriving in Moscow the day the Ukraine War broke out, and irritated China by defaulting on payment of Rs. 250 billion to the Chinese power plants.

In the next election, whether it takes place sooner or later, Pakistan will have to choose between honour as represented by Imran or the "price of potatoes," the reality of daily life that will be the overriding concern of Shehbaz. ■



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BRASS TACKS



By Raoof Hasan

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

An Endless Stream of Twinkling Stars

Some say that the die is cast. The treachery is sealed. Some say that a dream has been sculled. But dreams never die. Each one will hold the light for the next. The path to salvation will be lit with an endless stream of twinkling stars which shall never fade away. Having seen the face of a proud, self-respecting and dignified Pakistan, it is the people of the country who shall decide which way to take it further

*The month of April has dawned laced with
indelible memories of T. S. Eliot:*

*April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain*

*Eliot does not stop there. "The Burial of the
Dead" has more to reveal:*

*What are the roots that clutch, what branches
grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket
no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from
either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you,
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you,
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.*



*Parliament stands undermined because of the way Imran Khan's ouster
was orchestrated through horse-trading.*

These last few weeks have been difficult. They have bred immense pain, at times excruciatingly unbearable. Quite often, one felt it growing within the pit of the stomach to a point of bursting, and I would instinctively put my hand there to caress it. This pain is not related to any physical condition or a personal loss but, in certain respects, it is much worse than the worst of losses. It concerns my country.

Pakistan is bleeding profusely. In spite of some genuine attempts, it does not appear to be healing. The opposite may be truer: it is getting worse by the day. The polarisation that has been generated by mafias to save their loot and plunder and their political futures constitutes the core cause of this continuing deterioration. Everyone knows the reasons of the ailment, most of them know the prognosis also, but few are willing to engage in a corrective process that would rid the society of its grave present-day belittlements.

There is so much that I can say. There is so much that I want to say. But, then, there is so much that I can neither say, nor I would like to. It all remains internalised which intensifies the pain as there is no outlet, hence no relief. It concerns my

country. It concerns its leaders. But, most importantly, it concerns its myriad people from a host of backgrounds. While a tiny minority of them hail from the beneficiary elite, excessively stuffed on their indulgence in employing illicit means to build their financial empires, the predominant majority of the underlings suffers on account of their masters' lust and greed to accumulate more.

Along the way, and because of the pain that people have endured, their countless woes have transited beyond the bounds of description and cure. There is

*Continued silence
and numbness will
not work. Change has
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the combined effort
of the people like an
endless stream of
twinkling stars.*

no one they would be able to share this with which accentuates their sufferance manifold. Over time, the society has been effectively divided into two distinct segments: the exploiters and the exploited with the former managing their engines of corruption and the latter busy seeking their morsels to survive another day. So, we have these tiny elite communities which have fathomed all resources within their grasp owing to their mountains of pelf and their positions in power so that they could continue exploiting and keeping a vast majority of hapless people captive.

They operate without rules and without constraint. They live in a world they control and command. It is their exclusive domain and they don't brook any infringement. People have to subscribe to their whims to survive. Disobedience is punishable with whatever may attract the masters' fancy. Operating in collusion with their cronies and bootleggers, they have brought shame upon an entire society as the country writhes under their unwieldy weight. The recent vote of no-confidence against the sitting prime minister, and the sickening manner in which it is being orchestrated, is a case in point which illustrates the myriad ills and sick-



The general perception is that the Supreme Court of Pakistan went out of its way to accommodate the opposition and its concerns. 'Justice' administered on Sunday and even at midnight remains unprecedented in the country's history.

nesses that this coalition of crime and corruption has assimilated and which it uses indiscriminately to force its way. In the process, the institutions of the country have stopped functioning and the collective conscience of the people has been compromised. Every facet of the state, encompassing the legislature, bureaucracy, judiciary and a host of state institutions, has been corrupted to the point of dysfunction. They have suffered because of indiscriminate ravages perpetrated by this criminal collective.

In the process, the country has regressed to unimaginably shameful limits. Here is a land where souls are sold for the din of coins and futures forfeited in the hands of criminals. Here is a land where right and wrong are mingled for the cause of profit. Here is a land where criminal bands have the institutions at their beck and call while the righteous perpetually struggle for survival. Here is a land where looters, plunderers and murderers are bailed out routinely and their cases stayed indefinitely, but the poor have to wait for generations even to

For Imran Khan, it is no longer a question of merely coming back into power. It is a question of securing a wholesome mandate to change the system. Only that will provide the way out of this malaise.

be heard. Here is a land where the media fabricates stories disparaging of individuals and institutions, but those wrongly accused have no right to remedy, and where fictional narratives are concocted in aid of criminals with no regulatory checks

invoked. Here is a land where judges take dictation over phone and where briefcases full of cash are gifted to sway court decisions. Here is a land where the accountability bureau sabotages the process to catch criminals and the election commission operates with blatant partisanship. Here is a land where a sitting judge of the apex court is insulated from punishment for failing to declare his family's assets in violation of the law of the state, but nobody raises a finger.

Here is a land where the guilty are free and the innocent caged; where advancing personal, profit-based relations take precedence over state interests; where political parties are run as private limited companies amidst perpetual clamour for democracy in the country; where despotic and fascist spots are buried behind the veneer of democratic protestations, and where politicians operate as mafias and businesses as unchallenged cartels.

Here is a land where bureaucracy refuses to take off the apparel of the colonisers; where there is a judiciary, but no justice; where state institutions are used for

desecrating the constitution, and where religion is exploited as a tool by obscurantist merchants to hold people hostage and indoctrinate them in the art of violence and extremism.

Here is a land where the state edifice is fast crumbling before the multi-directional criminal onslaught spearheaded by malevolent operators whose sole interest in life is advancing their own stakes. Vast is the spectrum of this malaise and deep are its roots. There is no easy solution to this grave crisis and there is no one who will have the sagacity and sensitivity to pay heed. They are all floating along the tide which is getting rougher by the day, but no one seems to care because they have their assets and bounties secured in foreign lands where they will run off once the going gets tough. Pakistan

Every facet of the state has been corrupted to the point of dysfunction.

is only a stopover to be used and abused cruelly and then dispensed with.

Here is a land where the rich flourish and build their empires upon the bludgeoned carcasses of the poor and the marginalised; where the demand of the powerful is an order to be obeyed, but the anguished cry for help by the poor is met with disdain and hatred; where there is palpable discrimination separating the powerful from the weak and the advantaged from the downtrodden, and where chance of birth, not merit, ability or suitability, is the determinant for individual success or failure.

I can go on counting the ailments, but it has had little effect in the past, and may not have any in the future either. But time has really come to evaluate dispassionately whether the state can survive with its plethora of ailments which is becoming more gruesome with time, or whether something should be done before it is buried under the weight of its growing incapacities and inaction? This is the magnitude of the challenge which has brewed over years and which the state and those who are entrusted with the task of managing it are now confronted with.



Riot police gather outside the National Assembly on the day of the no confidence vote against former PM Imran Khan.



But some say that the die is cast. The treachery is sealed. Some say that a dream has been sculled. But dreams never die. Each one will hold the light for the next. The path to salvation will be lit with an endless stream of twinkling stars which shall never fade away. Having seen the face of a proud, self-respecting and dignified Pakistan, it is the people of the country who shall decide which way to take it further.

For Imran Khan, it is no longer a ques-

tion of merely coming back into power. It is a question of securing a wholesome mandate to change the system. Only that will provide the way out of this malaise as the system, in its existent form, will only perpetuate the inherent weaknesses and contradictions within its ambit.

Continued silence and numbness will not work. Change has to be stirred and sustained through the combined effort of the people like an endless stream of twinkling stars. ■



An Anti-West Khan

Even after losing the government, Imran Khan's impact will not disappear. He has managed to convince his fans that he is the only honest politician; surrounded by the corrupt who fear his justice

By Ali Mahmood

The events of the last few weeks have been more fantastic than any movie script. Imran Khan lost the army support, then his allies started to leave him, and finally his own MNAs, fed up with his arrogance, decided to bring him down. A no-confidence motion was presented in the house, and it quickly became obvious that he had lost his majority and would lose the no-confidence vote.

Whereas lesser men would have accepted defeat, Imran resorted to subterfuge. In his public meeting in Islamabad, large but nowhere near a million people, he took a piece of paper, 'The Letter,' from his pocket in a dramatic gesture, claiming that it was the proof of treachery, and that

the opposition was in cahoots with 'a foreign government' which was determined to bring him down. According to Imran, 'The Letter' established that the opposition, about to topple his government, was composed of traitors to Pakistan, and using this contorted argument, he moved to dismiss the resolution as anti-Pakistan and to dissolve the parliament. Though his moves were clearly unconstitutional and not permitted under the parliamen-

Imran has warned that he will be a greater danger in the street than he has been in government.

tary rules of procedure, nevertheless his unproven accusations of conspiracy and treachery overrode all dictates of law.

On the night of 7th April the Supreme Court finally passed their short order that the move by the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly to defeat the no-confidence motion and to dissolve parliament was illegal, void, and of no effect. The clock was rolled back, the PM, his cabinet, parliament, and the no-confidence motion were all reinstated. Never before, in the history of Pakistan, has the opposition celebrated defeat with such enthusiasm, because they knew that the restored Imran Khan government would last only a day, after which they would vote him out and take over government, together with all offices of prime minister, cabinet, president, and provincial governorships.

The Supreme Court judgment came

as a surprise to many who were expecting the judges to sit on the fence and avoid commitment to a clear and emphatic decision. Many expected that the court would say that though the ruling of the Deputy Speaker was unconstitutional and even raised questions as to how he could have signed off his order as the Speaker when he was only the Deputy Speaker, nevertheless, there was no going back and elections should take place forthwith. The factors that led to the decision were that this was one chance for the Supreme Court to redeem the reputation lost in earlier cases of political crisis due to the pressures and doctrines of necessity, with no risk. The establishment was staying out of this round, and the Bar Associations and lawyers throughout the country demanded a judgment conforming to law and the constitution, so why not do the right thing?

No longer limited by a 3 month election schedule, the new government now had enough time to deal with the problems created by Imran Khan, and to counter the aggressive propaganda campaign of the PTI. The opposition needed time not only to unravel the attacks and litigation of the PTI government against them, but also to build their own attacks against Imran and his ministers. The only pressure for an earlier rather than a last-minute election was that today they could blame Imran for all that had gone wrong, the crisis economy, the growth of poverty and inflation, tomorrow the voters would blame them. With the passing of time, the story of 'The Letter' and the international conspiracy would fade from memory, to be replaced by exposures of Imran Khan's follies.

While both sides, the PTI and the opposition are desperate to win this epic battle, it is clear that for the coming year, both teams will lose, and the biggest loser of all will be the people of Pakistan. The Ukraine War has created a surge in the price of oil, gas, coal, wheat, edible oil, and minerals. Poor countries with current account deficits, who need dollars to buy energy and food, will not have the money to pay for these essentials. Sri Lanka's erosion of foreign exchange reserves and massive devaluation has left her unable to pay for energy and food which has led to protests and riots over electricity blackouts, and the threat of famine. Pakistan is following the same road. Already load

shedding means several hours a day when electricity is just not available. There is enough generating capacity but not enough dollars to pay for the fuel inputs, oil, gas, and coal. Import of wheat, palm oil, and fertiliser will at first become more expensive and then more difficult, resulting in panic.

Imran Khan's reaction to losing both the government and the Supreme Court litigation will provoke agitation and rioting. This, in turn, will lead to further legal action against the PTI and its leader.

Imran Khan has already smeared his rivals and opposition as corrupt and treacherous, he will now go even further, roaring like a lion at anyone or anything that stands in his way.

By the time that elections finally take place 6-12 months later, the myth of 'The Letter' and conspiracy theories will have faded away, to be replaced by the exposure of the mistakes and crimes of the Imran Khan government – that bad economic policies have led to an economic collapse, that Pakistan's three most important international relationships have been endangered, the US by the accusation that they are involved in a conspiracy to topple the PTI government, the EU by Imran's high profile visit to Moscow the day the Ukraine war broke out, and China by Pakistan's default in payment of Rupees 250 billion to the Chinese power plants (instead distributing the money under the EHSAAS scheme to potential voters). The US and EU account for most of Pakistan's exports, the US (IMF and WB) and China (CPEC) provide the major part of the funding that keeps the Pakistan economy afloat. A mood of entitlement has been created by the PTI government by its wild promises that encouraged a fall in productivity, merit, and education but remained silent about never-ending population growth.

Even after losing the government and

his prime ministership, Imran Khan's impact will not disappear. He remains a hero to Pakistani youth, and he has managed to convince his fans that he is the only honest politician surrounded by the corrupt who fear his justice. However, now that he has stepped onto a level playing field, stories are emerging of Farah, Bushra, and Buzdar. Questions are being asked as to how he became so phenomenally rich in the last three years.

Imran Khan has warned that he will be a greater danger in the street than he has been in government. As prime minister, his weapons were NAB, the courts, the police, his control of the media, and his irresponsible use of populist slogans and policy. His dangerous populist adventurism in dropping petrol and electricity prices in defiance of rocketing world prices resulting in one more break down of the IMF programme, and his 'Great Surprise – the Letter,' a strategy that puts Pakistan's economy and international relations in danger, is a high price for the political advantage he hopes to secure for himself. The former prime minister recognises that there are more young voters than old, more ignorant voters than informed, and that in Pakistan he can fool all of the people all of the time. The new Taliban Khan will be aggressively anti-West, Islamist fundamentalist even as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia becomes more moderate, and his promises to the electorate even more wild and fantastic. He has already smeared his rivals and opposition as corrupt and treacherous, he will now go even further, roaring like a lion at anyone or anything that stands in his way. Khan will blame the elite for the problems of Pakistan and will try to seduce the poor and educated as victims of an unjust society, an appealing narrative.

Yes, there will be an election. The question is whether the overriding election issue will be the treachery and corruption of the opposition or the incompetence and bad governance of the Imran Khan regime. An early election focused on 'The Letter' will give an advantage to Imran Khan, an election after 6 months will expose many of his wrong doings and put him at a disadvantage. Either way, an election will raise expectations with false promises as a growing population with declining skills and education puts impossible demands on an impoverished state. ■



By Dr. Wang Xu

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China-Pakistan Bond

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, maintaining China-Pakistan friendship has always been the consensus of all political factions and social segments in Pakistan

Recently, the opposition tabled a no-trust motion against the government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan in the National Assembly. President Dr. Arif Alvi dissolved the National Assembly, and the political uncertainty is growing in Pakistan. (The Supreme Court of Pakistan has overturned the decision of the dissolution of the National Assembly. And since then Imran Khan's government has been replaced by Shehbaz Sharif led coalition.)

Pakistan is the only all-weather strategic cooperative partner of China. The political instability in Pakistan is always a cause for concern. However, with the time-honoured history and solid foundation of friendship, and having just celebrated the 70th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic ties, the two countries are confident enough to maintain and shape the steady development of bilateral ties that have been friendly for generations, regardless of the international and domestic political changes.

Chinese President Xi Jinping described China and Pakistan as good brothers and good partners sharing a special friendship. In history, no matter how international and regional situations change, China and Pakistan have always stood by each other, sharing joy and sorrow, understanding and supporting

each other's core interests. This is because the two countries have a high degree of consistency in safeguarding their joint and regional common interests of development and security.

During the Cold War, China and Pakistan supported each other to break the geo-containment of the superpower, and worked together in safeguarding regional peace and stability in South Asia. Two countries cooperated with each other to promote the normalisation of China-US relations, which changed the global landscape of the Cold War at one stroke. Since the turn of the century, both countries have supported each other in formulating and implementing counter-terrorism strategies in accordance with their respective national conditions, and have jointly opposed "double standards" and "stigmatization" in counter-terrorism by international and regional hegemonism. In the past decade, the U.S. adjusted its global strategy to promote great power competition in the name of "Asia-Pacific Rebalancing" and "Indo-Pacific strategy," and even hastily withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in disregard of the ground reality, resulting in political, economic, security and humanitarian crises. As neighbours of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan have always supported the political settlement on the Afghan issue, taking into full considera-

tion the historical and practical factors of Afghanistan, and have been cooperating with each other to promote the post-withdrawal era of Afghanistan from chaos to stability and prosperity.

In the meantime, the cooperation between China and Pakistan in the field of development, especially the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has injected new impetus into the in-depth development of bilateral relations. In April 2015, President Xi Jinping paid a historic state visit to Pakistan. Both leaders agreed to upgrade the bilateral relationship to an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and continue to promote the construction of the CPEC, building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era. The CPEC has brought 25.4 billion dollars in direct investment to Pakistan, created more than 70,000 jobs directly, and launched a large number of social and livelihood priority projects. It has helped Pakistan solve the problem of insufficient installed capacity for power supply, improve domestic transportation, promote the Gwadar port toward the goal of a logistics hub and industrial base, and achieve a period of stable and rapid economic growth.

China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in Pakistan's internal affairs no matter how political changes have taken place from time to time in Pakistan. The first highest level official contacts between Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra and his Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai, during the Bandung Conference in 1955, enhanced mutual understanding and trust. It was at this meeting that the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," one of which is "non-interference in each other's internal affairs," became the consensus among Afro-Asian countries in handling interstate relations. This not only lays the foundation for China-Pakistan friendship, but is also the reason why the China-Pakistan relationship has become a model of friendly exchanges between countries with different social systems.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Pakistan's political situation has gone through different periods, but maintaining China-Pakistan friendship has always been the consensus of all political factions and social segments in Pakistan. The



The CPEC is a symbol of the strength of China-Pakistan ties and promises to transform Pakistan's economic landscape.

China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in Pakistan's internal affairs no matter how political changes have taken place from time to time in Pakistan.

friendly relations between the two countries have kept growing from strength to strength. In fact, the past eight years since the construction of the CPEC was launched, have been a time of empathy, mutual trust and support between China and Pakistan. In these eight years, Pakistan has undergone two power transitions of government. Nevertheless, CPEC has always maintained a mutually beneficial and win-win development direction and a stable and far-reaching development momentum. The cooperation and mutual trust between the two sides transcend party differences in Pakistan, which also shows that the construction of CPEC gives no preference to cooperation with any certain faction, political party or region in Pakistan, the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits has always been open to the whole Pakistani nation.

The current political scenario in Pakistan is rather complicated, which is a result of the accumulation of contradictions over a period of time, but so far it has not affected the overall development of China-Pakistan relations. Recently, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Pakistan and attended the

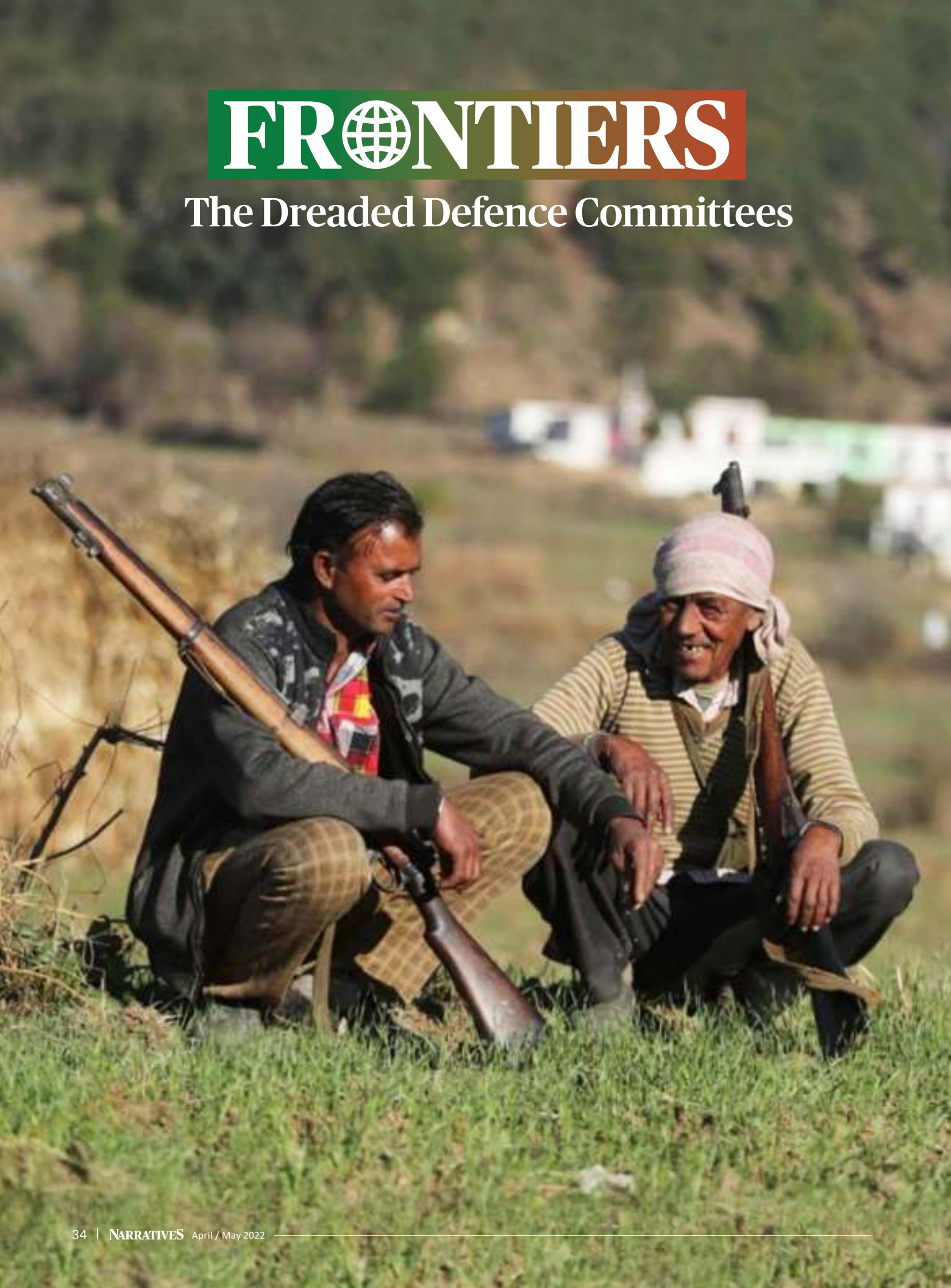
48th Sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC, reaching an important consensus with Pakistan on deepening strategic cooperation between the two countries under the current international and regional situation. China expressed its unwavering adherence to the policy of friendship with Pakistan. While Pakistan reaffirmed that ironclad friendship between Pakistan and China serves as the cornerstone of bilateral relations, Pakistan has always been firmly committed to upholding the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

There have been speculations on CPEC at times by seizing the chance of political changes in Pakistan. The CPEC has not regressed, but has made significant progress. From time to time Pakistan's economic development has been affected by political factors, and China has always held a positive approach towards this. However, unlike some other major powers or international institutions, China has never attached political conditions, set political agendas or exported political models to aid or cooperation projects. CPEC is new to the field of international economic cooperation, which requires close cooperation between two countries with different histories, cultures, social systems, development paths and stages. It is normal for different voices in this process, and the construction of the CPEC is not vulnerable to criticism as a snowflake. But the consensus between China and Pakistan in seeking development and stability has never been shaken, and the desire to promote the CPEC to achieve more comprehensive, sustainable and high-quality development has never wavered.

On March 29, Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi arrived in Tunxi, Anhui Province to attend the Third Foreign Ministers' Meeting among the Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan and the "Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan Plus Afghanistan" Foreign Ministers' Dialogue. This is another important engagement between two countries after State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent visit to Pakistan. The two meetings between China and Pakistan's Foreign ministers in less than 10 days reflects the high-level strategic coordination and solid mutual trust between the two countries. ■

FRONTIERS

The Dreaded Defence Committees



Indian Mercenaries are Back

The successive Indian governments repeatedly recruited informal militia groups in Kashmir as proxies to counter the resistance movement, resorting to massive human rights abuses



By Altaf Hussain Wani

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Indian Army conducts weapons training for VDC members in Occupied Kashmir.

The Indian government has recently announced its decision to revive the dreaded 'Village Defence Committees' (VDCs) in the occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The widely criticized move has been initiated under the pretext of strengthening the so-called security grid in this Muslim-majority region, though it runs counter to the much-hyped Indian narrative of normality in Kashmir. The track record of members of VDCs, which include a diverse array of irregular forces ranging from renegade militant groups to criminal gangs, highlights the dangerous nexus between the Indian Army, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and predominantly Hindu vigilante groups that have unleashed havoc by targeting marginalised communities, particularly the Muslims in communally sensitive areas of the region.

The successive Indian governments have repeatedly recruited these informal militia groups in Kashmir as proxies to counter the resistance movement, resorting to massive human rights abuses.

Instead of working to address the political aspirations of the people of the region, New Delhi has time and again resorted to illegal measures that have had adverse impacts on civilians.

The intensity and ferocity of the VDC members over the years can be gauged by the fact that hundreds of cases relating to their direct involvement in crimes, including murder, rape, plundering and rioting, remain pending in the courts across the disputed region. Official estimates show that 221 cases have been filed against various VDC members over their involvement in such serious crimes.

The VDCs, being largely composed of Hindus, have thus created an undercurrent of communal tension, especially in the villages with a mixed population.

Amongst these, 23 VDC members have been charged with murder, and seven with rape. However, the conviction rate in the cases against VDCs is low, with only six cases having so far led to a conviction. For rights activists, the Indian government's plans to revive these treacherous VDCs is alarming and does not augur well for the future of the region and the safety of its communities.

Use of Mercenaries

The systematic use of irregular militias in Kashmir began in 1995 when the Special Task Force (STF) was formed by recruiting mercenaries to neutralise the resistance struggle in the Kashmir valley. Captured and surrendered militants were redeployed as "counter-insurgents" or "friendlies." Mohammad Yusuf Parray, alias Kuka Parray, Papa Kistawari, Ghulam Mohammad Mir alias Mum Kana, Javed Shah, and Liaquat Khan were among the renegade militants, who were aided and abetted by the government to fight alongside the military and paramilitary forces.

Kuka Paray led his group, Ikhwani-ul-Muslimeen. Other groups were operated by Javed Ahmad Shah, who had the backing of the State Police's Special Operations Group, while Liaquat Khan



Jammu and Kashmir BJP chief Ravinder Raja meets with VDC members to pledge his support.

operated in Anantnag district. By late 1994 all the three groups had merged into one entity known as Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen. Between 350 and 500 members of Ikhwan remained on active duty. They were controlled primarily by the Indian Army, but also worked with police and paramilitary personnel.

These renegade groups, viewed in Kashmir as criminal gangs, remained active in the region for several years. Between 1996 and 1998, these mercenaries indulged wantonly and indiscriminately in gross violations of human rights, while the Indian military establishment shielded them with impunity. Even innocent women and children weren't spared by these mercenaries. The innumerable human rights violations committed by these groups are widely corroborated by independent observers.

With weapons supplied by the Indian government, these groups ran a parallel administration in the mid-1990s. Decried by the Kashmiris as traitors, these groups also carried out summary executions as they tortured and illegally detained scores of innocent Kashmiris. During elections, their activities intensified as they threatened and intimidated voters. At the same time, Special Operation Groups (SOGs) were created to unleash terror on common people in Kashmir.

Rather than holding mercenaries accountable for their crimes, including extortion and outright cases of loot and plunder, the Indian government offered them seats in the state assembly and also

The BJP government's decision to revive VDCs under a new name is tantamount to pitting Hindus against Muslims, particularly in communally sensitive areas of Kishtwar, Doda, and Ramban.

conferred gallantry awards upon them. The height of the government's hypocrisy came in 2010 when one of these most feared and violent renegades, Ghulam Mohammed Mir, alias Muma Kana, was awarded the Padma Shri for his appalling role in suppressing the freedom movement.

The Village Defence Committees in Jammu and Kashmir were originally established in 1995, initially in Doda District, but within no time they mushroomed from 400 units to over 1,600 units. Initially, there were around 5,000 VDC members, but over the years their number has grown to over 27,000. Mostly Hindus influenced by the RSS ideology were recruited into the militia as part of the government's policy to keep a strict vigil on the activities of the Muslims in the

region.

Working beyond the purview of the law, members of the State-backed militia soon turned into an unbridled band of thugs, who not only started to settle their personal scores but also involved themselves in massive human rights abuses and other anti-social activities. The VDCs, being largely composed of Hindus, have thus created an undercurrent of communal tension, especially in the villages with a mixed population.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a persistent demand by local Muslim leaders to disarm the VDCs as weapons and ammunition allotted to them have been used in communal clashes which often broke out whenever there were targeted killings. According to reports, FIRs against 200 VDC members for committing crimes of a serious nature have been registered in different police stations of Doda, Samba, Udhampur and other Districts.

Over time these committees have mostly been absorbed into the armed wings of the BJP-RSS Brigade. The BJP government's decision to revive them under a new name is tantamount to pitting Hindus against Muslims, particularly in communally sensitive areas of Kishtwar, Doda and Ramban.

Already occupied by 800,000 troops, the contentious decision to revive the dreaded militia is bound to push occupied Kashmir further into a quagmire of uncertainty and lawlessness. The move, fraught with serious political ramifications, is doomed to destroy communal harmony, polarise the social fabric, and widen the inter-religious and ethnic divide.

The news of VDCs being revived has already deepened the communal strife in the region, with Hindus applauding the decision, while Muslims are opposing it. The Kashmiri leadership across the political spectrum has continuously voiced grave concern over the move.

Along with the socio-political leadership of Kashmir, many civil society members and human rights groups, including Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), have in the past opposed the creation of VDCs.

Political Parties' Outrage

The Kashmiri political parties have strongly objected to the constitution of VDCs in the occupied territory, saying that arming people without any set

mechanism of accountability will lead to anarchy. Spokesperson of the National Conference Imran Nabi Dar, while reacting to the development, said that the government's words don't match its actions. "Not so long ago, the government was saying everything is hunky-dory in J&K." The decision, he said, puts a big question mark on the claims of the Indian government.

Former Chief Minister and President Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Mehbooba Mufti, in a tweet said; "The move of the Ministry of Home Affairs to form Village Defence Committees across the territory is another addition to a slew of decisions that contradict Indian government's much touted normalcy claims. Clearly Kashmir is far from any semblance of normalcy," she said, adding, "It will also create a wedge between communities."

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader, Nayeem Ahmed Khan, also voiced his grave concern over the move saying that the decision to revive VDCs under a new name was part of the BJP Government's divisive agenda aimed at pitting one community against the other. He said that the decision was bound to drive a wedge between the communities as the VDC members have been found grossly involved in human rights abuses, victimisation and initiating communal violence, especially in the Hindu-dominated areas of Jammu.

Indian forces operating in Kashmir have been working closely with these VDCs. Rather than disbanding these criminal gangs, the Modi government is now providing them with more weapons, training and other incentives.

The decision is being taken at a time when the Hindu nationalist leaders are openly calling for a Muslim genocide in Kashmir, after watching Bollywood's highly controversial, propaganda laden film, *The Kashmir Files*, which portrays Kashmiris as terrorists. The film, being screened for free in many Indian cities, fosters Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. The RSS and BJP is promoting the film with a view to advance their ultra-nationalist agenda, which paints Islam and Muslims to be a threat to the country's Hindu majority.

Amidst mounting majoritarianism and polarisation in India, the so-called *Kashmir Files* is an incendiary recipe to legitimise the persecution of innocent



Former CM Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, has claimed that the revival of VDCs contradicts the BJP regime's claims of normalcy in Kashmir, while threatening peaceful inter-communal relations.

The Geneva Conventions declare that mercenaries are not recognised as legitimate combatants and do not have to be granted the same legal protections as captured service personnel of a regular army.

Kashmiri Muslims at the hands of the Indian occupation troops.

Mercenaries as Quick Fix

The government of India's constant deployment of gangs of armed mercenaries as a quick fix to control Kashmiris, indicates its utter disregard for the international law that strongly prohibits the formation of armed bands of irregulars. No law provides legal authority to a State

for organising and arming people without any proper mechanism of accountability, especially when there is little or no recourse to justice for victims.

International law prohibits the use of mercenaries in armed conflict and certain peaceful situations. On the other hand, the Geneva Conventions declare that mercenaries are not recognised as legitimate combatants and do not have to be granted the same legal protections as captured service personnel of a regular army. The United Nations also considers use of mercenaries as illegal under international law.

Since the government of India has escalated its programme of recruitment, training and arming of these controversial committees as part of its policy to suppress the Kashmiris' legitimate political struggle, it is imperative that the international community should take serious notice and demand that these irregular armed groups should be disbanded, and hold accountable all those individuals implicated in criminal offenses. The Indian government should be asked to fulfil its obligations under the law and ensure that all allegations of abuses by VDC members, including illegal detention of civilians, torture, rape, and extortion, are thoroughly investigated. ■

Occupied Kashmir: Forgotten and Forlorn



Forcing Hinduism in Kashmir

Pakistan, considered a life-line of support for the Kashmiri freedom movement, has been exhibiting a lackadaisical approach



By Dr. Imtiaz A. Khan

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



A Hindu pilgrim waves the Indian flag in the Amarnath area of Kashmir.

More than two-and-a-half years have elapsed since the Indian government abrogated article 35-A and 370 through a presidential order and revoked the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir. This was followed by barbaric measures like the implementation and enforcing of the new draconian laws, which gave occupation forces unfettered authority to kill, plunder and destroy. The Kashmiri population is numbed by these ferocious measures, and are yet to recover from the trauma. Thousands of youths as young as 15 years of age are languishing in Indian jails. The slightest suspicion of protest by Kashmiris leads to macabre violence like brutal killings, demolition of localities and molestation of their women folk. The silence of the international community is exasperating, and the world is oblivious about proactive Indian measures aimed at promoting demographic changes in the region. This has left Kashmiris dismayed, daunted and disconcerted to the extent that the independence movement appears to have lost steam. But those of us who have visited IOC (Indian occupied Kashmir), and have met the youth would agree that present situation is a “lull before the storm” and restiveness anytime can trigger violence that would have se-

rious ramifications for the entire region. Without deviating from the main topic and due to limitations of space I would like to highlight some of the major steps that the Indian government is pursuing to achieve its nefarious objectives:

Huge influx of Hindus masquerading as tourists to Kashmir:

During the past decades Hindus from India would visit Amarnath temple in Kashmir for about two weeks in the middle of August. In the mid-nineties the Governor, appointed by the government of India, extended the visit of Hindu pilgrims up to two months and at present it has been stretched to three months. New religious sites are being discovered to maintain the flow of tourists throughout the whole year. Recently a holy lake in Ganderbal area of Srinagar was discovered and hundreds of thousands of Hindus flocked to the area to take a dip. At present Srinagar is inundated by Hindu visitors coming on one pretext or another. The majority of them are Hindu fundamentalist belonging to the lower middle class with vermilion on their forehead, ill-clad for the weather and with emaciated appearances. How such people can afford air travel or lengthy hotel stays is bewildering. The information that has percolat-

ed from reliable sources is that funds are being provided by the government agencies so that a continuous and unabated flow of pilgrims can be maintained. This will create a demand for building permanent abodes and huge chunks of land will be acquired for the purpose. This will contribute immensely to the change in the demographics of the region, which is a primary design of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

Destroying employment opportunities:

Currently the rate of unemployment in Occupied Kashmir is 22.2 percent, which is significantly higher than India where, officially, it is 7.1 percent. Indian authorities are working assiduously to scuttle any prospects for job to trap the Kashmiri youth in an economic quagmire. Additionally, the government sponsored agencies are patronizing the drug trade and a large number of Kashmiri youth have fallen victim to this menace. The goal is to destroy the young generation to the extent that they are extricated from the freedom movement.

Removal of Kashmiri bureaucrats:

Kashmiri officers have been flushed out of the upper echelons of the bureau-



An Indian soldier stands guard outside a locked Jamia Masjid in Srinagar; several Muslim religious sites have come under restrictions since the Indian annexation of Kashmir.

cracy and replaced by Hindu fundamentalist officials. One is hard-pressed to encounter a Kashmiri official at a high-level position, either in the civil services or the police. The goal is to appoint those Hindu officials who are highly motivated to fulfil the iniquitous agenda of the BJP government. Innocent people are massacred and civilian property destroyed, with the blessings of their political bosses, on a daily basis.

Occupation of Kashmiri land by the Indian Army:

About 4,301 lakh kanals of land in Occupied Kashmir is under the occupation of the Indian Army. Much of this land was used for agriculture and horticulture and provided an important source of livelihood for thousands of Kashmiris. Under the guise of security needs, the occupation forces can acquire any property or land without legal recourse for the owner. The intent is to deprive the Kashmiri population of their property rights and ultimately restrict them to ghettos.

Process of de-Islamisation:

There is a process of de-Islamisation going on in Kashmir at the behest of the BJP government. Major mosques are frequently locked by the occupation forces and Muslim religious activities like Muharram or Eidgah processions are banned. Conversely, Hindu festivals are celebrated with zeal and fervour, with the active participation of high officials and political leaders. There are workshops, seminars and camps conducted

There is a process of de-Islamisation going on in Kashmir at the behest of the BJP government. The aim is to destroy the Muslim character of the region and to allow Hinduism to prosper in its place.

by the army in which school children are made to participate. Under the pretext of acquainting them with principles of co-existence, serious attempts are made to indoctrinate them with Hindu culture so that they are weaned away from Islam. Again, the aim is to destroy the Muslim character of the region and to allow Hinduism to prosper in its place.

Indian propaganda:

Recently a feature film, *Kashmir Files*, was released in India. This movie was funded by the ruling BJP and aims to change the narrative of the Kashmir issue and influence moderate Hindus. The movie depicted the alleged murder of Kashmiri Hindus and rape of their women by Muslim freedom fighters. To implicate Muslims in these kinds of gruesome crimes is a total distortion of facts as none

of that happened. In the government's own report only 87 Kashmiri Hindus were killed and the majority of them accidentally, in police shootouts. On the contrary, more than 100,000 Kashmiri youth have been massacred, 11,300 women gang raped, 3,000 mass graves and thousands of Kashmiri men are among the missing persons. The BJP government believes in Goebbels' doctrine that if a lie is repeated consistently it becomes the truth. What India wants to achieve is to create a furore and mob frenzy so that all Muslims in general, and Kashmiris in particular, become soft targets for Hindu extremists, who receive patronage from the government.

The most regrettable part is that there is no strategy to counter the abominable game plan of India. Pakistan, which is considered to be life-line for the support of Kashmiri freedom movement, has exhibited a lackadaisical approach towards the problem. The country has failed to shun ad-hocism in their policies and discernible effects cannot be noticed. In fairness to Pakistan, it is possible that considering India's political clout and somewhat antagonism of the West towards Muslim countries, tangible results for the Kashmir problem may not be easily achievable. Nevertheless, the absence of any pragmatic steps that could challenge the Indian narrative and draw the world's attention to the crimes against humanity committed by the Indian forces, is vexing. The point to be noted is that the 'Kashmir problem' is part and parcel of the electoral process in India. Elections are won and lost on this issue, which finds space in the manifesto of all political parties. This is antithetical to Pakistani elections, where Kashmir is never included in the long- or short term objectives of any political party. Although Pakistan claims Kashmir to be the jugular vein, unfortunately, it is not the cornerstone of its foreign policy. What Kashmir is crying for is an expedient, practical and realistic approach for this protracted and incessant issue.

With Pakistan caught in its political crisis and lingering economic problems, it is heart wrenching to acknowledge that, in the present scenario, there appears to be no end to sight to the miseries of Kashmiris. It seems that the right of self-determination as promised by the United Nations Security Council to the people of Kashmir will remain a forgotten and unfulfilled agenda. ■



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By Tahir Mehmood

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

The Post-Colonial Tinderbox

What we wish to be, cannot be detached from what we are

The man and society both are bound by the time and space in which they exist. They can break away from them only in an imaginative haul or a dream-like awakened condition. This is exactly the case with us, the people in Pakistan, as we cannot divorce ourselves from time – including the past and the present – and in the world we live-in today. Pakistan as a nation, society and state exists in a modern world, which took its new journey on the wings of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and the 19th centuries. This revolution hinged around the supremacy of machine over man, and of which we see new forms as the time passes. And so far machines continue to rule man's world.

The invention of the machine for the first time empowered man to produce a huge surplus in factories as compared to the meagre surpluses of the feudal age. This gave birth to capitalism which so far remains a key force behind modern pros-

perity. It was this supremacy and primacy of machines that gave a cutting edge to the West to colonise almost the whole world, despite their smaller population. Whereas in the colonies, generally the native population was far less exposed to or proficient in the use of machinery and fast expanding associated domains of the modern world.

However, despite this huge deficiency, they espoused the dreams of freedom and liberating their lands from the colonial masters, and mostly got it in the aftermath of World War II, which essentially was a mammoth power struggle fought by the colonial powers of the West. Pakistan also got its independence in 1947 and started its journey in a post-World War II world. Like other former colonies, we were no exception to carving out our future amidst competing ideologies of capitalism and communism. Both these ideologies promised prosperity to the post-colonial world in some sense that

had its moorings attached to machines. Though freedom had been won from the masters, internal freedom had to be constructed which could liberate people from primordial tribal affinities, the oppressive feudal system and culture. In a nutshell, the newly liberated countries were yet not fully ready to adapt to the dictates of the modern industrial world. These post-colonial societies borrowed the 'machine' but not the idea and culture that gave birth to this scientific cost-effective invention. Despite sticking to old modes of work, production and living, the post-colonial societies, particularly the elite class, deeply yearned for the development and prosperity enjoyed by the First World. In this national pursuit, they embarked on a journey with 'borrowed money,' 'borrowed machines' and 'borrowed prosperity.' They had won freedom, but it got tainted with each new tranche of borrowed loans and capital.

Pakistan, like many other postcolonial states, looks for the new and continued sources of 'borrowed prosperity with all its strings attached,' while occasionally claiming for sovereignty and exercise of autonomy in its policies.

Being a post-colonial nation, we have also inherited a tinderbox which has the essential moorings and ingredients of security, prosperity and sovereignty. High population growth is an additional flint in the case of Pakistan, which is a potential opportunity as well as a great burden, if not handled properly.

On its independence, Pakistan had to make a choice between two poles: the capitalist West, or the Communist bloc led by the former USSR and China. The situation is almost the same even now with the difference that the USSR has now been replaced by Russia. Like the other postcolonial nations, Pakistan continued its journey in these competing worlds that were essentially producing surplus due to machinery and innovative allied technologies.

Almost to the level of paradox, being the creation of a separate Islamic ideology, Pakistan also remains attached to religion in which faith gets the primacy over machinery, which was nothing but an outcome of scientific reasoning and inquiry, duly tested and validated by experimentation; thus often rejecting 'others' (immoral capitalism and godless communism) rather than producing economic



President of the EU commission Ursula von der Leyen put Pakistan's GSP plus status on hold on account of "human rights violations," illustrating how the Western powers leverage trade to push a pseudo-moralistic 'rights and freedom' agenda.

surplus. This, however, never allowed us to fully adapt to the work-based dictates of the modern industrial culture of the two competing world powers, rather, the pursuit of economic prosperity-cum-luxury continued as a national hobby. All the successive governments found no easier solution than resorting to foreign loans to satisfy our ego as a developing nation. This mindset has not changed even today.

Pakistan on the one hand is relying for its prosperity on the West, and on the other hand also feels attracted towards the countries which are no longer communist but still represent the opposing pole.

Here we need to keep in mind that when the goal of prosperity is pursued, it means producing an efficient economic surplus that must also find a market to earn foreign exchange. In the case of Pakistan, our main export destinations are west-bound. When we use the term 'West,' it loosely means the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Canada, and the somewhat West-dominated Middle East. Essentially, the West does not offer its markets following some altruistic goals, but keeps a mixed pursuit of geopolitics and geo-economics. Out of the three ingredients in the tinderbox, prosperity, whenever it is pursued by a state like Pakistan in the post-Cold War World, comes attached with a 'freedom and rights' agenda which may appear moralistic on the surface but nurtures many problems in a society like ours, with its strong tribal, sectarian, ethnic and provincial identities and prejudic-

es. Thus the freedom struggle which has not been properly harnessed by our society through rule of law and habit, is more construed as anarchic and a challenge to order and stability.

In comparison to the West, China and Russia are more market seeker nations than export destinations. This creates a dilemma for a developing nation like ours which is a prosperity-cum-development seeker. Since Russia and China, as a policy, do not interfere in the internal matters of other states and attach no 'rights strings' to bilateral trade relations, they directly or indirectly do not pose a challenge to the order and stability of the other trading society. However, since balance of trade usually remains in favour of these big countries, it reduces the scope of attaining prosperity through export-led trade relations.

In the above two choices, ultimately we find less options but to stay connected to the West-led market, and thus also to keep haggling about Western machinations to control and shape our society according to their economic and geopolitical preferences. The common Western model adopted for a developing country has been through foreign aid, loans, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) etc. alongside a barrage of strings, with implications for security and sovereignty, internal autonomy and the political and cultural life of the recipient/dependent nation. Closer scrutiny also reveals that FDI not only thrives on the raw material of the dependent nation, but also nurtures an arti-

ficial consumer market which ultimately adds to the coffers of the already rich nations. Thus despite giving a semblance of development, the local society remains dependent, having less potential for real sustainable growth and prosperity.

In Pakistan, it is a common trend to give examples of countries like Japan, Germany, South Korea, Taiwan and a few others that have achieved great economic successes. But one thing is mostly ignored and that is the security relations of these countries with the United States. The US forces have military bases there and a direct influence on security and foreign relations. And in response to this leverage, these countries were given positive, preferential access to the Western market. Thus, this model does not hold good for countries like Pakistan which have somewhat divergent regional security goals than the West.

Similarly, it is almost a popular cliché in Pakistan to follow the Chinese model of development. However, again, a few basic assumptions which are the core values of Chinese state and society are often ignored. Being a communist country, religion has no place in China to affect the individual values and collective culture. This lack of faith-based divine obligations provide a vast space for constructing a utilitarian society, giving top priority to economic considerations. The Chinese Military is not an autonomous state organ but a creation of the Chinese Communist Party. It is the one party system, which controls, directs and steers both the politics and the military.

One more factor which affects the economic affairs of an individual in relation to the state is the strict state control of almost all spheres of economic, social and political direction of the country; stringent measures taken for controlling population growth is just one example. In absence of such values and practices, following the Chinese model may have a form but will lack the spirit.

Thus, in view of the above, it can be easily concluded that space and scope for economic prosperity remains limited for a post-colonial society like Pakistan while trading with both the poles. It can also be inferred from this that till the time we remained tied to 'prosperity' goal, a certain trade-off will come as a pre-condition as a foreign loans and aid dependent nation.

This necessitates for us to look inward

for our sustained development, growth and prosperity, rather than building it on foreign loans. We also need not only to review our policies but also shape and construct a national culture that gives primacy to machinery for surplus production.

A casual glance at Pakistan's population data is enough to tell that there are very few wage earning members carrying the burden of supporting dependents not doing any productive work. We as a society consume more than what we produce. Display of riches, waste and burden-

Prosperity, whenever it is pursued by a state like Pakistan in the post-Cold War World, comes attached with a 'freedom and rights' agenda which may appear moralistic on the surface but nurtures many problems in a society like ours.

some customs add insult to injury. While family bonds are a great strength of our society, this 'dependence culture' needs to be changed to a state where the majority of the working age population starts contributing in aggregate to national productive work. So far, every government of ours comes with development-cum-prosperity promises but always relies on quick-fixes like foreign loans and aid. As a result, though we see developmental projects as well as modern luxury items, they come with further addition to the foreign loans.

This national trend and practice must stop. Somewhere and someday we will have to say "No" to those projects which we cannot support on our own (the huge Public Sector Development Programme allocation in our annual budget, largely based on foreign loans, is evidence). Any source of borrowed luxury from individual to nation will have to be kept to a mini-

mum so as to promote a culture which gives supreme importance to self-reliance. Productive work by our own people through their own resources should be the new national mantra where each member of the society – minus children and the old – is put to work either in fields or factories. Here it is important to emphasize that 'machine' and 'work' need to become synonymous in our national lingo as the whole population is needed to shift focus from manual to machine, including the rudimentary labour. Presently our import bill is enormous and as a first step, we need to encourage 'import substitution industrialization' (ISI). This should remain a mid-term strategy with a basic aim to train our population to produce for itself. We can start from producing and replacing basic daily used goods and gradually moving towards mid-level industrial production. When we get enough trained and skilled manpower through ISI, we can target specific industries to promote export-led industrialization. In both the stages, agriculture subsistence through machines should remain the top priority as in case of any denial of the foreign market in response to our import substitution policies, we can survive on our own.

A big question arises: who will do it for us? Normally the elite in a post-colonial society are not trusted and seen as brokers to the imperial masters. However, for promoting a national work-drive and culture, it is the Pakistani nationalists, who will have to come forward from all the segments of society including elite, media, academia and progressive intelligentsia. "Everyone at work" will have to be a kind of new mantra for the Pakistani nationalists to transform our nation from foreign loan and imports dependent to a self-reliant and exporting nation. Till the time we reach this stage, a balanced relation with both trading markets needs to be maintained with a firm "No" to the borrowed prosperity. It will be a long journey, but there is no quick-fix method to develop a post-colonial society. Our proficiency at work, machine and technology will open new doors and markets, and till that time, the desire for 'luxury and prosperity' should be kept under check to the level at which we can afford ourselves.

The dawn never appears at the start of night, but comes through surviving, struggling and patiently living through long hours of darkness. ■

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Public Debt Challenge



Tightening Liquidity

Notwithstanding the recently enhanced autonomy of the SBP, the financial system's stability is a major common interest for both the central bank and the Ministry of Finance



By Asif Ali Qureshi

The writer is a Co-Founder and the Chief Executive of Optimus Capital Management. He has over 25 years of experience in Pakistan's financial sector, initially as a banker, and later as a financial analyst and entrepreneur.

The confluence of adverse macroeconomic conditions, non-recourse to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for fiscal borrowing and uncertain monetary policy outlook have made debt management exceptionally challenging for the Ministry of Finance, which is being forced to accept bids in the government securities auctions at rates significantly higher than the secondary market yields. Speaking metaphorically, the Director General (DG) Debt is being asked to swim upstream against strong currents while wearing a straightjacket, rendering his position the most unenviable job in the government.

The monetary aggregates encapsulate the interplay of macroeconomic variables, including the developments on fiscal and external accounts. The two fundamental monetary aggregates are Broad Money (M2) and Reserves Money (M0). The latter comprises Net Domestic Assets (NDA) and Net Foreign Assets (NFA) of the



Surging commodity prices and political uncertainty have led to precipitous decline in Pakistan's forex reserves since mid-2021.

SBP, while the former is the sum of NDA and NFA of the entire banking system (the central bank and scheduled banks). The ratio M2/M0 is the money multiplier, which has averaged around 2.8 times over the past three years. A Rs. 280 billion increase in M2 requires a Rs. 100 billion increase in M0.

With the deteriorating external account, the domestic liquidity conditions are tightening at a time when the government's borrowing needs are massive due to an elevated fiscal deficit and re-financing of maturing debts. The two biggest drains on the banking system's liquidity are contraction in NFA and expansion in Currency in Circulation (CiC). While the SBP has been constantly injecting liquidity through Open Market Operation (OMO)

for many years, the outstanding amounts have risen significantly in recent months and reached new highs. The net outstanding OMO injection amount of Rs. 2.8 trillion at end February 2022 was equivalent to almost 15 percent of the total banking deposits.

Pakistan has a perennially weak external account and hence the tightening of domestic liquidity conditions are a recurrent phenomenon. Moreover, high CiC growth has been an aggravated problem since 2015. What is different this time around is the restriction on direct government borrowing from the SBP, in place since end-June, 2019 as an IMF programme condition and subsequently codified into law under the SBP Amendment Act passed in January 2022.

Key Constituents of SBP's NDA (PKR Billion)			
Stocks and Change			
Source: SBP			
	June 30, 2019	Feb. 25, 2022	Change
Net Fiscal Borrowing from SBP	6,693	4,675	-2,017
OMO Injection	796	2,837	2,040
Loans to Banks	578	1,321	743



New IMF restrictions on SBP activities may trigger a liquidity crunch in Pakistan's financial markets.

Between July 1, 2019 and February 25, 2022, the outstanding stock of net fiscal borrowing from the SBP (gross borrowing less deposits) decreased by Rs. 2.0 trillion. Prima facie, it looks very impressive that a perpetual borrower paid back some of the debts that it owed to the central bank. However, the devil is in the details.

During the same period – from July 1, 2019 to February 25, 2022 – the outstanding amount of liquidity injection by the SBP through OMO increased by Rs. 2 trillion, while the stock of its loans (mainly refinancing schemes) to banks increased by around Rs. 740 billion. So the net amount of liquidity provided by the SBP to banks increased by Rs. 2.7 trillion, while the government's net borrowing from the SBP fell by Rs. 2.0 trillion. The need for liquidity injection would have been lower had it not been for the Rs. 2.2 trillion increase in CiC over the same period. On the other hand, there was a concurrent net increase in SBP's foreign exchange reserves of \$9.2 billion, which helped its NFA grow by Rs. 1.6 trillion.

Rapid CiC expansion post Fiscal Year (FY)-2015 (initially triggered by the levy of tax on banking transactions of non-tax payers but subsequently fortified by increased scrutiny of banking transactions in general) is a structural drain on banking liquidity. CiC/M2 ratio that used to average around 22 percent before FY2015, has increased to over 29 percent in recent years. Had the ratio stayed at 22 percent, banking deposits would have been higher by Rs. 1.7 trillion.

After two years of marked improvement in FY2020 and FY2021, helped by plummeting global commodity prices and travel restrictions during the peak pe-

The DG Debt is being asked to swim upstream against strong currents while wearing a straight-jacket, rendering his position the most unenviable job in the government.

riod of pandemic, Pakistan's external account has come under renewed pressure since the middle of 2021. SBP's foreign exchange reserves have fallen by \$4.3 billion in the past six-and-a-half months to under \$16.0 billion by mid-March, 2022. Moreover, with ongoing domestic political turmoil, the focus has shifted away from preserving macroeconomic stability to protecting political capital. Unless the trend is arrested, the ongoing attrition of foreign exchange reserves shall continue to drain rupee liquidity, creating more challenges for the government.

The latest amendments to the SBP Act not only bar incremental direct lending by the central bank to the government but also mandate that the existing stock of lending be retired at maturity. As of February 25, 2022, net fiscal borrowing from the SBP made up 53 percent of MO, while OMO injection formed another 32 percent, altogether accounting for over 85 percent of MO. With restriction on direct government borrowing from the SBP, the growth in MO would need to come from:

a) Expansion in NFA, which in turn would require the country to run BOP surpluses, and/or

b) Increased stock of liquidity injection through OMO.

Perhaps the only time in Pakistan's history when fiscal borrowing from the SBP fell 'naturally' was during FY2002 to FY2004 period when the country ran hefty Balance of Payments (BOP) surpluses following 9/11.

Historically, managing the external debt maturities was the main challenge for the government. However, the amended SBP Act has made domestic debt management an equally bigger challenge, especially during the periods of external account weakness. While the underlying intention of the amendments to the SBP Act may be to induce fiscal discipline and external account stability, the deep rooted structural problems cannot be addressed by such restrictions.

Thus far, the SBP has been relying on weekly OMOs to inject liquidity with occasional use of longer duration (63 days) OMOs in Dec-2021/Jan-2022. Although theoretically there is no limit on the amount of liquidity injection by the SBP through OMOs, the banks have their own internal exposure limits on how much maturity mismatch they can run. Over reliance on short-term liquidity injection by the SBP puts the Ministry of Finance in a vulnerable position in meeting its financing needs.

While the amended SBP Act prohibits purchase of government securities in the primary market, it maintains the permission for the State Bank to buy these securities from the secondary market. Ideally, the SBP should have started secondary market purchases of government securities a while ago. However, it appears that the current IMF programme may be keeping the SBP from using this liquidity management tool. If that is the case, the IMF needs to be persuaded to let the SBP exercise the right to use all legitimate options for liquidity management. The IMF conditions should not take precedence over the law of the land. Notwithstanding the recently enhanced autonomy of the SBP, the financial system's stability remains the most important common objective for both the SBP and the Ministry of Finance. These two critical institutions need to work collaboratively and not in disharmony. ■

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Debatable SBP Act



Autonomous or Unaccountable?

A widely recognised principle of corporate governance is that one individual should not simultaneously hold the important offices of chief executive officer and chairperson of the board of directors of the same corporation



By Abdul Rehman Warraich

The writer is a financial consultant, who served as Director General (debt), Ministry of Finance.



Former minister of finance Shaukat Tarin has assured that the SBP remains under government control despite the enhanced powers of its chief executive.

Certain aspects of the recently-enacted State Bank of Pakistan (amendment) Act 2021 are highly debatable for many reasons. It is one of the most important public institutions and corporations of Pakistan. The standards for its governance, autonomy and accountability have far reaching implications for not only the economic and financial performance of the country, but also for the adoption or replication of similar standards for other institutions and corporations, particularly those belonging to the public sector.

Despite serious criticism by the opposition parties and many independent experts, the government did not invite, or participate in, a serious public debate regarding the pros and cons of the amendments before these were passed by the cabinet and the National Assembly. This approach is not in line with the democratic traditions and principles. The government would be well-advised to hold this debate even now. Better late than never.

The debate should be held in the spirit to review the principles and objectives underlying these amendments; to evaluate whether the amendments are in accordance with sound principles of governance and the national interest; to learn from any mistakes that may have been made; and to identify and take actions to rectify those mistakes, where possible.

The mistakes that may have been made can be of two types: the amendments that should not have been made but were made; and the amendments that should have been made but were not made.

As these amendments have been introduced during an International Monetary Fund programme, and largely as part of its conditions, the government is likely to defend itself against the mistakes of the first type by contending that these were non-negotiable conditions, and therefore, it did not have a choice.

It seems difficult, however, to envisage a plausible defence on part of the government in the case of mistakes of the second type. It is only reasonable to expect that the IMF would be neutral towards any amendments that the government

wants to introduce on its own and are in accordance with the internationally recognised principles of good governance. The most likely reason for not making such amendments is either a lack of understanding or a lack of interest on the government's part.

The purpose of this article is to highlight a mistake of the second type that, in my opinion, has been made, and which needs to be thoroughly debated with an open mind, and, hopefully, rectified through further legal amendments.

The thrust of the recent amendments has been to grant greater autonomy to the State Bank of Pakistan. This is a good thing provided that, firstly, a strong case can be made that the existing level and extent of autonomy is insufficient, and, secondly, the enhanced autonomy is fairly balanced with robust mechanisms for performance management and accountability.

Let us assume, for argument's sake, that there was a strong case for granting enhanced autonomy to the State Bank of Pakistan. Without going into the merits of the measures that have been taken to grant enhanced autonomy, which we can discuss separately, let's focus on the ques-

tion whether the enhanced autonomy has been fairly balanced with robust measures for performance management and accountability.

All corporations, whether public or private, suffer from an inherent agency problem i.e. the risk that its managers may not work in the best interests of its owners. The responsibility for performance management and accountability of a corporation's management lies mainly with its board of directors. A widely recognised and important principle of corporate governance, devised primarily to address the risks arising out of agency problems, is that one individual should not simultaneously hold the offices of chief executive officer and chairperson of the board of directors of the same corporation. This principle is even more important in the case of a public corporation which is ultimately owned by the government – an impersonal entity – rather than a group of individuals. Needless to emphasize that such mechanisms are necessary to avoid the potential conflict that exists when the same individual holds both offices.

The best practice on this issue is that the chief executive officer should not even be a voting member of the board of directors. As the board has to set the targets and review the performance of the management, it is only fair that the management has no direct influence over the Board's decisions. The legitimate role of chief executive as a member of the board of directors is to educate and inform the board of the management's viewpoint on the issues at hand and not to directly participate in, or lead, the board's decisions.

Interestingly, this anomaly already existed in the case of the State Bank of Pakistan. The law (SBP Act 1962) stated that the Governor of the State Bank shall also be the Chairperson of its Board of Directors. This was arguably the weakest link in the corporate governance structure of the SBP. The government should have amended the SBP Act long ago to restore the balance of power between the Board of Directors and the Management of the central bank. Preferably, the Governor should have been made a non-voting member of the Board. At the minimum, the Governor should have been



As both the Governor and Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SBP, does Reza Baqir's influence over the central bank compromise its accountability to the people?

The government would be well-advised to hold this debate even now. Better late than never. The debate should be held in the spirit to review the principles and objectives underlying these amendments.

made a voting member but prohibited from becoming the Chairperson of the Board.

The recent amendments offered a golden opportunity to do so. As most of the amendments were meant to further enhance the powers of the SBP as an institution, the need and justification to have internal checks and balances within the institution were even stronger. It is surprising that the government chose not to do so even as part of the recently intro-

duced amendments.

Apparently, it was not a condition of the IMF to let the same individual hold both most powerful offices in the central bank. The IMF's own literature (reference to the content of the course titled 'Foundations of Central Bank Law') recognizes the separation of the offices of the Governor and chairperson of the Board of Directors as the superior governance principle. The principle of separation of these two offices is so widely accepted and well-entrenched in the governance literature, that it is difficult to envisage any opposing views on this matter. If it turns out that the IMF insisted, or even supported, the holding of both of these offices by the same individual, then further questions will arise as to why the IMF would do such a thing.

It seems that either this issue did not catch the attention of the government, or it was a deliberate decision of the government to let this situation persist.

In case of the former, it is worrisome that the government is oblivious of the major governance flaws (let alone the questions of whether or how to fix it) of one of the most important national institutions, and is content with doing only that much as is required by multilateral lenders such as the IMF.

In case of the latter, it is worthwhile to know who the government's key advisors and decision makers on this matter were, and what they were thinking, while making this decision.

The ultimate, million-dollar question is 'what is the difference between being autonomous and being unaccountable?' In my humble opinion, a national institution whose performance can be evaluated and rewarded or sanctioned only by its Board of Directors, and not by the government, and whose chief executive is also the chairperson of its Board, is well past the status of an 'autonomous' institution and has reached the status of an 'unaccountable' institution.

The media would be well-advised to hold a well-reasoned debate on this matter so that the viewpoints of the government and the critics are properly explained and the general public, the analyst community, and the current and future makers of such decisions of high national importance, stand educated. ■

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Elite vs. Poor



Miftah Ismail – a leading businessman and a senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – delivered a speech at a TEDxPIDE event in March 2022 on ‘Unequal Opportunities: Elite vs Poor,’ in Pakistan. Narratives Magazine carries this speech with his permission. The speech has been slightly edited and trimmed to suit the print.

The 'one percent' Pakistan

A land where opportunity is inherited

The topic of my talk is "opportunity." I was asked to talk about opportunities for the young people in Pakistan. I said that I am going to give a talk, but it would be slightly different. My talk today is about the 'one percent society.' Because in Pakistan, we only provide opportunities to the top one percent, not to the rest of the population. So, if you belong to the privileged one percent then you will have a lot of opportunities. But if you don't belong to that privileged one percent then sorry... opportunities are not for you. The appropriate name for Pakistan really should not be the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, but it should be called the 'One Percent Republic of Pakistan.'

Now let's do a mental exercise buying a farm. Suppose we buy a farm with a horse stable, which has 100 horses. And when you buy the farm, you ask the manager 'what do you do?' The manager replies that 'every year we send one horse to a very competitive local race.' You ask 'how does the horse do?' He replies that 'every year our horse comes near the bottom.' When asked which horse he sends, the manager says that 'we used to have a horse named Babur. Once Babur died, we started sending his son Humayun. They both finish last, or second to the last.'

Naturally, you ask why the manager doesn't have all the horses in the stable race with each other, and send the fastest one to the race. But the manager remains adamant, 'this is not how we do things here. We just send Humayun every year.' This captures how we do things in Pakistan.

We don't give opportunities to all the Pakistani kids. We don't try to find out who is the smartest or the most capable. We just repeatedly allocate opportunities to the same people again and again. So, we have effectively limited our talent pool to the 'one percent.'

Obviously, if you limit yourself in such a way, you do not get the level of talent that countries who open the field to all of their people get. Now the entire world is dominated by elites, regardless of the society. Therefore, Pakistani society is not exactly



Leading businessman Miftah Ismail argues that Pakistan lacks upward mobility due to its "absolutely horrible education system."

unique in the sense that we have elite privilege, but we are a more elitist society than most.

Even in the United States, for instance, billionaires pay a lower percentage of their income as tax than millionaires do, but what is good about America is that there is a high rate of turnover among the composition of the elite. They keep changing. If you look at the names of the American elite from 100 years ago you have names like Rockefeller and DuPont, but now you have people like Elon Musk, who was an immigrant from South Africa or Steve Jobs, who was also the son of an immigrant, or Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg who were not from super rich families. If you look at the rich people in Pakistan today; the Habibs, the Dawoods, the Sehgal

and the Manshas, they were very rich 50 years ago also. Of course, there are some exceptions, but those are exceptions that prove the rule.

If you look at any field in Pakistan there is hardly any upward mobility. Look at politics, the leader of my own party, Mian Nawaz Sharif. He has been very successful in politics, but comes from a rich and privileged background. So do the Bhuttos and Prime Minister Imran Khan. Other than Altaf Hussain, the vast majority of our prominent politicians come from very privileged families.

Furthermore, our top generals. Mostly, they have fathers who were also high-ranking military officials. So, if we think back to the story of the farmer and the horses, generals' sons become generals, doctors' sons become doctors, businessmen's children become businessmen and so on.

Hence, our society lacks dynamism due to the lack of upward mobility. If you look at Ronald Regan, his father was a shoe salesman. Bill Clinton's father was an alcoholic. Gerald J. Ford was an orphan. We don't see people of such backgrounds at the top in our country. You don't see the son of a *mali* (gardener), *bawarchi* (cook), or a driver doing well in Pakistan.

So, we limit our leadership to the elite

The real barrier in Pakistan is that of the English language. English is the cleaver in our society. It separates the masses from the elites.



Most Pakistani children receive a woefully inadequate education, limiting their life prospects.

few.

How does our elite sustain this? How does it succeed in keeping the masses down, in keeping with the colonial mindset? Well if we think about it, the armed forces of Pakistan are basically represented by two districts in northern Punjab, a few districts in central Punjab dominate the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, and in the last few years it is said that around 95 percent of the people hired by the Sindh government speak the Sindhi language to the exclusion of those 30-40 percent, who do not. But the barrier in Pakistan is not of an ethnic nature. The real barrier in Pakistan is that of the English language. English is the cleaver in our society. It separates the masses from the elites. How has this been sustained for so many years? Well, primarily, it is due to our absolutely horrible education system.

Our education system is made up of three streams. One stream which is mostly public schools and some very low-priced, low-quality private schools (are) mainly in the lower-income areas. There, the kids go to school, spend or rather waste about five hours and then come back home. The kids in this stream are basically being trained to become poor members of society. Then you have the expensive English-medium schools. There the students are trained to become middle-class managers, professionals etc. and that's pretty good. There are some ex-

If this country is ever to become rich, or even middle-class, we need to educate our children but we are failing 99 percent of our kids.

ceptional students in this stream, who can go on and make it to the very top. And then there are only two schools, which provide the elite rulers across all of Pakistan; the Aitchison College Lahore and the Karachi Grammar School.

The former provides you with half of your cabinet today, it provides you with most of your political and military elite, while the latter provides around 70 percent of the rich people in Pakistan. 100 percent of the very rich people's children in Pakistan go to these schools. With a few exceptions, these are the schools for the very elite, since the colonial days.

The first stream is basically not training people. You have 10th grade kids coming out of them who cannot write two sentences in any language and are functionally innumerate. For the past God knows, 50 to 70 years, we have been debating which language to teach our kids

in? Every Chinese scientist has learnt science in Chinese, while in our elitist society if an actor speaks English badly or in a funny accent, he is lampooned. It is a weird society. And we sustain this privilege. So we have not been able to decide whether to teach Sariki or Sindhi kids in their native language or in Urdu or English. Then somehow we have decided that we are not really going to teach them science. We're not really going to teach them math. And the – generally speaking – one percent kids, who go to America or England and come back to Pakistan, all the nice power positions are for them.

You have really smart people in Pakistan, who work as carpenters, bus drivers etc. In America, sons and daughters of bus drivers and cooks become professors and go on to win Field Medals and Nobel Prizes, while most of our kids are relegated to a life of unskilled labour because they simply never had a shot. So this is a weird society in the sense that it is absolutely a one percent opportunity society.

Since this was a talk on opportunity, I am going to end on a slightly positive note. I can tell you the secret of success in this globalized world. And this is not my secret. My father was a very rich man. I could have been a complete idiot – and perhaps I am – but given my background, it was sort of guaranteed that I would do well in life.

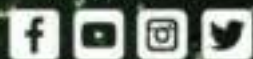
But for the rest of the world, what is the secret to success? Well, as most economists will tell you, it is about necessary and sufficient conditions, and education is still a necessary condition for success. You could be really smart, but if you are not educated, you will find it hard to move upwards. So, in Pakistan or anywhere else in the world, the only necessary condition for success is education. And the sufficient condition for success is also education, including in Pakistan, where you have no opportunities if you are not from the privileged class. If you educate yourself you will inevitably get ahead, even if you do not reach the very top, you will get ahead quite a bit.

This is the main issue in Pakistan. We do not impart serious education on most of our children, so if you need to get educated, you have to do it on your own. If this country is ever to become rich, or even middle-class, we need to educate our children but we are failing 99 percent of our kids. ■

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By Dr. Salman Shah

The writer is a former Finance Minister and founder of Bridge-Asia Financial Services.

Transforming Pakistan

Pakistan's economy has neither lived up to the expectations of the people nor up to its huge potential

The National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26 highlights geo-economics along with geo-politics as its twin pillars. Its launch for public consumption coincided with the passage of the supplementary finance bill by the Parliament of Pakistan in January 2022. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions appropriately highlight the dire state of the economy, and the media has been at the forefront in showing the pain and agony faced by the people living in a debt-ridden economy. The comprehensive NSP declaration was a timely message that the security of the country was closely linked to its economic strength. A message that was needed to remind the decision makers and the stakeholders that a strong economy was the base on

which the other pillars of the state stood. External and internal security, foreign relations, food security, law and order, welfare of the people and internal cohesion all depend on a healthy and a vibrant economy. Unless the economy generates the needed wealth and resources, all elements of state power stand eroded.

Over the last many decades, Pakistan's economy has neither lived up to the expectations of the people nor up to its huge potential. A large youthful population, abundant natural resources, a strategic location and a huge pool of hardworking, talented people can provide the foundations on which a strong economy can be built. Yet, successive governments have failed to cash in on the opportunity to pull Pakistan out of the shackles of poverty and backwardness.

To fully comprehend the importance of a competitive economy as the basis of an effective national security policy, the decision makers need to relate to contemporary real-world development examples to find a way forward. In this context, a comparison of Pakistan's economic trajectory with the evolution of South Korean economic prowess is instructive.

50 years ago, in the early 1970s, Pakistan and South Korea, two mid-sized third world countries, had the same per capita income and because both faced existential threats from belligerent neighbours, both spent almost 6 percent of their respective GDPs on their defence. Since then, the per capita income of South Korea has increased by over 233 times, while Pakistan has managed to increase its per capita income by only 11 times. Both countries continue to face the same belligerent neighbours, but now spend approximately three percent of their respective GDPs on defence. For Pakistan this amounts to around \$10 billion a year versus \$60 billion a year for South Korea. Clearly South Korea has been able to transform its backward economy of the 1970s into an awesome wealth producing machine that can simultaneously finance its national security needs and promote the welfare of its people, but Pakistan has failed miserably to do so.

How was South Korea able to break the curse of backwardness and achieve an economic transformation, while a similar transformation continues to evade Pakistan? From the very beginning, South Korea, despite facing an existential threat from North Korea, endeavoured to boost and magnify its economic size. And it tried to achieve this goal without compromising its independence in the pursuit of security. The South Koreans met their defence needs without overreliance on their cold war allies. Pakistan's efforts were similar as it sought the same western allies to counter its existential threat from the east and tried to build the economy to sustain its defence needs, but the results were opposite.

Both countries made a transition from military dictatorships to democracy but their transitions from dictatorship to democracy followed very different paths. South Korea's transition from a military dictatorship to a vibrant democracy did not create the hiccups nor the disruptions that a similar transition did in

Pakistan. The South Korean path to economic transformation was smooth and exponential whereas the Pakistani path was discontinuous and suffered many reversals as the vagaries of its politics demolished its economic foundations. The result is that today, according to the World Economic Forum, South Korea is the world's 13th most competitive country, whereas Pakistan ranks at the lowly 110th position, one of the least competitive in Asia. South Korea as a matter of routine generates around \$100 billion in current account surpluses every year, while

ent judiciary, tax system, investment freedom and trade freedom rank among the best. Its anti-corruption efforts are also world class. In contrast, Pakistan ranks 152nd out of 161 countries in economic freedom; 34th out of 40 countries in the Asia Pacific region. Pakistan has the worst ecosystem in the world for a free economy, it is highly-bureaucratic, over-regulated, over-protected and corrupt. We have evolved over the years as a dysfunctional, extractive economic system, which is now the biggest threat to our national security.

In the last 50 years, while the Koreans



Can Pakistan replicate South Korea's economic miracle?

Pakistan continues to be constrained by its huge current account deficits and relies on excessive foreign debts and the IMF programmes to sustain itself.

The South Korean miracle is a magnificent celebration of its civil and military leadership, which nurtured a two trillion-dollar vibrant, entrepreneurial, high-tech and modern economy with the principles of economic freedom well entrenched in its economic frameworks and constitution. It excels in most booming global markets from electronics, engineering, automobiles, chemicals, shipbuilding and telecommunications to robotics. Driven by the business freedoms granted to its private sector, the role of the government is facilitative but demanding.

The Economic Freedom Index of the Heritage Foundation ranks South Korea among the top 20 in the world, with its governance institutions meeting and exceeding international best standards and practices. Its property rights, independ-

were building their economic powerhouse, we were busy strangling the very foundations of a modern, competitive economy. During this time, we have had military rule for 20 years and civilian rule for 30 years. Military rule always followed a period of civilian rule, purportedly to fix the mess created by the civilians.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was at the helm of affairs for 14 of these years under the firm control of the Bhutto dynasty, which is now in its third generation. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has ruled for 11 years in the iron grip of the Sharif family, which is now preparing its second generation to take over. The military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq ruled for 11 years with the active support of the Sharif family, while General Pervez Musharraf, in power for around nine years, was fully supported by the PML-Q and the PPP-Patriots.

These handful of players are responsible for our current economic mess. They

are the rulers, who created the enormous external debt of the country. They are the rulers who have left us with a dysfunctional judicial system, a dysfunctional bureaucracy, archaic economic rules and regulations, the complex processes and systems that create rent seeking and corruption, and a banking system that only serves the elite. They are the ones responsible for our dismal rankings in most economic indicators, including our 152nd and 156th ranks in the Economic Freedom Index and the Human Development Index, respectively. These are the politicians responsible for our shocking economic performance in the global race of nations. Over the last five decades, it is difficult to describe the efficacy or the vision of the policies pursued by these politicians other than to classify them as capricious, unnecessary, wasteful, fraudulent, unworkable, ill-conceived, and badly-implemented, which has led to disastrous consequences.

Four beguiling boondoggles have shaped our economic contours over the last 50 years. The first was the slogan of 'Roti, Kapra and Makaan,' raised by the PPP to sweep into power in the 1970s. But instead of fulfilling its promises, the PPP went about decimating the entrepreneurial foundations of the economy as, with a stroke of the pen, it nationalised the productive and financial sectors of the economy. In one go, the very entrepreneurs who could have generated great wealth for the nation, found themselves deprived of their economic freedoms and assets. Overnight, the footprint of the government increased manifold and bureaucratic control over the economy was made absolute. The wealth creating capacity was demolished. The economy lost its private sector engine and its direction. In subsequent stints in office, the PPP tried to reverse the damage but to no avail. The damage of nationalisation still reverberates through the economic structure of Pakistan.

The second boondoggle was floated by General Zia to counter the PPP. He introduced an Islamisation drive to legitimise his coup and force the people on to a straight and narrow path. In the process, he disabused any notions of Pakistan be-



Prior to the 1970s nationalisation, Pakistan was one of Asia's leading industrial nations.

According to the World Economic Forum, South Korea is the world's 13th most competitive country, whereas Pakistan ranks at the lowly 110th position.

coming a modern, international hub for tourism, commerce, finance or manufacturing. In his 11 years, he turned Pakistan into a very conservative, intolerant and divisive country. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was his lucky break and he became the conduit for Jihad-e-Afghanistan, which contributed to his longevity but did nothing for the country's economic wellbeing. Ably assisted by the PML-N, General Zia thrived on maintaining the status-quo and did not endeavour to privatise, deregulate, liberalise or reform in any significant manner, nor create an environment of economic freedom that could have turned Pakistan into an economic powerhouse.

The third major boondoggle was floated by Nawaz Sharif to make Pakistan an Asian Tiger. He started out well by launching an aggressive privatisation programme, but very quickly got it mired in allegations of corruption and crony capitalism. To the great misfortune of Pakistanis, Sharif's governance model was

driven by tight family control, total disregard for conflict-of-interest principles and a management model derived from running a large undocumented business entity. His foreign currency account freedoms were designed to permit money laundering by corrupting the banking channels. His profligate ways led the country to bankruptcy, not once but twice in his various terms. His style of governance led him into damaging confrontations with seven army chiefs. Instead of making Pakistan an Asian tiger, he left it pauperised and highly indebted to international creditors.

The fourth boondoggle was undertaken by General Musharraf, who launched the era of 'enlightened moderation and ruthless accountability.' He took over in a bloodless coup from Nawaz Sharif, who got convicted in the infamous hijacking case. General Musharraf established the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) headed by a senior military general. The ruthless accountability campaign targeted not only politicians, but also leading businessmen, who were put behind bars for dodging taxes and defaulting on bank loans. The draconian measures tanked the economy, compelling the regime to undertake a U-Turn. The tax authorities were tethered by the removal of their discretionary powers and the introduction of a self-assessment tax scheme, which was easy to comply with. Privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation of the economy were accelerated. The measures led to Pakistan becoming the second-fastest growing economy in Asia, driven by an investment boom comprising both foreign and domestic investors. The debt-to-GDP ratio tumbled from a high of 100 percent in 1999 down to 54 percent in 2007. The investment-to-GDP ratio exceeded an all-time high of 23 percent. With the economy growing at over 7 percent during 2004 to 2007, an ambitious armed forces modernisation plan was developed and put into execution mode.

The virtuous cycle of economic freedoms, investments, economic growth and poverty reduction came to an end when the 'Western allies' of Musharraf cooked up a plan to create a hybrid dream team, comprising the military ruler and Benazir Bhutto, to navigate the quagmire of be-

ing the frontline state in the war on terror. The infamous National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) was promulgated, which opened the floodgates for the hitherto discredited leadership to make a triumphant comeback, knocking out the General's pledge to root out corruption and hold the rich and powerful accountable.

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto paved the way for the PPP, headed by the bereaved widower Asif Ali Zardari, to come into power for a stint of five years, followed by five years for the PML-N.

The decade under these experienced political stalwarts showed that they did not learn any lessons from the past. After their 10 year rule from 2008-18, the economy was in tatters. The debt-to-GDP ratio went from 54 percent in 2007 to 85 percent in 2018 and, more dangerously, external debt increased from \$38 billion to around \$90 billion, while the investment-to-GDP ratio never exceeded 15 percent. Exports stagnated and imports multiplied on the back of a debt financed, overvalued exchange rate and a grossly import dependent and expensively padded energy sector. Rather than meeting the requirements of national security, the economy was caught in an external debt trap and needed the crutches of the IMF to survive. The aftereffects are reverberating throughout Pakistan.

Going forward, if we continue doing what we have done for the past 50 years, we are doomed. We live in a tough neighbourhood and to survive, we must become the fastest growing economy of the region. We need to pursue a national security policy that ensures the welfare of the people, provides adequate financing for our defence needs, enables us to pursue geo-economic objectives and counter economic coercion from any quarter whatsoever. In this case, the most important pillar of our NSP has to be the development of a powerful economic machine that churns out the wealth needed to meet national security requirements, somewhat similar to what South Korea has done over the past 50 years.

It is critical that we should focus, without any delay, on laying the foundations of a \$5 trillion economy to be achieved by 2047. This would require painstakingly upgrading and building an ecosystem

that unreservedly promotes entrepreneurial freedoms, well-functioning competitive markets and a capable judiciary and bureaucracy that meet international standards of governance.

The size of our working age population (sixth largest in the world) mandates us to become a major export-production hub of our region. This would require building excellence in multiple value chains in high-value agriculture, hi-tech



Pakistan's economic prosperity and national security are intimately linked.

manufacturing and sophisticated services. Our objective has to be creating unambiguous competitive advantage in each chain through productivity enhancements to international standards.

It would necessitate facilitation of the private sector, both domestic and foreign, to invest in the modernisation of Pakistan, simultaneously, the government's focus has to shift from an 'NOC culture' towards a culture of promoting supply chain development. This would require dismantling the restrictive governance and institutional regimes, developing dedicated physical infrastructure for each chain, facilitating knowledge-based development, promoting technology up-gradation and creating specialist capital and financing systems.

From a national security point-of-view, fixing the economy in all its dimensions is critical. The most urgent objectives are:

1. Completing the ambitious macro-economic reform agenda embedded in the IMF programme in letter and spirit and meeting all its performance criteria.
2. Executing a comprehensive and

accelerated programme of rapid privatisation.

3. Establishing the ecosystem for economic freedoms, including unfettered property rights, freedom to invest, freedom to trade, and freedom to do business. Rollback of the heavy hand of the state impeding our economy, through a massive deregulation plan.
 4. Pursuing a comprehensive strategy to enhance value chain productivity and investments to global standards.
 5. Developing the financial sector to provide for the financing and capital needs of all sectors and segments of the economy.
 6. Transforming the energy sector from being an imported and expensive millstone around our necks to a sector providing energy independence to the country, with abundant availability of competitively priced power; a vital economic input.
 7. Reforming the judicial system to promote economic efficiency, commercial activity, the rule of law and enforcement of contracts.
 8. Preparing a properly articulated economic transformation plan with implementation responsibility assigned to each relevant entity of state and requiring all its organs to effectively coordinate efforts as an integral part of the proposed NSP, the first leg of which is destined to finish by 2026.
- Economic strength is the key to our national security, international relationships, economic security, and a respectful place in the ranks of the developed countries of the world. This would entail reinventing and organising the state to focus on an investment-led economic transformation, which will be challenging. It will involve reforming the bureaucratic governance structures, processes and personnel that are firmly entrenched in the status-quo. Furthermore, we will have to consign our brand of power politics based on ethnicity, sectarianism, divisiveness and dynastic control to the dustbin of history and refocus our politics towards a national consensus of relentless nation building. The challenging tasks are doable, but will need the absolute commitment of the highest echelons of the state, including the parliament, the executive, the judiciary and the armed forces. ■



And the Rupee Falls

From 123 against the US dollar in August 2018, the Pakistani rupee has plunged to 184.42 by the end-March 2022. This is one of the highest devaluations of the rupee in Pakistan's entire history

Pakistani rupee, which plunged nearly 50 percent against the US Dollar under the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government, will remain under pressure due to the gnawing trade deficit, huge debt repayments and simmering political uncertainty.

From 123 in August 2018, the rupee plunged to a record 185-plus against the dollar by early-April 2022. This makes it one of the highest devaluations of the currency in Pakistan's entire history

As the PTI government did steer the economy to some sort of stability, by the time it left on April 10, the economic indicators, including import bills and trade balance have been showing a worsening trend in the wake of rising imports that are putting pressure on the rupee. Under the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) programme, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has left it to the market forces to determine the exchange rate, which further accelerated the free fall of the rupee.

With inflation now running in the double digits, the delay in the release of

funds under the IMF's 7th review, the gradual decline of foreign reserves, skyrocketing global oil prices and the political instability in the country, the Pakistani rupee continues to remain under constant pressure.

Leading economist and social policy analyst Abid Qaiyum Suleri said that Pakistan's imports remain higher than exports. "The current account deficit – currently at \$544 billion – has widened because Pakistan has to make import payments in dollars and owing to the short supply of the greenback, the local currency depreciates."

Suleri said that recently Pakistan repaid a loan to China and as a result, foreign reserves have further dipped. The current political uncertainty is also adding to Pakistan's economic woes as investors have chosen a cautious path that has also led to the "dollarisation of the economy," he added.

While explaining the SBP's hands off approach, Suleri said that the central bank can only interfere in stabilising the rupee "when you have enough dollars through

export earnings, foreign direct investment or remittances. But in Pakistan's case, dollars remain in short supply."

He said that he was against the policy of borrowing dollars and releasing them into the market to stabilise the local currency. "If the SBP resorts to pumping dollars in the local market to stabilise the local currency, its own reserves would dwindle and the trade deficit would further widen. This would create more demand for the US currency and Pakistan would face another crisis in the shape of a dollar crunch."

He said that if you set an artificial rate of the dollar, as was done under the previous PML-N government, the cost of imports would increase.

He said that in the short term, Pakistan needs to review energy prices and take some tough decisions. He said that if Pakistan keeps energy prices at the current subsidised rates till June – and if their prices continue to go up in the international market – the country will have to spend more dollars against imports which will further take a toll on foreign re-

serves and put pressure on the rupee.

“Pakistan will have to pay attention to imports substitution and unnecessary imports have to be curtailed and the energy prices have to be set according to the international rates and subsidies, if absolutely necessary, will have to be given selectively.”

Refusing to speculate about the future levels of the rupee against the dollar, he said that could lead to the selling or buying of dollars. “It will have to be seen how the current or the new government deals with the IMF and clinches a deal with China for the rollover of the loan payment.”

He said that the Gulf countries may increase their oil output which may bring down the oil prices, cushioning the blow Pakistan is currently facing in the shape of expensive imports of commodities, including oil and coal.

“Pakistan is currently facing a dollar crunch and the heavy payments on imports are taking a toll on the foreign reserves, which is putting pressure on the rupee.”

Suleri said that the international factors, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic, have played their part in intensifying Pakistan's economic challenges as no country could have predicted them.

“The rupee is under constant pressure because oil, steel, coal and iron ore prices all have skyrocketed in the international market and Pakistan is a net importer of all these commodities.”

He said that Pakistan needs a drastic cut on the import of luxury goods and must levy higher taxes on their imports to save dollars.

At the same time, exports need to be increased and the government must focus on local manufacturing.

Waqar Masood, former advisor to Prime Minister Imran Khan on Revenue and Finance, said that the government's lopsided policies have to be blamed for the devaluation of the rupee.

“The PTI government blamed the previous government for stabilising the local currency through artificial means, but [left] the rupee to the market forces to play havoc with it.”



As the price of oil imports and debt servicing grows, the rupee is falling faster against the dollar than ever before.

“The PTI government blamed the previous government for stabilising the local currency through artificial means, but [left] the rupee to the market forces to play havoc with it.”

Masood said that now the IMF fully dictates Pakistan's economy and when the PTI government attempted to resist their demands, the international lender pulled the string and withheld the seventh tranche of the programme, which resulted in a further dip in foreign reserves – which were, he said, about to touch around 20 billion dollars in August 2021, but fell to 12 billion dollars by March end.

He said that instead of imposing taxes in the budget, the government introduced the mini-budget under the dictation of the IMF and opened the economy abruptly

and generously gave funds to legislators.

He said that Pakistan also received a \$3 billion loan from Saudi Arabia and separately offered a \$1 billion deferred payment facility for oil import as part of a special economic support package, but nobody knows where all this external aid went or where it was spent.

“The devaluation of the Pakistani currency is being dictated by the IMF and the country has become subservient to the monetary policies of international lenders to determine currency rates.”

He said that the economy is going through a period of volatility because the demand for the dollar has risen and no government can do anything to contain this upward trend in the near future. The possibility of a further slide in the value

of the rupee cannot be ruled out but that would be disastrous for overall economic growth, he said.

Arsalan Siddiqui, research head at Optimus Capital, said that the delay in the IMF's seventh review was one of the main reasons behind the depreciation of the rupee.

He said that despite the 16 percent rise in exports, the current account deficit being at a sustainable level of \$545 million in February and strong growth in large scale manufacturing, the sudden rise in oil prices and exogenous shocks were posing a threat to the gains made on the economic front. He said political uncertainty is also adding to Pakistan's woes as rising oil prices are eating up foreign reserves and putting constant pressure on the local currency.

The high oil import bill remains the primary factor taking a toll on local currency, while debt servicing is the other factor responsible for the fall in the foreign exchange reserves, thus putting further pressure on the rupee, he said.

He said that Pakistan is left with no option but to resort to more borrowings from international lenders to stabilise its dwindling foreign reserves, which, in itself, remains an uphill task. ■

Balance Sheet

Ukraine Crisis & Pakistan



The Great Economic Squeeze

The Ukraine War is sending prices of oil, coal, gas and basic food up with the speed of a rocket. This means trouble for Pakistan

By Ali Mahmood

Before his Russia visit, Prime Minister Imran Khan said the Ukraine crisis had nothing to do with Pakistan. On arriving in Moscow, he commented, "What a time I have come. So much excitement." Both his statements show a complete lack of appreciation that the Ukraine War was the most important event in our current history which would have a devastating impact on the future of Pakistan.

When Putin moved his troops into Ukraine, nobody expected the response of the West to be so aggressive, so strong, as they imposed the harshest economic sanctions on Russia. The West denied the SWIFT bank transfer system to Russia as well as shutting off their airspace. In a series of other measures, the Western bloc also denied shipping for transactions in Russia and halted the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, with giant companies from the West closing down their operations in this former communist state.

BP, which owned 20 percent of Rosneft – Russia's biggest oil company – closed down and wrote off its Russian interests with assets over \$25 billion. Refugees, fleeing Ukraine, quickly exceeded 2 million, with expectations of up to 5 million which would make Ukrainians the world's largest refugee population. About 85 percent of Russia's foreign reserves of \$600 billion were frozen by the West. As the oligarch billionaires were sanctioned, dramatic news releases showed their super luxury megayachts being hunted in the chase for oligarch assets.

The Ukraine War has become a game changer for the Western bloc and for Russia as the world divides into two camps. Even Switzerland, a traditionally neutral country, has joined the EU camp. Despite the prevailing mood of 'you are either with us or against us,' Imran Khan wants Pakistan to be unaligned, citing the immense loss of 80,000 lives and \$100



Fuel prices are set to skyrocket in the wake of the US sanctions on Russia.

billion economic losses by participation in the Afghan wars. His public statements show that his political heart does not lie with the United States. Can Pakistan avoid commitment in this new world divide?

At a time when Pakistan's economy is threatened by its CAD (current account deficit), we desperately need more dollars and more exports if we are to meet our liabilities. The dollars come mainly from China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The exports go mainly to the EU and the US.

Not just the PTI government, but all of Pakistan is under attack from inflation and the current account deficit. The Ukraine War has already seen commodity prices rise with astonishing speed to new record heights but you ain't seen nothing yet. It's going to get worse, much worse, very quickly. Cost of imported energy lies at the heart of Pakistan's dollar crisis. Since September 2021, international oil prices have doubled as they rose from \$63 to \$125. In the last month, Dutch gas has risen from Euros 84 to 208 per ton; British gas has also risen by 250 percent, the price of Newcastle coal has almost doubled in a month from \$250 to \$440 a ton. Oil traders and analysts are predicting oil at \$200 and Alexander Novak, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, is warning that the price of oil could even reach \$300 if the US and Europe ban

imports.

Russia's top 5 exports are crude oil (\$123B), refined oil products (\$66B), natural gas (\$26B), coal (\$17B) and wheat (\$8B). Russia produces 50 million tons of fertiliser every year (13 percent of the world's total) and exports from Ukraine and Russia of sunflower oil make up 60 percent of world exports. The risk of supply chain disruption due to the Ukraine War is diverting many buyers to palm oil. Palm oil prices have doubled over the last six months, burdening Pakistan which imported palm oil at a cost of \$1.7 billion in 2021. International wheat prices have risen by 40 percent over the last month. The impact of inflation in Pakistan, over the coming year, will be severe. The Ukraine War is sending prices of energy (oil, coal, gas) and basic food (wheat, edible oils and fertiliser) up and up with the speed of a rocket. This means trouble for Pakistan.

Imran Khan has an emotional antipathy to the rich and powerful West and resents being ordered what to do. But Pakistan's economic survival is highly dependent on the IMF, EU, GSP+ and FATE, all of which are controlled by Europe and America. Pakistan trembles at every session of IMF negotiations, and is constantly worrying about withdrawal of tariff privileges in its main export markets. Pakistan has suffered penalties of over \$50 million



Ukrainian expatriates in London protest outside Downing Street, calling for an aggressive Western response against Russia.

imposed by the US on the National Bank of Pakistan, has had long delays and difficulties in keeping the IMF on board with its current programme, remains on the FATF grey list, and is at risk in its trade relationship with Europe (protected by GSP+), its biggest trading partner, if it steps too far out of line.

Pakistan looks to be \$40-50 billion short in its dollar requirements this year, with the rising prices resulting from the Ukraine War. Will it be able to beg or borrow such a large amount from China? Imran Khan wants to maintain a balanced relationship with both Russia and the West. How to define a balanced relationship in the context of a Pakistan dependent on the largess of whoever is ready to give, whether China, America, Europe, or the oil-rich Gulf Arabs? Pakistan's balanced relationship seems to have fallen between a rock and a hard place. The *Business Recorder*, in its headlines of March 8, 2022 stated "Government seeks \$21 billion support from China." The government is optimistic in expecting so much from China, while the CPEC is falling behind because of broken commitments as Pakistan defaults on its contractual payments to the Chinese power plants and gives the Rs. 250 billion owed on this account to EHSAS for handouts. At the same time, the government is giving up a similar amount in petroleum levy on the grounds that there is surplus tax collection. The priority given to winning voter approval rather than honouring contracts indicates that elections are not

Imran Khan has an emotional antipathy to the West and resents being ordered what to do. But Pakistan's economic survival is highly dependent on the IMF, EU, GSP+, and FATF, all of which are controlled by Europe and America.

out of the question.

As the economic crisis grows, domestic politics faces instability. Will the no-confidence move against the PTI government unseat Imran Khan, who in turn, threatens that he will be dangerous in opposition? The economic situation is grave, with so little hope on the horizon that any incoming government will take the brunt of public anger in the terrible times that are coming. Even an interim government, till the elections, will attract hatred and its leaders will have no political future to look forward to. The establishment will have to tread carefully if it is to avoid opprobrium so that Imran Khan and the PTI take the fall for the bad times. The

establishment will stay clear of frontline politics.

Over the coming year, law and order is likely to break down as food becomes more expensive and poverty increases. After some months, blackouts or brown-outs will reappear despite sufficient generating capacity, because, as has already happened in Sri Lanka, there will be no money to buy expensive oil and gas. Corruption will increase as more and more people decide to take the money and run. The State Bank will try to hold the value of the rupee through intervention and selling of dollars. But this strategy can only continue for as long as foreign reserves don't run out. Finally, the State Bank will give up and let the market decide, after delaying the inevitable at the cost of burning our scarce reserves. Investors will start to redeem Roshan Digital dollar accounts yielding 7 percent, which will look unattractive compared with higher yields of 13-15 percent on Pakistani US dollar-denominated bonds and sukuk available in international markets. When the State Bank starts to pay off those existing Roshan Digital dollar accounts, the fall of the rupee will accelerate.

Nothing, not even bad times, last forever. Finally, a solution will be found to the Ukraine crisis, but this will only be after the protagonists have inflicted enough pain on each other for sanity to prevail. The outcome will be determined not by who is right and who is wrong, but by who can take the pain longer. Before a war, countries feel rich, after a war countries are broke. At the start of a war, people argue about right and wrong, after a war people think only of peace and security. Peace is valued more by a people after they have suffered war.

What will happen to Pakistan? In the depths of despair, Pakistan will finally make the long overdue decision to build a nation rather than loot it. Authoritarian leaders will replace populist democrats. Leaders will turn from self-interest to service. Hard work will replace self-deception, education and merit will again be respected, religious extremism and terrorism will be crushed, and the long struggle to escape the quicksand of the past will prevail. This is the only cure, but it could take decades of suffering before people see sense. Meanwhile we must endure the bad times and await the future. ■



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By Nazim F. Haji

The writer is a businessman, civil rights activist and the former chief of the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC).

Banking on Ombudsman

Pakistanis should be knocking at the doors of the Federal and Provincial Ombudsman for free and speedy resolutions of their complaints. At the Ombudsman's office, one does not have to engage a lawyer and the complaints have to be resolved within 60 days

The position of ombudsman was originally created in Sweden in the 1800s and known as ombudsperson, ombud, ombuds or public advocate. The *Riksdag* (Swedish parliament) appointed an Ombudsman to resolve difficult problems in the absence of the country's abducted king. In more recent times, ombuds programmes have been created throughout the world to assist citizens, consumers and employees who wish to address concerns about administrative

actions or the lack thereof.

In the United States, various types of ombuds functions are utilised in the state and the local governments, nursing homes, the media, colleges and universities, corporations, prisons, and agencies of the federal government. During the period of nationwide campus unrest in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of universities established ombuds programmes in an attempt to respond to demands for a neutral, confidential and safe place to discuss concerns and voice

complaints.

The Government of Sindh, while taking a lead role in the recent lifting of the ban on student unions and anticipated violence (imaginary or otherwise) expected in the campuses of universities and colleges, would be well advised to establish ombuds in all of them or at least in the major ones, to begin with.

In Pakistan, the establishment of an ombudsman institution had been advocated for some time, before Article 276 of the Interim Constitution of 1972 provided for the appointment of the Federal Ombudsman (*Wafaqi Mohtasib*) and the Provincial Ombudsman. The constitution of 1973 also provided for a Federal Ombudsman and the institution was eventually created through the Establishment of the Office of *Wafaqi Mohtasib* (Ombudsman) Order, 1983 (President's Order No. 1 of 1983), which is now a part of the Constitution of Pakistan by virtue of Article 270-A. It started functioning on 8 August 1983. A former Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, Justice (R) Sardar Muhammad Iqbal was the first Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan. He was also a member of the Punjab University's Syndicate. The present Honourable *Wafaqi Mohtasib* is Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi.

Basically, the function of the Federal Ombudsman is to provide speedy and expeditious relief to citizens by redressing their grievances, to promote good governance and, more importantly, provide it free of cost. As per the Federal Ombudsman Institutional Reforms Act 2013, the Federal Ombudsman enjoys administrative and financial autonomy. If one were to draw an analogy with the conventional justice system, the Federal Ombudsman enjoys the status of the Supreme Court; wherein an order by the Federal Ombudsman, while a review is permissible, the appeal lies with the President of Pakistan.

The *Wafaqi Mohtasib's* purpose is to institutionalise a system for enforcing administrative accountability through investigating and rectifying any injustice done to a person through "maladministration" by a Federal Agency or a Federal Government official. Appointed by the President, the Federal Ombudsman holds office for four years. This term cannot be extended or renewed.

Subsequently, the institution of

An important aspect of the Federal Ombudsman institutions is that an order once passed, cannot be challenged in any court of law and an appeal rests only with the President of Pakistan. So, virtually its stature is equivalent to that of the Supreme Court.

the Provincial Ombudsman was established in all the provinces. The Provincial Ombudsman Sindh was created in 1991 under the Establishment of the office of Ombudsman for the Province of Sindh Act, 1991 (Sindh Act No. 1 of 1992). Thereafter, the other provinces followed suit. (Punjab in 1996, Balochistan in 2001 and KP in 2010 – all through Ordinances).

All the above-mentioned Ombudsman offices, Federal and Provincial, were established to check

maladministration in general and were not equipped to deal with cases of a specialised nature such as taxation, banking and insurance. Hence, the Federal Tax Ombudsman was established in 2000 to deal with complaints against the federal tax agencies. Thereafter, the Federal Banking Ombudsman and Federal Insurance Ombudsman were established.

Having covered the history and the background of the institution of Ombudsman in Pakistan, I would like to emphasise and reiterate its concept of providing free and speedy justice. Free because one does not have to engage a lawyer and speedy as the complaint has to be resolved within 60 days. Furthermore, complaints can be lodged online, but thereafter physical hearings take place following due process. The purpose of this article is to create awareness and encourage the people to avail the facility of these institutionalised alternate dispute resolution mechanisms in Pakistan.

An important aspect of the Federal Ombudsman institutions is that an order once passed, cannot be challenged in any court of law and an appeal rests only with the President of Pakistan. So, its stature is virtually equivalent to that of the Supreme Court.

In conclusion, the proof is in the pudding. I have tried the Federal Ombudsman, Federal Tax Ombudsman and the FBO; and obtained 100 percent relief. ■



President Arif Alvi has called for strengthening the role of the Wafaqi Mohtasib as a speedier and cheaper alternative to the courts.



Stratagem

Russo-Ukrainian War

Time for a New Order

A new world order is in the offing as NATO fights Russia till the last Ukrainian standing



By Lt. Gen. (R.) Tariq Khan HI(M)

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

War is a curious thing, but the term is nevertheless all encompassing. It involves confrontation on many dimensions and not necessarily just a military conflict. The rationale for confrontation could be resource oriented or enhancement of influence or even ideological aims, however, more often than not, it includes all three. These objectives are usually achieved at the cost of one's adversary. The usual method to this madness lies in the fact that whereas one individual or group of belligerents set out to acquire goals they set for themselves, the other belligerents try to preserve, defend or contain whatever is being taken from them.

The confrontation can take place across a wide spectrum that includes di-



Ukrainian urban warfare tactics have put their civilian areas in the line of fire.

plomacy, economics, infrastructure, communication, energy, and fuel. However, military conflict is the last rung in an inter-state escalatory ladder and yet it is the smallest component. The military comes into play when all else fails. Its aim is to cause sufficient pain to the adversary to coerce him to acquiesce to one's demands.

When engaged in a military struggle, one finds that the conflict oscillates between total war and limited war. The former, at the theoretical level, in the extreme case, implies the total destruction of every person before coming to a resolu-

tion. This is highly unlikely, since a stage is always arrived at when the losing side decides to surrender before it is totally annihilated. Thus most military conflicts are limited to the extent till when a moment comes, where it is mutually decided to cease fire. This limit is determined by the side that surrenders.

The character of the war is determined by the method that is adopted by the two belligerents and could be asymmetric, the tempo that determines swift or slow conduct, causality intense or space focused and manoeuvre-oriented as opposed to kinetic battles.

The nature of war is determined by the type of war-style that is adopted, i.e. low intensity, conventional, missile based, defensive or offensive, urban or rural etc. As such the Russo-Ukraine war must be seen in the context of how wars have been understood over the ages.

The war in Ukraine did not start in the last few weeks or a month ago. This war has been waiting to happen since 2014, yet in many ways it goes back to 1991. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the basic rationale for NATO was in question since its primary objective was to contain the Soviet Union. Thus it listed sec-

The war in Ukraine did not start in the last few weeks or a month ago. This war has been waiting to happen since 2014, yet in many ways it goes back to 1991.



A huge fire engulfed a fuel depot in Belgorod, Russia on April 1, 2022, which Russia claims was the result of a helicopter attack by Ukrainian forces.

ondary roles such as ensuring peace in Europe and had even applied itself selectively in some places at opportune times such as Kosovo to ensure that it remains relevant and seen as having a purpose. Nevertheless, NATO's original member states in 1949 were 12 countries that expanded to 15 countries with Turkey and Greece joining it in 1952 and to 17 countries when West Germany and Spain joined it later.

This slowly changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as many nations that were in the Warsaw Pact were lured into NATO, expanding its membership to 30 nations. This was despite the verbal assurance given to Russia by the US Secretary State, James Baker: "Not one inch eastward," limiting the possibility of any NATO expansion.

Every nation has its sphere of influence depending on its capacity and Russia inherited this influence not from the Soviet Union but the Russian Empire since the 18th Century. With NATO meddling in the affairs of Eastern Europe, Russia was losing its sphere of influence and NATO forces were gradually creeping closer to Russian borders. Soon the West in general and the United States in particular began to influence Ukraine and attempted at getting it to become part of the EU and NATO. This was a direct threat to Russia.

Subsequently the West organised the 'Revolution of Dignity' overthrowing a

If Ukraine is eventually going to accept Russian conditions for a ceasefire, then it should do it sooner than later. Russia has no intent of occupying Ukrainian territory and would withdraw once its conditions are met.

pro-Russian Government in Ukraine and installing a Western-friendly administration. This led to uprisings in the South East of Ukraine in the ethnic Russian region of Donbass, comprising the two rebel states. The Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic now demanded independence.

Russia also claimed that Crimea, which consisted of Sevastopol, one of the three warm water ports, had an ethnic Russian majority population, and was under threat by Ukraine at the behest of Western influence. Russia annexed

Crimea in 2014, on the basis that it had always belonged to the Russian Empire and was merged with Ukraine by the Soviet Union for administrative purposes only and, as such, the transaction was neither legal nor recognisable. Based on its language and ethnicity, Crimea was given independence and made into an independent republic. In 2013/4 civil war in Ukraine picked up against the Donbas Region, resulting in the Minsk Agreement which failed and led to the Minsk Agreement 2.

The Agreement was concluded on the Normandy Format by an informal group that included France, Germany, the Rebel States, Ukraine and Russia.

Both sides now claim that the Minsk Agreement was not implemented by the other and Russia used it as a casus belli to invade Ukraine with the objective of giving the Donbas Region its independence.

The Donbas Region allows an alternative connection to Crimea via land for Russia. The invasion of the Donbas Region by Russia was motivated by the alleged threat to Crimea by a NATO inspired plan, where Ukraine was being encouraged to re-annex the State, thereby denying Russia Sevastopol a parking spot for its Black Sea Fleet.

Russia's objectives are to create an independent zone in the Donbas region, allowing it land contiguity to Crimea and developing a buffer Zone between itself and Ukraine. Secondly, it wants Ukraine to announce its neutrality so it does not align with the EU or NATO. Ukraine is not willing to give up the Donbas region or declare neutrality. So now the nature of this war has become graduated and incremental, swinging more and more towards total war as NATO looks to continue the conflict till the last Ukrainian. Thus, Russia is applying more and more pressure to convince Ukraine to acquiesce. Till Ukraine does not come to terms, the war will continue.

The Ukrainians have decided that the nature of war would be urban and have thus exposed the civilian population to collateral damage. Having done so, the Ukrainians are exploiting this nature of war to accuse Russia of war crimes and genocide. Although these accusations remain notional till now, since there is no practical way in implementing anything against Russia, they still create a seemingly legitimate cause to rally the world against Russia. Ukraine is also buying

time, hoping that resources and weapons systems arrive and that NATO will eventually declare a no-fly zone over the skies of Ukraine. This buying of time and fighting in the cities has swung the pendulum of the conflict more towards totality rather than being limited and civilian casualties are mounting. If Ukraine is eventually going to accept Russian conditions for a ceasefire, then it should do so sooner than later. Russia has no intent of occupying Ukrainian territory and would withdraw once its conditions are met, however, what's more important is that the unnecessary civilian casualties, destruction and displacement of people would cease. In the meanwhile, the West is egging the Ukrainians on to continue to fight, knowing very well what the likely outcome will be. Ukraine either does not seem to understand that it is being used to get to Russia or its leadership is deliberately towing the NATO line at the cost of its own country. In an analysis, it appears that the Russian offensive into Ukraine is actually a defensive manoeuvre triggered by the threat of NATO expansion.

Also the possibility of cutting off Crimea from Russia and denying Russia the warm waters of Sevastopol would make this a pre-emptive strike to deny NATO any military advantage detrimental to the Russian National Security. The West having been caught off guard did what they do best - put in a knee jerk response leading to sanctions, cutting off Russia from financial integration and withdrawing businesses. These steps will soon create a global food crisis, fuel and energy issues, and a hit on the petro-dollar financial system.

The United States' centre of gravity lies in its Dollar Reserves and the international status of the Dollar. As long as this is intact, it will go along with anything. That is why, democracy, as a US battle cry, is only when everything else is going their way but if it's not, the US can live with dictators, and extremists with equal ease.

The major effect of this war will be a shift away from the Dollar as the global reserve currency and the Chinese Yuan may gradually take over. Bullion trading may take over the Dollar economy system. As it is, India is paying for fuel from Russia in Roubles as are the other countries. The Russian News Channels have been blocked and only one side of the picture is being fed to people.



Ukrainian soldiers huddle behind a tank as they engage Russian forces outside Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city.

The Russo-Ukraine world has shaken up the Globe in more ways than one and it will never be the same again. The world is shifting back to regional approaches as opposed to global ones.

The obsession with Ukrainian Casualties and suffering as being displayed by the Western Media has exposed their bias, given how they ignore the carnage Western forces and proxies have unleashed in Palestine, Kashmir, Libya, Syria and Iraq. This war will end soon. Russia will probably have the upper hand but China will emerge as the winner.

Whatever may be the future, one

thing is certain, the Russo-Ukraine conflict has shaken up the globe in more ways than one and it will never be the same again. The world is shifting back to regional approaches as opposed to global ones. What happens or does not happen in a region will be determined by regional nations and not by external parties any longer. A new world order will emerge where the East and the West will have defined lines separating one world from the other. It may take years to happen but western prejudices, phobias and biases will define this more than any political propriety.

The United Nations has outlived its utility and has managed to reduce itself into a debating club. It may end up being replaced by a more even-handed, unbiased organisation that could act without that prejudice and political pressure that we see every other day. Maybe this leads to a fairer world where everyone would be equal and no one more equal than the other. One may even be accused of hoping for a world that can deal with the international environment and climate change, famine and issues such as displaced people on far more humane terms. ■

BOOKSTORE

— Author of the Month —



Kamran Asdar Ali

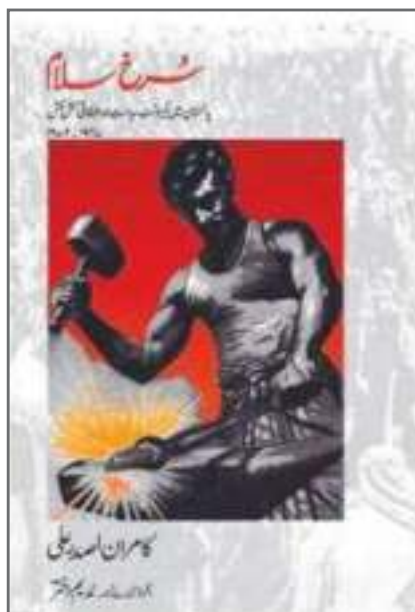
Untold Stories of the 'Reds'

A window into the ups and downs of the Communist Party of Pakistan and the arduous struggle of its Comrades



By Mujahid Barelvi

The writer is a senior journalist, writer and anchor at GTV News.



Surkh Salam

Author: Kamran Asdar Ali
Urdu Translation: Nadeem Akhtar
Publisher: Maktab-e-Danyal
Pages: 459
Price: Rs. 950

A January afternoon at the house, a few minutes' walk from the tube station, an elegant woman welcomed me at the doorstep with a big smile. Perhaps I reminded her of someone she knew during her Lahore days. After pleasantries, she asked me if I would like something, but the sentence was left unfinished. I was not sure whether it was an invitation for tea or lunch. It was one in the afternoon and I imagine she was offering me a cup of soup.

'What do you have,' I asked.

Well, I can offer you scotch or gin,' she replied.

I was a bit taken aback. I had come prepared for an interview and a drink on the rocks was not my idea of focusing on the topic. I declined, she smiled again and just said. 'All Pakistani communists started drinking before noon and they loved scotch, neat.' This was a delightful comment, welcoming and absolutely true. After all, she had known them all!"

When a researcher, with a plethora of foreign degrees, showcases a superficial, traditional, and narrow-minded reading of Communists, it raises a question on the author, Kamran Asdar Ali's ideological and intellectual might. The problem actually lies in his absolute agreement with an ill-informed, gross misrepresentation of Pakistani Communists.

Presently, neither does the Communist Party exist nor the card-holder Marxists. However, for decades rivals accuse many comrades of being 'atheists, immoral, and drunkards.' And the aforementioned anecdote reinforces this allegation.

When *Surkh Salam* – originally written in English – was translated in Urdu, I read it keenly, and the book took me down memory lane. It not only reignited memories but the history of leftist politics swept my mind.

Countless books have been written on Pakistan's founding party, the Muslim League and its leader Quaid-e-Azam

Muhammed Ali Jinnah, but we find a paltry amount of books published about the anti-Muslim League parties, nationalists, and progressive political forces. There are scattered accounts about the parties that opposed the Muslim League, such as the Awami Muslim League, the Awami League, the Azad Pakistan Party and the National Awami Party, though a large amount of memoirs and biographies have been written about the ebb and flow of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and leftist movements in the country.

The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, which led to the ban on the Communist Party, has been captured terrifically by Major (retired) Ishaque. Abd-ur-Rauf Malik, Sardar Shaukat Ali, Tufail Abbas, Abdullah Malik and Professor Jamal Naqvi's writings, also provide a lot of information and illustrate divisions within the Communist Party.

But at least this student of politics hasn't come across any book that could be called a comprehensive recollection of the CPP's history, even though, the Indian Communist Party's history has been compiled in various volumes.

In Pakistan, it was undoubtedly, Syed Sibte Hassan, a pioneer Party card-holder, who could have written an accurate history of the Communist Party since his works including, *Musa se Marx Tak*, *Maazi Ke Mazaar*, *Naveed-e-Fikr*, hold biblical status in the realm of ideological texts. If only, he had penned it, students and comrades like me would have gained an authentic understanding of the challenges, toils and struggles, as well as mistakes of the Pakistani Communists, which could have been passed on to the coming generations.

I won't hesitate to claim that since 1970, I have had the honour of staying in the company of a long list of Marxists whose names I must mention: Syed Sibte Hassan, Dr. Sher Afzal Malik, Dr. Haroon Ahmed, Dr. Muhammad Sarwar, Sobho Giyan Chandani, Minhaj Muhammad Khan



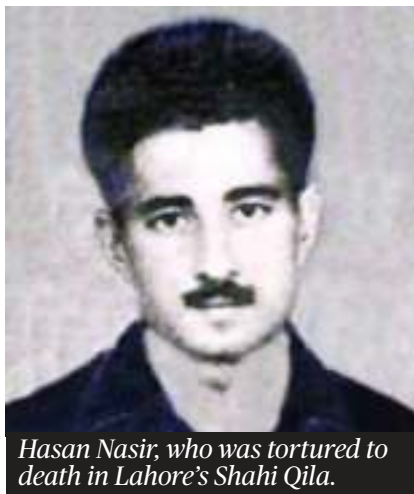
Three leftist pioneers, Syed Sibte Hassan, Dr. M. Sarwar and Faiz Ahmed Faiz sharing a light moment.

Burna, Mairaj Muhammad Khan, Sher Muhammad Marri, Afrasiyab Khattak, Prof. Jamal Naqvi, Abid Hasan Minto, Abdullah Malik, Prof. Amin Mughal, Dr. Eqbal Ahmed, and Dr. Feroze Ahmed. And some of these comrades had never touched liquor, or even if others did, it was only after sunset.

It's an interesting coincidence that the Urdu version of this book has been published by *Maktab-e-Danyal*, established by Malik Noorani, who was a close friend of Sajjad Zaheer and a sympathiser of the Communist Party. Malik Noorani's wife was one of the leaders of the party's *Anjuman-e-Jamooahriyat Khawateen*. When Sajjad Zaheer went into hiding, he would stay at Malik Noorani's place. Now Noorani's daughter, Hoori Noorani, runs *Maktab-e-Danyal*. She might remember that in her childhood, comrades from the National Students Federation (NSF), including myself would visit her home – an apartment at the Club Road – after day-long sloganeering. We would have tea there, then dinner and sometimes would stay for study circles conducted by senior comrades till late at night.

Moving on, I do feel that I might have been slightly unfair to Kamran Asdar and his treasure trove work but how can I ignore and let go the brazen allegation of John Afzal, whose husband, Afzal Khan, was arrested for a few years after the ban on the Communist Party. Later he fled to London. This accusation blatantly downplays the prolonged ideological and intellectual struggle of a large number of comrades and activists, who served long sentences; all of them put their future and families at stake and some turned into cerebral patients or died wretched deaths, while never having indulged in a luxury

Research on the Communist Party is an uphill task. After the formation of the party in Pakistan in 1948, comrades from Pakistan and those coming from India, were on the run and in hiding for years. The major reason for the ban of the Communist Party was the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case.



Hasan Nasir, who was tortured to death in Lahore's Shahi Qila.

such as drinking alcohol. One of the stars of the Communist struggle in Pakistan, Hasan Nasir, was tortured to death.

In the beginning of the book, Kamran Asdar Ali shared a note of thanks spanning 11 pages. One must admit that the author conducted extensive research and a large number of interviews in various cities for days. The most important chapter is on the events from 1940-47 and then up till the ban of the Communist Party in 1954. Most importantly, he mentions the Calcutta Congress, where details related to the Communist Party have been made public for the first time.

Another extremely important chapter is the one in which the author describes Hasan Nasir's murder in Lahore's Shahi Qila.

Research on the Communist Party is an uphill task. After the formation of the party in Pakistan in 1948, comrades from Pakistan and those coming from India, were on the run and in hiding ('underground' as it was dubbed in the party circles) for years.

The major reason for the ban of the Communist Party was the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, on which Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote a couplet:

Woh baat saare fasaane mein jis ka zikr na tha

Who baat unko buhat nagawar guzri hai

Surely, meetings between the Communist Party members and the military officers were not mere cocktail parties, it was decided by the Party's Central Committee that Syed Sajjad Zaheer would meet General Akbar Khan and his colleagues, who were extremely upset with the way the Muslim League government agreed to the ceasefire in the disputed Kashmir region. This displeasure made sense as under General Akbar Khan, soldiers and tribal volunteers were only five kilometres away from Srinagar, which was waiting for them with arms wide open. It remains mired in controversy whether Pakistan's then incumbent government, could have pushed in that direction, but it is a fact that a statesman like Jawaharlal Nehru rushed to the UN in panic, while the Maharaja of Kashmir ran away to Delhi.

The Muslim Conference's leader, Sardar Abdul Qayyum, confessed in a meeting with the scribe that it was the first and last effort towards freeing the oc-

cupied territories but British officer Gracy and his counterparts pressurised Pakistan's civilian and military leadership to compel General Akbar Khan to recall the army and tribal volunteers from the Kashmir mission. It is also intriguing how the Pakistani civilian and military leadership – propped up by the United States – could ignore the conspiracy concocted by the Communist Party and the military officials.

After imprisonment and acquittal of comrades post Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case and especially Communist Party's Secretary General Sajjad Zahir's exile to India in 1955, even if there was a party framework, Kamran Asdar Ali's book doesn't shed light on it. The author, despite having researched for decades, couldn't succeed in mentioning who held the position of the acting secretary after Sajjad Zaheer's exit and even if the Party's organisational structure didn't exist, who gave others the right to run the Party clandestinely in Sindh, Punjab and the former NWFP.

Let's accept that due to strict restrictions and hardships, the entire Party's network and those assuming responsibilities, were working in a clandestine manner. However, after General Zia-ul Haq's Martial Law, the unannounced ban on the Communist Party was lifted and the comrades who were on the run for almost three decades, began their activities openly. Comrades such as China-leaning Tufail Abbas, Mairaj Muhammad Khan and Moscow-leaning Professor Jamal Naqvi and Jam Saqi could have been interviewed for an accurate account of those times.

The CPP's 'underground' history cannot be written without conversations with eyewitnesses to the struggle. It is also necessary to consider whether those interviewed are genuine and committed sources or not. Sorry to say, Kamran Asdar Ali interviewed almost 200 comrades, their children and their sympathisers, but many of them have either been deviants or considered as dubious sources.

Syed Sibte Hassan's book *Mughnie Aatish-e-Nasaf: Sajjad Zaheer*, compiled by Jaffer Ahmed, has honestly articulated the Communist Party's formation in 1948,



Sajjad Zaheer, the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of Pakistan.

Kamran Asdar Ali must be applauded for his great effort in compiling the Communist Party's history up till 1955. However, the infighting, division, and dilution of the party merits a second and updated edition of the book.

its ban after the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, the release of its Secretary Sajjad Zaheer in 1955 and then his departure to India. This is because Syed Sibte Hassan's writings are considered authority amongst comrades. Surely, Kamran Asdar Ali benefitted from this piece of work, and yet he did not mention what happened to the unfortunate party and its depleted comrades later. He's perhaps unaware that the real conflict started after Sajjad Zaheer left for India.

After Hasan Nasir's death in custody there was an atmosphere of fear, due to which many of the Party's card-holders either left the country and lived cushioned lives abroad or they compromised and became informants and self-professed leaders of the Party.

The Party's division became evident in 1967-68 and this writer – then in his first year of university and part of the Moscow-leaning group – was an eyewitness to these events and the formation of factions.

The situation of the China-leaning faction of the party was clear. When a large-scale people's movement comprising students and labour emerged, the majority of its leadership and followers either joined Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) or the National Awami Party's

(NAP) Bhashani group.

The yesteryear leaders of the Communist Party's student wing – the Democratic Students Federation (DSF) – Dr. Muhammad Sarwar, Dr. Haroon Ahmed, Dr. Adeeb Rizvi and then Dr. Sher Afzal Malik and Dr. Mehboob, had completed their political innings in the 1970s. However, their student protégés had taken hold of the DOW Medical College's Moscow wing.

Although it is a misfortune that the Moscow-leaning party was divided into two. Dr. Sher Afzal Malik, Dr. Mehboob and B.M. Kutty had reservations against the party's original heirs, such as, Imam Ali Nazish, Professor Jamal Naqvi and Sain Azizullah. Frankly, the true Moscow-leaning party was that of Imam Ali Nazish and Jamal Naqvi.

Recently, I learnt from Juma Khan Sufi's – the Communist Party's representative who stayed in exile in Afghanistan for years – book *Faraib-e-Natmam* that Moscow had given Imam Ali Nazish's party the official status, which was being run by Professor Jamal Naqvi.

After the PIA hijacking episode in 1980, remnants of the Party were treated cruelly, leading to Nazeer Abbasi's death and its two main leaders, Jamal Naqvi and Jam Saqi, being imprisoned for six years. Both Naqvi and Saqi have written about why and how they quit the party in their books.

In the end, Kamran Asdar Ali must be applauded for his great effort in compiling the Communist Party's history up till 1955. However, the infighting, division, and dilution of the party merits a second and updated edition of the book. ■

Interview

A Conversation with Omar Shahid Hamid



In less than a decade since his debut novel, *The Prisoner*, Omar Shahid Hamid, has made a mark for himself among the lovers of South Asian English-language Literature. Since his first novel, published in 2013, Hamid has written four more novels, which is kind of a feat in itself, given the fact that the author is one of the most decorated police officers in a crime and terrorism-infested country like Pakistan. But perhaps it is the very nature of his job which provides him much of the raw material to develop his works of fiction. One main question in the minds of many of his fans remains how he strikes a balance between his creative endeavours and professional life? After all, writing requires solitude, while for police work, one has to be a man of action.

It would perhaps be clichéd to say that Hamid has seen life in all its bitterness, crudity and challenges during his police job. He, himself, had to undergo a personal tragedy at a young age when his

father, Shahid Hamid, a bureaucrat and managing director of the KESC, now K-Electric, was murdered in the teeming city of Karachi in July 1997. However, the young writer has not allowed his personal tragedy to reflect in his writing. And like his father, the professional work has put Hamid's life in danger scores of time, and even now he remains on the hit-list of shadowy terrorist groups.

Hamid went for his undergraduate to University of Kent, Canterbury and did his first masters from the University College London (UCL). Then he did a second masters from the London School of Economics (LSE). His degrees are in law and criminal justice policy. A degree in criminal justice was a mid-career endeavour, more relevant to his profession.

Currently, Hamid is serving on an important assignment in Balochistan. Narratives Magazine talks to this prolific writer to shed more light on his literary undertakings.

A Writer & an Officer

“There has never been a clash of my creative world with my professional world”



By Gulrukhsar Mujahid

The writer is an Editorial Assistant at Narratives Magazine.



The launch of Omar Shahid Hamid's book 'The Party Worker' at the Karachi Literature Festival.

Why do you write? And why fiction?

I think non-fiction is a difficult genre to master as a discipline. Obviously, one has to fact check, and look at it again and again. Fiction is much more creative and relaxing. You may say it's cathartic. The other thing I've always felt is that by stating things in a fictitious setting, (one) can reach a far wider circle of readers. For instance, I got a lot of comments about my first book *The Prisoner* which talks about police and law and order. Had I written a non-fiction book on how the police work in Karachi and across Pakistan, it would've been read by only a few. But when you write a novel, you can cater to a wider readership... it opens your works up to a lot more people.

To reach a far larger audience, do you intend to translate your books in Urdu?

I myself don't have command over the Urdu language, but I was approached by a publisher and in fact the translation of my first book, *The Prisoner*, has just been completed. Hopefully, it will come out in the next four to five months. And that on its own will be interesting because if you publish in Urdu, it's a whole different readership. I'm very curious to see the re-

sponse. A lot of my colleagues in the police – especially from the lower ranks – often said that your books could be more accessible to us if they were in Urdu.

What kind of response do you generally get on your writings from your colleagues in the police?

Generally, it has been overwhelming positive. A lot of people have said that it's good to convey the point-of-view of the police across, especially with the earlier books. But I don't mean to write a propaganda piece. And if you read *The Prisoner*, especially, it doesn't necessarily present the police in a positive outlook. It's just a realistic perspective. People appreciate that they get a realistic kind of look into the lives of police officers in Karachi and in Pakistan.

When did you realise that you want to write, and become a police officer? Was it an epiphany of sorts?

I was never one of those people who, when they're very young, had planned what they would want to do. It just happened. I stumbled upon it.

What's your writing process like?

I like to write about different things. I like to keep challenging myself. My first three books were crime thrillers. Then I slightly diverted the path, and wrote

about cricket match-fixing, which also revolved around the women's cricket team, while my book *Betrayal*, is a spy thriller. The way I take up stories is that I may randomly come across something in a news clipping, it starts with an abstract idea and then I grow that abstract idea into a plot line and flesh out characters. Earlier, when I wrote my books, obviously I drew a lot from personal experiences and of my colleagues in the police. But now, as I keep writing, I keep expanding horizons and try to come up with new and interesting things to write.

How do you manage to be so prolific? You have written five books in a span of almost 9 years?

I haven't written in the past five months or so, but generally I have been lucky enough to be prolific. I think it's one of those things with me, since I've started writing it's been cathartic; it has got to the point where I feel the need to write, and if I don't write, it feels like something is missing. It's like exercise, if you've not done it, you feel a little off. I don't try to reserve a time slot for it but I do try to block time out for writing.

Writing, especially fiction, requires a certain sense of idealism, creativity, but then you are in the po-



Five spectacular books by the author, written in a span of less than a decade.

lice force where your work is rooted in practicality. Do you think there is a conflict between the two roles?

I don't necessarily think that you need idealism (to write). I don't agree idealism is required for creativity. Creativity can have an effect due to your profession. I don't think it's mutually exclusive, in fact, I've always found that my job has helped to open up this world of stories for me that I keep using and fictionalizing. It constantly gives you new ideas.

But am I a realist and a gritty sort of a writer? I say yes. Perhaps you could also argue that it is a genre on its own. I'm willing to try out different themes. For instance, in *The Fix*, I went into a different direction, a female-centric book around match fixing. Even *Betrayal* is a departure from my previously published books on crime thrillers. Moreover, the book I'm currently writing is a political satire. Which would also be a departure from my previous books. I think changing things up in that way keeps you fresh as a writer.

There has never been a clash of my creative world with my professional world.

If you look at works of various novelists, I don't think anyone has been apolitical, any of the great classic writers. So, I don't think I can say that I'm apolitical.

If you're writing books about politics, crime, spies or a political satire, is there a need to be apolitical when writing novels, does it matter?

If you look at works of various novelists, I don't think anyone has been apolitical, any of the great classic writers. So, I don't think I can say that I'm apolitical. And I don't think that has ever been a problem as far as writing is concerned, in that sense; if someone has a political point of view, I don't think it's a bad thing. In my case, if you ask me personally, I have always tried to portray those sort of worlds in which, whether it is policing or

religious groups, political urban parties or whatever, I try to depict the world as it is or was. Some people have said that you have taken pot shots at the MQM in *The Party Worker*. My response to that; I don't think that it's taking pot shots. If you ask citizens of Karachi, who have lived in the city for the past 40 years or so, they will all say that these things happened. I also feel if you talk about writing about Karachi, as a novelist, and you leave out this incredibly massive party, you're ignoring the middle years when looking at the history of Karachi.

I have noticed that your characters are in the shades of grey which is quite interesting.

You're right, like in *The Party Worker* and in all my books, I try to paint my characters in greys.

One of the best compliments I have received is that we actually felt sympathy for the target killer and thought that was fantastic because it is very easy to portray him as evil incarnate but when you kind of put on these human shades on your characters, layers of humanity and emotions, the characters come out much more interesting. We understand where the character is coming from. You may not agree with it or their actions, but you may understand to a certain extent, sympathise.

That's interesting, though your father was murdered by a target killer and that's a very personal tragedy. How did you still manage to empathise with the target killer in your book?

Perspective and distance from the tragedy is important. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to write, immediately after the incident had taken place. Therefore, I wrote these a couple of years after my father's death – roughly after 10 to 15 years. And that has played a great role, but you've got to be able to look at people who may have totally different points of view and you've got to be able to consider where, what makes it tick. That comes a lot from my professional training as one of the jobs of a police officer is to be a mini-quasi psychologist. Because you're dealing with all kinds of human beings, all the time.

Which character is closest to you, if you have to pick one?

Honestly, none. That has never been a consideration. I have never consciously

modelled a character on myself. Unconsciously or subconsciously, elements of my personality may have been there in some characters, but never intentionally.

What was the most challenging book for you to write?

The most challenging book was probably, *The Fix*. Reason being, I pushed myself, because one of the criticisms which I had received was that in the first three books, female characters were not as strong as they should have been. That's a fair point. Although, I would say that the first three books were about worlds where a strong female wouldn't have naturally flowed because those worlds are male-centric.

Was there a different writing process when you were writing female characters?

That's interesting, I didn't think about it consciously. I don't know a proper way of a male writer, writing about female characters but what I tried to focus on was their motivations and placing myself in their shoes.

Which books have inspired you, any authors that you look up to?

Before I started writing fiction, I didn't read much of it. I was more of a history fan, narrative history, but I've always appreciated fiction writers who are able to transport you into a world of their own so when you're reading their books, you're in a zone where you can smell, taste and touch the characters they've created.

Do you think in this digital age, the mode of writing and storytelling has changed, would you like to meddle with different mediums perhaps?

Yes, it is quite challenging because you have to hold on to the attention of people who are used to reading things that are much shorter, but I think this is a challenge writers have had for a long time. Every time there is technological advancement, these questions come up for writers, will books be able to survive?

But I would admit, it is tough because you always have to be on your toes. One of my primary jobs as a writer is to be a good storyteller irrespective of the medium or the depleting attention span. If there's a good story, it will resonate with the readers. People will read if the book is gripping.



Mr. Hamid reading an excerpt from his best-selling book 'The Prisoner.'

One of my primary jobs as a writer is to be a good storyteller irrespective of the medium or the depleting attention span. If there's a good story, it will resonate with the readers. People will read if the book is gripping.

There is a perception about South Asian writers that they are catering to a western audience and when they're writing about Pakistan, there is a sense of superficial depiction of the country and its people. Your take please?

You know I don't think that any writer starts out thinking that I'm going to write this for an audience for instance in London, but I do think, with reference to the Pakistani writers who write in English – the pioneers – they did and have spent a large portion of their lives in the West. So, they were kind of looking back at the Pakistan they knew of, from a distance. Therefore, I think this allegation arose; moreover, a lot of the younger lot say that these writers don't resonate with us be-

cause these authors can't relate with the world they're living in. I think I've never done that; my writing is grounded in the world as it is today, therefore, I don't think anyone has made that assertion about me.

Do you think a police officer can be neutral? Like they say about the KPK police that it's an independent security force, portraying a positive image?

I won't comment about the KPK police because I have never served there, I can't speculate.

When you ask if a police officer is politically neutral, there are two things that need to be addressed. If you look at policing in a theoretical sense, it is a profession wherever you are whether you're in Washington D.C, Lahore, or in New Delhi, you're serving amidst the political sphere so there is always going to be a degree of politics in policing. The New York Police Commissioner is fundamentally an official who is selected by a political party, the Mayor, but when we talk about policing as being politically neutral, in our context, then we think in the operational sense which should always be the case. The police should not be bound by any kind of political considerations while investigating a case or carrying out their professional duties. Over the years, in our history, typical exigencies have been such that there may not have been a case which is 100 percent politically neutral.

Are you completely satisfied with how the police force is functioning in Pakistan? Are there any reforms that need to be brought about?

Police reforms are something that is almost constantly being spoken about but I think the nature of reforms is such that they can't be constant since we as a society are continuously evolving. Pakistan is not the same way today that it was in 2001 when I entered service. I think it is very important to keep that process of reform on. With regards to the police performance, I can't comment on police performance across Pakistan. Though I will say that a police force is reflective of the society that it is placed in whatever the positive or negative nature of that society may be. So, if you have a society that has systemic problems, you will have police forces having systemic problems. Can they do better? Sure. Absolutely. ■



RADIO PAKISTAN

Nostalgia

Karachi Radio
& Theatre

Those were the Days...

A look at the glory days of Pakistani radio and live theatre



By Seema Faruqui

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

It's Saturday night at home, dinner is finished, and our family automatically gravitates towards our individual comfort spots encircling our radio. Nine p.m. and the characteristic theme music of *Studio Number Nau* (9) booms throughout the room and the excitement is tangible. This was a big part of our lives in the 1960s, in Karachi.

Though a significant part of the Western world had already been taken over by television, Pakistan well into the 60s remained dominated by radio. As such, the quality of programming that the country produced was par none, as the focus of other nations had already moved towards television material.

I clearly remember tuning in to *The Listener's Choice* that was broadcast twice a day – once around midday and once at night. For those 30 minutes, we got to hear our favourite English pop songs. The show was hosted by Edward Carapiet and was a way of sending birthday greetings and dedicating songs to our friends and family. The internet was barely an initial thought at the time, and thus this was our



Three leading voices of the heydays of Radio Pakistan: Mahmood Ali (sitting extreme left), S. M. Saleem (Centre) and Zafar Siddiqui (extreme right).

means of 'shouting out' to our loved ones and having bragging rights the next day at school etc.

This was the time of Cliff Richard, Elvis Presley, Lulu, Helen Shapiro, Jim

Though a significant part of the Western world had already been taken over by television, Pakistan well into the 60s remained dominated by radio. As such, the quality of programming that the country produced was par none.

Reeves, Trini Lopez and many more. Just like social media is the mechanism to measure popularity today, the higher the number of song dedications you received were equivalent to your becoming 'viral.' What was even more significant for us three sisters was that these songs connected us back to our lives in Australia.

By the early 60s, most of Australia had already moved on to television being the new nucleus in the family. So coming back to Pakistan, we were reintroduced to the importance of radio. The calibre of shows that we were able to listen to, however, never made us feel as if we were missing out.

The weekends were when the most popular Urdu shows were broadcast. *Hamid Mian Ke Haan* was a must every Sunday morning at 8.30, where the audience peeked into the happenings taking place in a typical middle-class family. Later on Sundays at 11 am, *Bachoun Ka Programme* was also a regular feature of many households. Hosted by Zafar Siddiqui and Muni Baji, they kept their

young audience entranced with stories, short skits and the performances of talented children.

Zafar Siddiqui was my mother's eldest brother and doted on me, the eldest girl within the next generation. Most people had access to his story-telling via the radio, but I was lucky enough to have him regale me with bedtime stories every night. He took on the part of the characters he was describing and whether he was acting out the part of hero or villain, animal or man, his dramatic persona and range would leave me spellbound. He knew all the traditional children's stories and further made up many of his own. We were even more fortunate as beyond his company, we were able to interact with many of the senior actors who were his colleagues as they would attend most of our family events and celebrations. The love was such that on many an occasions they even performed variety shows to entertain our guests and make each event more memorable than the last. It is like yesterday when a young Moin Akhtar and Agha Sarwar took to the stage and kept the audience in a continuous state of laughter.

Just as Pakistanis have been proud of the production level of our TV Dramas for the last 40 years, at the time Radio Pakistan Karachi made us proud as a source of high-quality dramas. This was largely thanks to Zulfiqar Ali Bukhari, the Director General of Radio Pakistan.



The father of Radio Pakistan: Z. A. Bukhari.

Studio Number Nau was another programme which could be depended on for brilliance.

Performers such as S.M Saleem, Mahmoud Ali, Abdul Majid ... and others always kept their audiences glued to the radio till the very end.

With his beautifully modulated voice and love for drama, he produced, penned and performed in plays as well. His portrayal of both the father and the son in the play *Light House Key Muhafiz* was remembered and talked about for months.

A much awaited time of year was the annual drama festival, *Jashn-e-Tamseel*, where a different play was broadcast every night for seven consecutive days. The plays garnered such interest that it was common for people to purposely rearrange schedules so that they could get home in time to tune in. The usual bustling city would shut down with the shops closing early and very little traffic on the road. That was the power of drama in the golden era of Radio Pakistan.

Studio Number Nau was another programme which could be depended on for brilliance. Performers such as S.M Saleem, Mahmoud Ali, Abdul Majid, Zafar Siddiqui, Fatima Khanum, Humaira Naeem, Ibrahim Nafees, Mughal Bashir, Sahab Qazilbash, Irfan Ali, Qayyum Arif, and others always kept their audiences glued to the radio till the very end. As time passed these senior artists were joined by other unforgettable artistes like Talat Hussain, Sajida Syed, Qazi Wajid, Rehana Siddiqui, Talat Siddiqui and kept alive the magic, making the show one of the most popular and most awaited drama series in the history of Radio Pakistan.

These very same artists were also the ones who brought magic to live theatre, an integral part of Karachi's vibrant cultural scene. Famous stage plays like *Mirza Ghalib Bunder Road Pe*, *Lal Qila Saay Lal Khait* and *Taleem-e-Blighhan* were staged at the Theosophical Hall situated across the road from Radio Pakistan. The impression left by watching one of these plays was something one could never forget. The dialogue delivery, body language, and costumes of the actors on stage were so powerful they would leave the audience spellbound.

The same could be said for plays staged in English such as the ones that were staged by Javed Jabbar and a group of his friends, from Karachi University, who presented *Julius Caesar* and two hilarious American comedies; *You Can't Take it With You* and *The Man Who Came To Dinner*. A few years later they staged *The Promise*, a three-character Russian play, including Hasan Jawad. Watching those incredible plays left a lasting im-



The golden days of 'Studio Number Nau.'

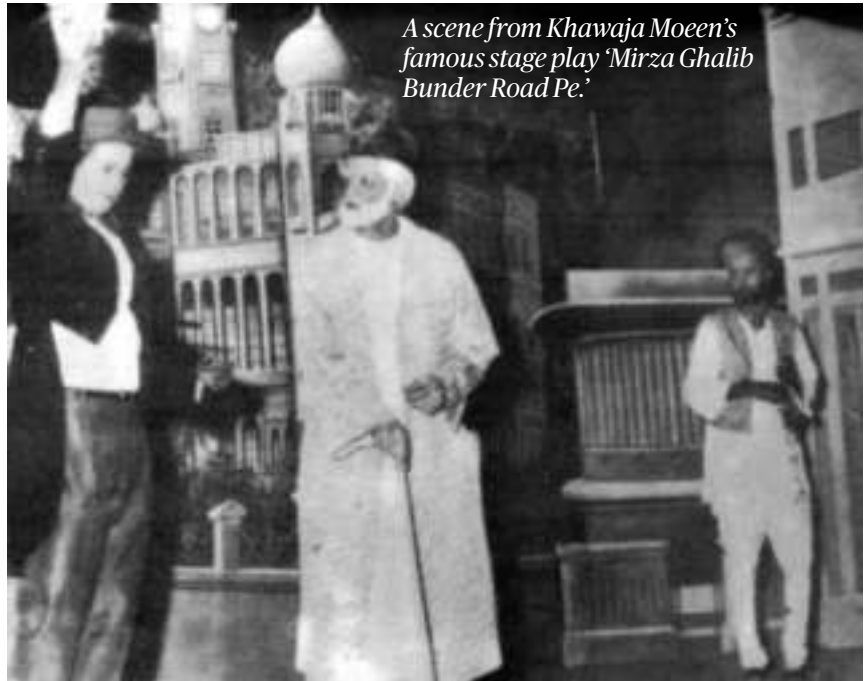
pression on a younger audience, with dreams of one day duplicating their success with the same elegance.

We were fortunate that being St Josephines, we were given opportunities to give our inner dramatists full rein. Throughout our school and college days, we were encouraged to take part in elocution competitions, debates and plays. Our English teachers encouraged us to improve our oratory and debating skills and inter-school competitions were held where students from our school would compete with students from our sister schools of St Patrick and St Paul and The Karachi Grammar School. Participating in such debates, including the rush of besting our main rivals from Grammar School, are some of my treasured memories.

Looking back, it's funny how some people stick out more than others. Benazir Bhutto, a Grammarian, was one of the talented debaters that took the podium at our auditorium. Little did we know then that we were watching history in the making! Two of Asif Ali Zardari's sisters were students at St Josephs at that time and I am sure that they did not know they were watching their future sister-in-law debating on stage. Whether at the diplomacy table, business negotiations in meeting rooms, or on stage in front of large audiences, the skills instilled and developed through those programmes helped many a student be successful in their later careers.

In terms of drama itself, St Joseph's College had two main dramatic events each year including the inter year competition. There we were encouraged to hone our talents and those who loved to act and direct would undertake to put on plays. In my second year of college, our group staged a mime of *Cinderella* where I got the opportunity to put all my acting skills to work as one of the ugly sisters. Oh the excitement of preparing for that competition! The endless practices, the costume fittings and the continuous laughter and camaraderie is something that one can never forget. Our take on the story had the sisters and the stepmother interpret their roles as comedians resulting in a lot of audience laughter and the first prize.

The other main dramatic event of note was the Annual Drama. For me the most unforgettable was the production of George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Being an all-girls college we had to take on



A scene from Khawaja Moeen's famous stage play 'Mirza Ghalib Bunder Road Pe.'

Famous stage plays like Mirza Ghalib Bunder Road Pe were staged at the Theosophical Hall situated across the road from Radio Pakistan. The dialogue delivery, body language, and costumes of the actors on stage were so powerful they would leave the audience spellbound.

the roles of men as well. The audience was captivated by Nazli Jamil as the cynical Captain Bluntschli and Sahira Ansari as the dashing Segius Saranof. Both of these portrayals were amazing and received a standing ovation. These two girls were the shining light of our college and we freshmen idolized them. Sahira went on to greater things in the arenas of acting and directing when she joined PTV and soon



The skills and talent of artists like Talat Hussain drove the immense popularity of 'Studio Number Nau.'

achieved great fame in her chosen line of work and eventually married her co-star Rahat Kazmi, becoming Sahira Kazmi.

Looking back, the fond and treasured memories that we had of us being 'stars on stage' are then somewhat dampened as I remember that there were also a lot of rules that had to be adhered to. I was one of those who would have loved to have taken to the stage, but I adhered to family expectations and studied science. However, I found my happy compromise when I became a teacher which gave me a routine of having a captive audience multiple times a day. I've been blessed with the best of both worlds, being a respected teacher and performing before a live audience and having the creative space to inspire and perform. ■



By Dr. Zubaida Qazi

The writer is a leading doctor and president of the Pink Pakistan Trust, which is working to create awareness about breast cancer and other health issues among women.

A Grim Picture

Pakistan needs to drastically increase its healthcare budget and implement reforms aimed at greater access, equity and universal care

Pakistan's healthcare system is in a crisis. Ranked 154th out of 194 countries in a 2018 study, it has been struggling to meet the healthcare needs of the country's teeming population of more than 220 million people. Unfortunately, we only spend 1.2 percent of our GDP on healthcare (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2020-21), which is much lower than the 5 percent GDP recommended by the United Nations to be spent on healthcare by a country. Even smaller countries in our region spend more on healthcare, such as Nepal which allocates 6 percent of its GDP to healthcare.

With only 1,282 public hospitals, 45,987 registered doctors and 116,659 registered nurses for a population of more than 220 million – according to the 2020 data – the healthcare facilities and the number of healthcare professionals in Pakistan are below the minimum standards set by the World Health

Organisation (WHO). The maternal, infant and neonatal mortality rates of Pakistan are quite high as compared to the other Asian nations, indicating lack of access to the basic health facilities. Pakistan is among the few countries in the world that do not have a universal healthcare system.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated Pakistan's healthcare challenges. The hard fact remains that our country's healthcare system, even now, is not ready to provide an emergency response to a pandemic even on paper. With some luck and a lot of hard work, we managed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 despite the insufficient number of hospitals and limited and untrained staff. Moreover, the pandemic also exposed our outdated medical equipment and dysfunctional and scarce resources. We saw many tragic incidents of patients losing their lives as they could not find beds in the Intensive Care Units

of both the public and private sector hospitals around the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan.

The healthcare system of Pakistan needs a comprehensive and purposeful master plan of reforms to increase its effectiveness, efficiency and equity. A stronger integration of medical education and health services needs to be created in order to improve the quality of training, the equity in access to healthcare, and the focus on serving the community. Hospital-autonomy also needs to be increased to allow them self-growth as well as self-management. A family physician programme can also be implemented to provide the population in the rural and remote areas access to healthcare.

A purposeful and sustainable health policy needs to be formulated and implemented to provide a universal healthcare system and substantially increase its budget. Universal healthcare protocols and guidelines need to be developed to improve the quality of healthcare services and reduce the disparity between the public and private sectors hospitals. More hospitals, diagnostic centres and medical universities need to be established for producing more healthcare professionals. However, I would like to single out one step that can significantly improve the healthcare system of Pakistan: Reforming, strengthening, and fully utilising Basic Health Units (BHUs).

The primary healthcare in Pakistan is provided mainly through more than 5,500 Basic Health Units. The BHUs are the only source of healthcare for a large number of population, especially in the rural and remote areas. They are supposed to play an instrumental role in providing preventive, curative and rehabilitative healthcare services to the masses and decreasing the burden on the secondary and tertiary care hospitals. However, BHUs in Pakistan are plagued by a number of administrative and infrastructural problems. The unavailability of experienced medical professionals, lack of medicine, equipment and testing facilities, and unavailability of ambulances for critical patients are some of the hindrances that

have crippled BHUs across the country.

The government needs to formulate and implement a proper policy and allocate sufficient funds to BHUs to enable them to function effectively. Financial incentives need to be offered to medical professionals to work in the BHUs in the remote areas. Strict disciplinary actions need to be taken against the BHU staff who are irregular, inefficient or involved



Shortage of staff, beds and other amenities in Pakistani hospitals led to many preventable deaths during the height of the Covid pandemic.

The healthcare system of Pakistan needs a comprehensive and purposeful master plan of reforms to increase its effectiveness, efficiency and equity.

in any kind of corruption. The BHU staff need to be trained to treat the patients with respect and care to encourage them to seek medical help without any inhibition. The funding for BHUs needs to be increased to provide medicine, latest equipment, diagnostic facilities and ambulances to transfer critical patients to secondary and tertiary care hospitals.

I believe that BHUs have untapped potential to be used in a variety of ways to provide health care to the community. BHUs can create awareness about the common diseases, especially the com-

municable diseases, among the community to prevent their spread. They can be used to collect data to identify the trends of diseases prevalent in a community to find out the causes behind their high incidence rate. In fact, the data can be used to develop the first patient directory of Pakistan to facilitate medical research in the country.

Breast cancer is one of the biggest

causes of deaths among Pakistani women. The lack of awareness and social taboo around it are the major hurdles in fighting this fatal disease. BHUs can be used to create awareness about breast cancer among women belonging to all the strata of the society. Breast Cancer Screening Centres can be established at BHUs to ensure early detection and timely treatment of the fatal disease. My non-for-profit organisation, 'Pink Pakistan Trust,' has recently launched the first mobile application to create aware-

ness about breast cancer and provide medical assistance to Pakistani women. Available in English and major local languages for both Android phones and iPhones, Pink Pakistan application assists women to do self-screening for breast cancer by explaining the step-by-step procedure and provides free-of-cost consultation with national and international specialist doctors and psychiatrists. BHUs can guide women about the application for seeking medical help and counselling sessions for breast cancer.

Finally, the government needs to consider running BHUs in partnership with the NGOs working in the health sector of Pakistan. The NGOs can resolve the administrative issues in managing BHUs and significantly improve their performance in serving the community. Pink Pakistan has applied for the adoption of four BHUs and has been waiting for the Sindh government's response since 2020/21.

BHUs can become a force of change in the Pakistani healthcare system if the administrative and infrastructural problems are resolved and its true potential for providing health services is fully exploited. ■



Plant a Tree This Ramzan!

We must explore the environment's relationship with religion, and culture to understand how they may contribute to conserving and preserving the natural environment

By Ibrahim Sajid Malick

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, there is a vanishing margin of error when it comes to limiting global warming. The report presented to the United Nations in April 2022 says that nations must shift away from fossil fuels far quicker to avoid a catastrophic future.

Unless the nation states immediately increase efforts to reduce emissions of coal, oil, and natural gas, the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) will likely be out of reach by the end of this decade. Over this threshold, experts warn, the threats of global warming, such as severe flooding, drought, wildfire, and ecosystem collapse, increase significantly. Since the 19th century, humans have increased the earth's temperature by an average of 1.1 degrees Celsius by using fossil fuels for energy.

It is, however, a challenging task to correct the wrong. For example, a global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 43 per

cent by 2030 and a complete cessation of the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by the early 2050s are required to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or below, according to the analysis. According to existing strategies by different countries, the reduction in global emissions is only estimated to be several percentage points this decade. After a temporary decline due to the coronavirus epidemic, global emissions of fossil fuels rose to near-record levels last year.

Over 80 per cent of the world population identifies with numerous religious and spiritual communities or cultural traditions which influence how they see and treat the world around them.

Religions are deeply entwined in the fabric of daily lives. The churches, mosques, temples and other religious communities play an essential role in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviours for managing and using the environment and natural resources and sustainable development overall.

In its numerous expressions ranging from cultural heritage to cultural and creative

industries and cultural tourism, culture enables and drives sustainable development's economic, social and environmental components. Various cultures' cohesiveness and well-being suffer common threats that undermine traditional ways of life and livelihoods; and well-intended but misguided development attempts that threaten human rights and sustainable practices. Therefore, it is crucial to understand all parts of people's cultures – not just the economics or logistics, but the beliefs and spiritual rituals. Diversity must be promoted while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone.

Traditional knowledge and customary sustainable usage reinforce indigenous peoples and local communities' resistance to environmental change, including climate change, and directly contribute to biological and cultural variety and global sustainable development. Sustainable livelihoods, cultural heritage, and indigenous peoples' knowledge can be jeopardised by initiatives to combat biodiversity loss and climate change.

Suppose respectful relationships are established with indigenous peoples. In that case, the effective management of their resources may considerably contribute to conservation, sustainable use, and fair sharing of biodiversity benefits. We must explore the environment's relationship with religion, and culture to understand how they may contribute to conserving and preserving the natural environment. The role of diverse value systems and cultural diversity as resources for conservation and climate justice action; and the part of science and other knowledge in bridging the divide between science and other knowledge. We need an integrated approach and its connections to religions, cultures, the environment, and sustainable development's environmental and social components.

The world community must take decisive action to address severe and growing environmental deterioration and associated social and economic instabilities. Religion and culture can significantly address climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, pollution, deforestation, desertification, unsustainable land and water use, and other pressing issues identified by all nations in a shared vision aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Traditional knowledge and customary sustainable usage reinforce indigenous peoples resistance to climate change and directly contribute to global sustainable development.

Religious and cultural groups should advocate for robust, inclusive, green, sustainable and transformational economies based on circularity, sharing, cooperation, and alternative growth and welfare metrics. They can play a critical role in teaching people the importance of sustainable lifestyles and behaviours for sustainable consumption and production. Religious and cultural influences have the potential to make a substantial contribution to reducing extreme poverty and associated concerns such as women, youth, and minority rights, as well as universal access to essential services. They can advocate for innovative nature-based solutions, the preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural diversity, environmental stewardship and duty of care, the development of a global and local citizenship ethic, the promo-

tion of good governance, tolerance, and reconciliation, and the establishment of safe, inclusive, and peaceful societies. Promoting and communicating morals, values, behaviours, and innovative solutions have never been more critical. With a growing knowledge of religious consensus on environmental ethics, this global objective may serve as the foundation for a shared vision that emphasises religion and culture's role in attaining sustainability. Interfaith and intercultural discourse agree on a few fundamental principles, like the sacredness of nature and the rights of nature shared by the majority of organised faiths, indigenous peoples, and many natural scientists, among the numerous positive actions – large and small – SDG 2030 and the Paris Climate Change Agreement; the actions of faith-based declarations and statements, particularly concerning climate change and cultural diversity. These forces must coalesce to establish worldwide cooperation to transform the paradigm and tackle the critical issues of our day, both for humanity today and for future generations.

“And We made the sky a protected ceiling, but they, from its signs, are turning away.” Quran, 21:32

The Qur'an tells us that Allah cares for us by endowing our earth with an ozone layer that protects us and other species from harmful UV radiation. However, Allah is well aware that mankind's avarice would destroy the ozone layer. This serves as a reminder that we must safeguard Allah's creation to protect ourselves. ■



Entertainment^[1]

Storylines

Pakistan's political drama may be intense, sensational and colourful, but that does not mean that viewers have given up watching Pakistani plays on the local entertainment channels or at their preferred time on

YouTube.

This month, Narratives pick a handful of plays which have become trendsetters and breaking new grounds when it comes to the storyline, plot or production.

Sinf-e-Aahan

Our girls in uniform are creating all the positive vibes when it comes to presenting entertainment plus messages in one bouquet. The series, jointly presented by the Next Level Entertainment and Six Sigma Plus in collaboration with the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), is being aired weekly on ARY Digital and is becoming a source of inspiration for the young and old Pakistani women alike.

The story of six independent, headstrong, self-driven and motivated young women is being portrayed in a subtle manner by none other than Nadeem Baig as the director of the play.

The military and personal life has been overlapped delicately in the play as the parallel stories of these six girls unfold highlighting their background, challenges, ambitions and heartaches. The message being that Pakistan Army remains one great equalizer, unifier and merit-based organisation. With the sprinkling of the right and measured amount of patriotism, love, adventure, innocence, wit and challenges, the series is a treat to watch.

Written by Umera Ahmed, *Sinf-e-Aahan* boasts a strong female cast, comprising Syra Yusuf, Kubra Khan, Ramsha Khan, Sajal Aly, Yumna Zaidi, Dananeer Mobeen and the Sri Lankan actress Yehali Tashiya Kalidasa.



Susralis

This is a highly entertaining series telling the story of two middle-aged women, who love to hate each other. Starring Hina Dilpazeer, Saba Faisal, Faisal Qazi and Mustafa Changezi in key roles, it offers a tongue-and-cheek comedy.

Shabana returns from England after many years as a

'wannabe angrez.' But she has to share the family home with her older sister-in-law Sultana, who is an old fashioned true 'desi.'

One wants to sell the house. The other doesn't. Sparks and missiles fly as each woman mocks the other. The tension escalates when Shabana's son arrives from England and falls in love with Sultana's daughter.



Ishq Pagal Karey

Raheel and Rania are madly in love. Just when they are about elope, Rania changes her mind and Raheel is left waiting for her at the railway station. He vows revenge, while Rania gets married to a decent and loving Dr. Zain, and starts leading a happy life.

Until one day when Zain brings home a recovering drug addict and tells Rania to look after him. Rania is shocked to find that it is Raheel.

Starring Mikail, Zubab Rana and Irfan Khoosat. The series is catching eyeballs on TVONE.



Naqqara-e-Khuda

A serial currently on air on TVONE has ignited some great viewers' interest because of its arrogant, sadist protagonist. Written by the immensely popular writer, Asma Nabeel, the serial shows how this antihero destroys many lives, even of those he claims to love.

Used to the charming chocolate heroes, Pakistani viewers now have a glimpse of what real life can be like with a maniac – a storyline the west has depicted scores of times.

Shamoon Abbasi, Zara Tareen, Bilal Qureshi and Arooba Mirza are featuring in leading roles. rolesingNaqqara-e-Khuda.



Harjai

This record-breaking Turkish serial has won international acclaim in at least 32 countries.

When young and beautiful Reyhan falls in love with rich and handsome Miran, she imagines a blissful future. But then she discovers an ugly secret. A past enmity now threatens their marriage. And her father is responsible for this looming tragedy. A powerful serial with thrilling twists and turns, brilliant acting and beautiful locations. Only on TVONE.

Mor Moharan

For the first time in Pakistan a television serial that highlights the crucial issues of environment and climate change. A powerful story about a woman protagonist, Rohi, who influences change in her land by leading through example and deep conviction as she becomes a source of inspiration.

The story is set in the Cholistan Desert, a prominent landmark, where the ravages of climate change are clearly visible. Written by Ali Moeen, Mor Moharan boasts strong performances by Sonia Husain, Zahid Ahmed, Firdous Jamal and filmstar Babar, making it a compelling watch on TVONE.



To Be Honest

It is a no holds barred show that is hugely entertaining on the web. Audacious host Tabish Hashmi grills celebrities Ayesha Omar, Mohib Mirza, Sarwat Gilani, Hiba Bukhari about their personal and professional lives. But the bold and beautiful stars pay back Hashmi in kind. This battle of wits and breezy hits is highly entertaining and a bit controversial as it sheds insights into the showbiz world.



Morning Star

This morning show continues to make waves after a terrific start! The Morning Star, hosted by Azfar Rehman, has captured eyeballs, hearts and ratings in a short time. Armoured with a vision and a purpose to impart information and guidance on social issues, Azfar hosts qualified experts and specialists daily. A-category showbiz celebrities and stylists add glamour and lively entertainment to rock our mornings.



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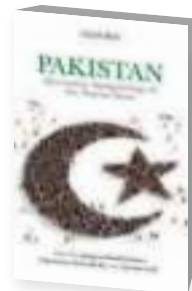


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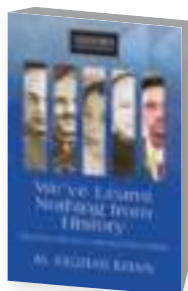
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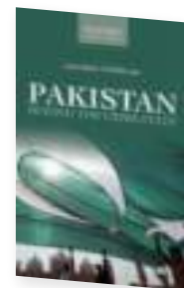
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