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July 2022

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**Head of Marketing**

Imran Ali Khan

**Design & Creative**

Aman Ahmed Khan

**Admin. Manager**

Waqas Hasan

**Sales**

Asif Musa

**Monthly 'Narratives'**

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Aamra Cottages

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Pakistan.

**Contact us:**

letters@narratives.com.pk

**Website:**

www.narratives.com.pk

**Follow us:**

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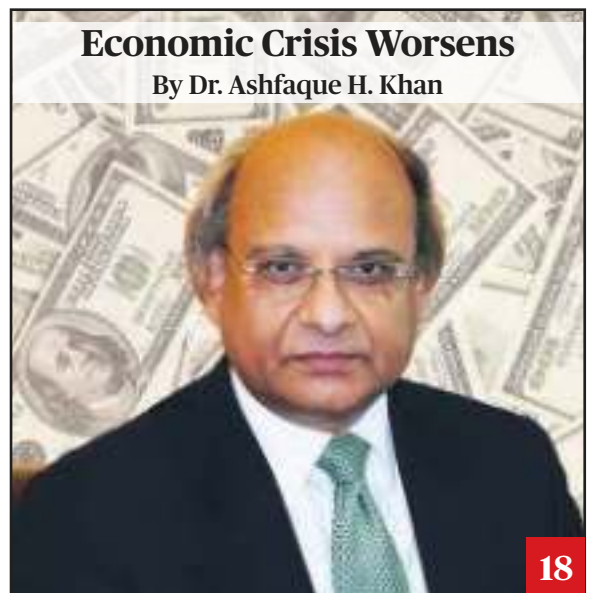
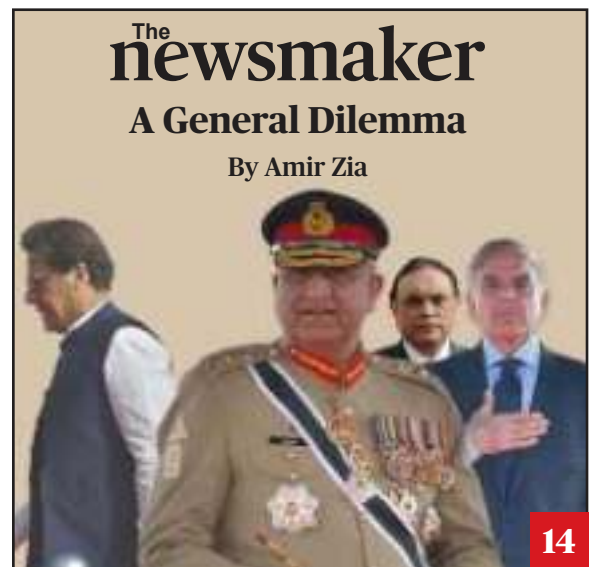
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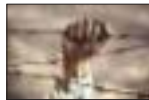
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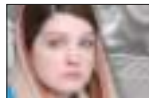
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# Course Correction



Ibrahim Sajid Malick  
Editor, *Narratives*

**N**ow that Pakistan has accepted structural adjustment terms, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will reward us with more loans, increasing our debt akin to a so-called firefighter pouring gasoline on a burning home instead of water. Petrol prices have already gone through the roof. As the Sharif-Zardari government implements IMF's tough conditions, including scrapping subsidies in the energy sector, inflation appears all set to cross the 20 per cent mark.

The Pakistani rupees – already trading at above 200 against the dollar – continues to remain under pressure against the backdrop of a looming balance of payment crisis. The sharp devaluation may increase exports by accelerating the plunder of natural resources, lowering real wages, and subsidizing export-oriented foreign investments, but its impact on the common man remains lethal.

This raises questions about the IMF, which was established to collaborate with member countries to adopt measures to safeguard the stability of the international financial system and rectify balance-of-payment imbalances. From its inception, instead of assisting countries in avoiding currency crises, the IMF has consistently pushed them to forgo cross-border trade and financial flow control, resulting in vast trade imbalances and irresponsible financial speculation.

The IMF, the World Bank, and other neo-colonialist institutions cannot be successful without corrupt 'natives.' Some interesting facts emerge from Pakistan's history of borrowing from the IMF, which was first approached in 1958 by General Ayub Khan. Under the country's first Standby Agreement with the IMF, Pakistan signed an agreement to secure \$25 million in special drawing rights (SDR). These funds were never withdrawn.

Not long after, Ayub's finance team pursued two consecutive IMF programmes in 1965 and 1968. However, this time around they ended up withdrawing approximately SDR 112 million – the entire agreed-upon amount. Pakistan officially became an IMF client at this point.

After Ayub's exit, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took the country back to the IMF on May 18, 1972. Bhutto appears to have a strong affinity for the IMF, evidenced by the number of times he approached it. Bhutto knocked on the IMF doors thrice in a row – 1972, 1974, and in 1977, withdrawing approximately SDR 314 million against the agreed-upon SDR 330 million. There was no stopping the train wreck after Bhutto. The PML-N, the PPP, and the PTI have all borrowed heavily from the IMF. Overall, Pakistan has borrowed approximately SDR 13.79 billion from the IMF. The PPP secured 47 per cent of the loans, followed by the PML-N at 35 per cent, and military rulers trailing at 18 per cent.

Continuing on this path would now be economically unsustainable and politically suicidal. Public resentment of the privileged class is already so strong that it could lead to civil unrest. For too long, the ruling elite has plundered public resources for their gain. It's time to face the music. Nothing less is acceptable in the tinderbox of widespread unrest.

The government must immediately impose clear, all-encompassing austerity measures on the ruling class. No half-measures will do. People are gazing into the abyss of financial disaster, suffering from a 40 per cent increase in fuel costs, a 47 per cent increase in the per unit electricity bill, and a 45 per cent increase in the gas tariff in early June.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called on the privileged classes (people like him) to make sacrifices, but it would be naive to expect that such appeals would work. There must be concrete acts to show that the governing class is willing to share the burden of belt-tightening with the ordinary man. At this crucial point, it makes both economic and political sense to remove the trappings of the VIP culture, which is flaunted in the face of 'ordinary people' every day.

The unnecessary ostentation of certain people's security escorts, the contingents of hangers-on accompanying members of the governing class for umrah at the state cost, the foreign junkets of officials with family members and so on. Whatever their disagreements, the governing class is nearly always in agreement regarding improving advantages and privileges for themselves. Such disparities in lifestyles are absurd in a nation where millions of people lack proper access to basic necessities. Preference for some members of society has always been ethically and legally incorrect. Continuing on this course now would be a crime.

# ZEROING IN



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



# License to Corruption

*Amendments to the NAB laws have benefited nearly 90 per cent of the accused, including high profile politicians. 'House of Sharifs' is among the main beneficiaries*

**T**he National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has never been an issue for the masses, who if given a chance would like to see all the bad guys of Pakistan's tiny ruling elite taken to task for their loot and plunder of the national wealth. Yet, the NAB has remained in the top news year after year since it was first established with a lot of fanfare during the heydays of former military ruler General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf with an aim to eradicate corruption at least in the highest echelons of power. In this context, NAB remained only an issue for the miniature but very influential and powerful segment of the country's ruling elite. No wonder using the media blitz, it did manage to make the NAB controversial and make a case to defang it, if not to wrap it altogether.

It is also a fact that as the country's top anti-corruption watchdog, the performance and efficiency of the NAB has always been questionable because none of the much-maligned politicians had ever been convicted.

The reason; the poor investigations, prosecution and all the political interference did not allow the NAB to ensure the closure of the cases. However, it did manage to at least initiate inquiries, investigations and cases against the corrupt members of the ruling elite and keep some of them under custody for at least a few months. No wonder all the traditional political forces, their loyal bureaucrats and even many businesspeople hated the NAB and wanted to pull down the curtain on it.

And finally, the alliance led by the Sharif and Zardari families in less than two months after coming to power rushed to defang the NAB in one of the most controversial law-making exercises witnessed in the country.



Targeting NAB...

*Alliance led by the Sharif and Zardari families in less than two months after coming to power rushed to defang the NAB in one of the most controversial law-making exercises witnessed in the country.*

The amendments made to the NAB (2nd Amendment) Bill 2021 by the Shehbaz Sharif-led government will benefit more than 90 per cent of cases, including high profile ones against politicians – whether at the inquiry, investigation or trial stage. One of the biggest beneficiaries of these amendments are the members of the Sharif clan and their close aides.

In May, the NAB amendment bill was rushed through both the National Assembly and the Senate without any kind of serious debate. The National Assembly passed the bill with more than 120 vacant seats. The small and friendly opposition, whose leader wants to run in the next election on the PML-N ticket – facilitated the process with their connivance.

President Dr. Arif Alvi did the right

thing by refusing to sign the bill as he returned the NAB bill and the one pertaining to electoral reforms, saying they violated Article 46 of the Constitution.

The NAB law will have retrospective effect – from the date of promulgation of the original National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) 1999. Legal experts say that more than 90 per cent of NAB cases, whether at inquiry, investigation or trial stage, will benefit from these amendments.

Now the NAB, according to a senior NAB official, stands powerless. "It would have been better to shut the NAB and save valuable money from the national exchequer than to run it without any power," the official told Narratives requesting anonymity. He said that now the accountability of the corrupt elite is impossible.

The biggest change made in the NAB law is that now "the burden of proof" has been shifted to the one who reports the matter. This would allow any suspect to get away with the illegal wealth as convicting a white collar criminal was a Herculean task even under those NAB laws which were dubbed as draconian.

The sole purpose of this new legislation is to benefit the few, who are accused of corruption. The absence of the PTI members – who have tendered their resignations from the National Assembly – made it easy for the government to bulldoze these controversial amendments, which are being challenged in the Supreme Court.

The amended NAB law says that in assets beyond means cases, the value of property will be considered as shown in a



*Friends for now.*

registered document or the Federal Board of Revenue value, whichever is higher.

This benefits the accused as the FBR rates were introduced about five years back. It means that the value shown in the registry or deputy commissioner rate will be taken as the value of the immovable asset for all such properties, which were acquired five years ago.

The new NAB law describes in vague terms that assets should be 'substantially' beyond means and have been made from 'corrupt and dishonest means'. However, no definition of 'substantial' has been given in the law. Moreover, linking assets with corrupt and dishonest means will also give significant benefit to an accused.

If a public office holder possesses assets worth millions/billions of rupees, which cannot be justified with known sources of income, the NAB cannot proceed against the accused under the new law as the entire onus will be on the bureau to establish that these assets are made from corrupt and dishonest means. Section 14 of the NAO 1999 – which says the burden of proof in cases where the anti-graft body has made a reasonable case will shift to the accused person – has been deleted.

In the misuse of authority cases, it will be mandatory to show that a public office holder making a decision gained 'monetary' benefit from that decision.

In the absence of a NAB chairman or deputy chairman, any senior officer of the NAB will function as the chairman, which can always be used by the sitting government.

The definition of 'asset' has also been

*In a nutshell, these hasty NAB amendments – the foulest in the country's history – have been made to give a clean chit to top politicians, who already stand accused of corruption*

changed. Earlier, it meant any property held by the suspects, directly or indirectly, in his/her own name or in the name of a spouse or relative. Now, a property only in the name of the accused or the benamidar will be included in the definition of asset. This will benefit a number of high-profile suspects, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif – accused of accumulating assets in the names of their spouses and relatives.

In Section 23 of the NAO 1999, which says a suspect cannot dispose of his property during inquiry and investigation without permission of a court, has been deleted. Inquiry or investigation time has been restricted to six months by law, which is not practical in white collar crime cases. Similarly, the remand time in NAB custody is reduced to 14 days from 90 days.

In Section 21, clause (g) has been

scrapped. This section made evidence received from a foreign state admissible in court proceedings notwithstanding with provisions of Qanun-e-Shahadat Order 1984.

The biggest beneficiary of this deletion is Maryam Nawaz – the PML-N's vice president – whose trust deed written in Calibri font was received from the UK. These documents will no longer be admissible in court proceedings.

Another amendment pertaining to cheating the public at large now states that the number of affected people should not be less than 100. This benefits senior PML-N leaders Khwaja Saad Rafique and his brother Khawaja Salman Rafique, who face the Paragon society reference involving 76 affectees. Earlier, the NAB as per its standard operating procedures could take cognizance of up to 50 affectees. Later, a Supreme Court judgement said that 22 people can also be treated as public at large.

The amended Section 26 says that an accused becoming an approver "shall be disqualified from holding any public office for five years." This discourages the accused from coming forward. Another new condition says that an approver's disclosure shall be "based on material". This is a new hindrance, as in white collar crimes, a person privy to the planning of an offence may not be able to have "material" to support disclosures.

A change has also been made in Section 36 of the 1999 law. This provision provides indemnity to the state functionaries and NAB officers for actions done in good faith in pursuance of the provisions of the NAO.

With an amendment to the application clause (Section 4), the decisions of federal, provincial cabinets, ECNEC or any regulatory body have been excluded from the NAB's domain. In the appointment of a NAB chairman, the president's role has been eliminated. Now, the federal government will appoint the chairman whose tenure has been reduced to three years from four.

In a nutshell, these hasty NAB amendments – the foulest in the country's history – have been made to give a clean chit to top politicians, who already stand accused of corruption and give them a license to do more plunder in the future. The people or the national interest do not figure in any of these NAB amendments. ■



# Trading with the Enemy?

*Pakistan's political leadership and the military establishment both should be clear that trading with the enemy in the near or any distant future is no option at all until India reverts back to the pre-August 5, 2019, status of Kashmir*

**W**hen on August 5, 2019, India unilaterally scrapped the symbolic autonomous status of occupied Kashmir to make it part of its union territory, Pakistan's reaction had been weak, confined to more bluff and bluster rather than any concrete and meaningful steps. Indians had anticipated and factored in this Pakistani reaction given Islamabad's weak economic conditions, a divided political house, and the world's apathy towards the plight of Kashmiris.

However, former prime minister Imran Khan despite all the odds did managed to highlight the Kashmir dispute on the world stage and took a principled stand that there can be no normal relations with India, including trade, until New Delhi revokes its August 5 decision which violated the UN resolutions and the bilateral agreements made with Pakistan. This was the bare minimum Pakistan could have done as India crossed one red-line after another. And that's what Islamabad did, even though under the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government, there were moves to open trade with India. Some within Imran Khan's cabinet and powerful business circles advocated this position openly. But thanks to the public pressure, these designs were foiled.

Come the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led coalition government, among the first steps it took was to appoint a trade minister at the Pakistani High Commission, New Delhi. The public uproar, however, forced the government to announce that there has been no change in Pakistan's position and the trade ties between the two estranged neighbours



**Pakistan must rule out trade with India until New Delhi revokes Aug 5, 2019 unlawful measures that made occupied Kashmir part of Indian union territory.**

*A segment of Pakistani elite is advocating peace with India on purely Indian terms in which Pakistan not just surrenders Kashmir but confines its role to a satellite state of India.*

are not being restored. But the symbolism of this unilateral flexibility towards India can hardly be missed.

And this is not the first time that the PML-N has gone an extra mile to appease the Hindu extremist government of India. Even during Nawaz Sharif's third stint in power, the PML-N had been giving one-sided concessions to the Modi regime at the cost of aspirations of the Kashmiri people and Pakistan's just and principled position on Kashmir.

And now in the PML-N's fourth stint in power, it is moving in the same direction damaging the Kashmir cause and alienat-

ing Kashmiris living on both sides of the so called Line of Control (LoC).

Pakistan's political leadership and the military establishment both should be clear that trading with the enemy in the near or any distant future is no option at all until India reverts back to the pre-August 5, 2019, status of Kashmir. Only then, the process of dialogue and efforts to normalise relations with India can start. Anything short of that means that Pakistan has accepted the new position of India – that is assimilation of occupied Kashmir in the Indian union territory – and the talks would only drag on to solidify the Indian grip on the disputed territory.

This would be an abject surrender by Pakistan and betrayal to the Kashmir cause.

In the recent past, there have been growing voices within the country's ruling elite to normalise relations with India at every cost although there are no takers of peace on the other side of the border. In a way, a segment of Pakistani elite is advocating peace with India on purely Indian terms in which Pakistan not just surrenders Kashmir but confines its role to a satellite state of India. Our so called peace doves want Indian trucks to ply on Pakistani roads and Islamabad's role is reduced to collecting nominal toll tax from them. ■

# Rich Pakistanis and Dubai

*Pakistanis among top three foreign investors in Dubai's real estate*

**P**akistan may be a struggling, debt-ridden country, but rich Pakistanis are among the top three investors in Dubai's property market, which remains a favourite destination of foreign investors to park their wealth because of the lax investment policies.

A total of 19,662 Pakistanis own 38,907 properties across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) worth a staggering \$10.6 billion, according to a report released by the Centre for Advanced Defence Studies, a US non-profit organisation.

The Centre – dedicated to analysis and reporting on conflict and security issues worldwide – in its latest research has attempted to analyse the property ownership in one of the world's largest off-shore financial centres and discussed the ownership of about 800,000 properties in this territory.

The report presented a global map of real estate wealth held in Dubai by the foreign nationals scaled by the investing country's GDP.

According to the report, investors from India and the United Kingdom own about 20 and 10 per cent of offshore properties in Dubai respectively, closely followed by Pakistan, the Gulf countries, Iran, Canada, Russia, and the United States.

The UAE ranked 1st in the West Asia region in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). It accounts for 54.4 per cent of the total FDI inflow to the region, which amounts to \$36.547 billion. Apart from owning businesses, off-shore real estate in Dubai is large, estimating to around \$146 billion worth of foreign

wealth invested in its property market.

Foreign-owned real estate in Dubai appears to be about twice as large as in London, despite the fact that Dubai – with a population of 3.5 million – is only a third the size of London, which has an estimated population of around 9.0 million.

According to the report, the main owners of Dubai real estate in absolute terms are large neighbouring countries including India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and a number of large, often English-speaking economies – the United

Kingdom, the United States, Canada and, to a lesser extent, China, Germany and France.

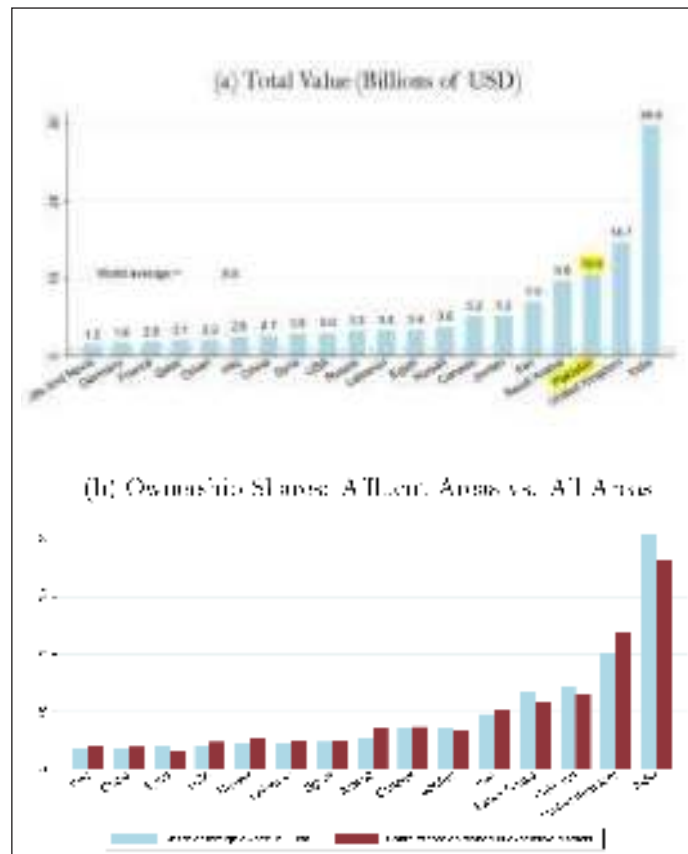
India is the country with the largest ownership both by value and number of owners. Nearly 35,000 Indians own real estate in Dubai, worth almost \$30 billion (20 per cent of total Dubai off shore real estate). The second largest investor is the United Kingdom with more than 23,000 different UK owners and \$15 billion in assets (10 per cent of the total).

While neighbouring countries still appear at the top of the ranking, US, China, and European Union countries – which had sizable holdings in absolute terms – have small holdings relative to the size of their respective economies, equivalent to less than 0.05 per cent of their GDP.

Other countries at the top of the list include conflict-ridden countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Sudan; countries under autocratic rule like Eritrea, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan; and neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Kuwait, and Iran.

Cross-border ownership of real estate is a blind spot in existing statistics on international investments.

There has long been a concern that real estate is used for money laundering and hiding wealth from tax authorities. ■







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**By Amir Zia**

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

## A General Dilemma

The military leadership once again stands as the deciding force. Whatever steps the military leadership takes or does not take from now, will have a direct bearing on the future of Pakistan – good or bad. The ball is in their court

**C**hief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa is in a race against time. If everything goes according to the announcement made by the current military spokesperson, General Bajwa is all set to retire by the end of November this year, after completing his second three-year term as the COAS. This leaves barely five months for the most influential and powerful man in the country right now to oversee and guide to completion what his supporters say is “the process of institutional course-correction” which began with the announcement of a new ‘neutral-

ity’ of the Armed Forces on Pakistan’s political chessboard.

However, this apparently “politically correct” posture – that has long remained the demand of Pakistan’s traditional anti-establishment forces – has triggered a sharp reaction among the Pakistan Army’s many ardent civilian supporters and cheerleaders. They see this institutional “neutrality” as directly or indirectly responsible for the return of the country’s two allegedly most corrupt political dynasties – the Sharifs and the Zardaris – into the corridors of power.

And in the battle of optics and percep-

tions, the unexpected fall of the Imran Khan government seems to have exacerbated Pakistan's political, economic and institutional crises.

The political polarisation has intensified against the backdrop of the once again soaring popularity of Imran Khan – which had ebbed considerably during his time in office. Now he is seen as holding a far higher moral ground than his political rivals. And as both he and his opponents – the unity government – have dug their respective heels on two opposite ends of the political spectrum, there appears no middle ground for any workable relationship. To discredit the system even more, the incomplete National Assembly is seen passing controversial laws, clearly and solely aimed at benefiting the Houses of the Sharifs and Zardaris and their close aides in numerous corruption cases. The sweeping changes in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) laws are a prime example of this. Meanwhile, right or wrong, as far as the general public is concerned, all this has been done with the blessings of the powers-that-be.

With more than 120 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers staying away from the National Assembly after tendering resignations, a small friendly or “pocket” opposition is making the process of law-making murkier. Many Pakistanis, especially the educated and politically-aware segments in the urban areas, have lost faith in the system, and vent their anger by joining Imran Khan's rallies and public meetings, or taking extreme positions on social media in which they target not just the Shehbaz government, but also the institutions they see as culpable in respect of the current political maelstrom.

Perhaps this expression of public resentment and outrage is the most worrisome sign. Never before in the past, has the Pakistan Army's top leadership been made the target of a smear campaign on the huge scale being witnessed today. In the past, a tiny segment of “politically correct” westernised liberals, and the fringe sub-nationalist and separatist groups resorted to propaganda campaigns against the Armed Forces, but they found hardly any takers of their point-of-view in mainstream Pakistan. Even when former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam, and some close aides criticised the military leadership, including the Army Chief General Bajwa, by nam-



Same page no more...

*To discredit the system even more, the incomplete National Assembly is seen passing controversial laws, clearly and solely aimed at benefiting the Houses of the Sharifs and Zardaris and their close aides in numerous corruption cases.*

ing them in their rallies, a vast majority of Pakistanis reacted strongly against them and rejected their narrative. But this time around, the situation is different.

Former premier Imran Khan often speaks in metaphors and makes indirect references against those who brought what he calls the “most corrupt” politicians back to power, but he tactfully refrains from making any direct allegations

against the Army or its leadership. In fact, both in his on-the-record and off-the-record interviews, he always highlights the vital importance of the Armed Forces for a country like Pakistan.

However, a large number of his fans, and those who oppose the Sharifs and the Zardaris, are not following suit, or paying heed to Khan's advice. They are continuing with their propaganda against the military leadership. And perhaps for the first time, many retired officers of the armed forces, including senior level officers, have also joined these voices of protests – such a break from the past being unheard of in Pakistan's history.

This kind of mass public criticism cannot be simply brushed aside as the work of anti-Pakistan forces or an organised campaign by some vested interest or a political party – the PTI. Something unprecedented is happening in Pakistan, where people are questioning the sudden shift of the military's own narrative on both the regional and domestic fronts. For them, the country's “centre of gravity” now stands shaken, if not compromised.

Even before the change of guard in Islamabad, Many nationalist Pakistanis were upset at Pakistan's soft and lacklustre stance, including that of the Army Chief, in relation to India and the assimilation of occupied Kashmir into Indian





Imran Khan's ouster has rejuvenated his support base.

union territory. Barring some lip-service to this cause for internal consumption, Pakistan's climbdown on this front has been stark and shocking for many Pakistanis. Statements such as it being time to "bury the past" and "regions must go forward" have not gone down well among the people considering that India's extremist Hindu government is resorting to the worst kinds of atrocities in occupied Kashmir, and also against Muslims living in India in general.

Now the rise of the Sharifs and Zardaris to power is seen as another institutional climbdown even on the domestic anti-corruption narrative which had been consolidated and nurtured for years. Similarly, on the media front, there

*Now the rise of the Sharifs and Zardaris to power is seen as another institutional climbdown even on the domestic anti-corruption narrative which had been consolidated and nurtured for years.*

has also been an about-turn in the institutional position. Now those media houses which had remained the target for years, are being patronised and cultivated, and those which were seen as being close to the establishment, are being sidelined and shunned.

Whether for good or for bad, these are mega shifts in the Pakistan Army's position that will have a long-term impact not just on the institution itself, but also on the country. The biggest question for Pakistan watchers remains whether Gen. Bajwa will be able to finish what he started in the fag-end of his military career. The military top brass also needs to do a lot of introspection on why the country's most trusted and most popular institution until just a few months ago, failed to put across its message effectively, logically and rationally. Why has there been such a huge disconnect between the public and the barracks? And why was the institution not able to correctly read the mood of the moment?

However, it is not just the "institutional course correction," and its impact on politics and optics which remain a challenge for both, the military and civil leadership. The reality of a severely strained economy is making this task even more difficult and unpopular.

Although on many fronts, Pakistan's macroeconomic numbers are impressive – for which credit should be given to the Imran Khan government, including the rise of exports, a higher tax collection and the inflow of remittances – exogenous shocks have made imports too expensive, leading to a balance of payments crisis.

The measures taken by the Shehbaz government to revive the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, including jacking up petroleum products' prices and electricity and gas tariffs have already resulted in record inflationary pressure. Going forward, inflation is all set to increase, which will make the current government and its supporters even more unpopular and provide Imran Khan greater ammunition to carry on his tirade against them.

While the Shehbaz government has floated the idea of an economic charter and a consensus on economic policies, the hard fact is that no country can fix its economy without ensuring political stability. And unfortunately for Pakistan, this stability will remain elusive because those



Much of Pakistan's urban-educated classes have rejected the new political set-up, which they view as tainted by corruption and foreign influence.



who are leading the country are not seen as honest and above-board. This perception is one of the many stumbling blocks that is preventing Pakistan from exploiting its huge potential. Many Pakistanis are justified in asking how those responsible for bringing Pakistan to its knees economically and amassing huge wealth in foreign countries, can be trusted to once again lead the government.

This lack of confidence and overall negative perception is now like a millstone around the neck of the current military and civil leadership. The perceived union between the Army leadership and those accused of corruption is badly hurting the credibility of the institution and its leadership. But, for the corruption-tainted politicians it is a win-win situation. They are not just back in power, but are also now exploiting the system to manage their cases and advance their interests.

The military leadership appears in a catch-22 situation, as on one hand it is facing a backlash from its own popular support-base – so vital for any country's security – and on the other hand it is being accused of selecting those civilian partners who enjoy little respect among the people and are historically seen as unreliable by the institution itself. A continuing environment of political instability and confrontation remains bad news for any country, and it is in the state's enlightened self-interest that it resolves such internal contradictions on a war-footing.

The deepening political crisis is not just putting pressure on the Armed Forces, but also on the other state institutions – from the judiciary to the Election Commission of Pakistan. There is a lot of disillusionment and discontentment towards the performance of these institutions, as the powerful, politically connected and corrupt elite now seem to be unstoppable.

While the Pakistan Army leadership is under severe criticism, allegations of corruption and misrule against Imran Khan seem to make little impact on his fan-base. He is largely seen as the Mr. Clean of Pakistani politics, and the criticism that he attempted to interfere in the working of the army, made a bad choice regarding the chief minister of the Punjab, messed up Pakistan's foreign relations with friendly countries and remained uncompromising in his relations with the opposition, is also not creating any significant



*Time appears against PM Shehbaz Sharif's government as public discontent and economic challenges continue to grow.*

*There is a lot of disillusionment and discontentment towards the performance of these powerful, politically connected corrupt elite now seem to be unstoppable.*

dent in his popularity. In fact, some of the charges leveled against him – of him being hawkish and uncompromising on corruption and saying a firm no to the alleged dictation of foreign powers – are going in his favour. Currently, Imran Khan is the voice of all the country's popular narratives – from his anti-corruption crusade to saying no to foreign dictation, from the need for pro-poor measures to getting his inspiration from the Riasat (State) of Medina.

But it does not mean that the road ahead for Khan is smooth. He is seen taking on the country's entrenched political establishment, the media establishment and the military establishment all at the same time. His only card right now remains that of a popular support base,

even though his core team appears weak and disorganised. And yet, vested interests are finding him hard to manage with every passing day.

For General Bajwa, defusing these ever-escalating political tensions remains a prime responsibility – and a major national security challenge.

Given the public mood and reaction, the way forward cannot be expecting tried and tested politicians to pull the country out of the morass, but rather on disengaging them. And the people know this cannot happen if this so-called unity government is kept in power in Islamabad and Lahore. Perhaps a truly neutral set-up comprising experts and technocrats, with a mandate to steer the country through difficult economic times is the answer to the problem for now. State institutions must also ensure that an across-the-board accountability agenda is rebooted before the country holds fresh elections. The work can only start from the dissolution of these compromised and controversial assemblies. But who will bell the cat?

Gen. Bajwa can still leave a legacy by facilitating the steps needed to take Pakistan towards political stability and progress. Can he do it? Will he do it? Or will the institution itself do what it is required and expected to do? The entire nation waits with bated breath; whatever steps the military leadership takes or does not take from now, will have a direct bearing on the future of Pakistan – good or bad. The ball is in their court. ■



# thinktank

## IMF Dictates

**By Dr. Ashfaq H. Khan**

The writer is Principal School of  
Social Sciences and Humanities,  
NUST and Director General, NUST  
Institute of Policy Studies.



# Economic Crisis Worsens

Ground is being prepared to take Pakistan back to the IMF for a new programme by September

**P**akistan's economy is passing through the most difficult phase of its history. Yet, if one looks at the numbers, Pakistan's economy was doing reasonably well until February-March 2022. The real GDP growth for fiscal 2021-22 – announced on June 9 – was recorded at 6 per cent as against the 5.7 per cent a year ago. The average GDP growth of the last two fiscal years is close to 6 per cent, which is robust. Not many countries across the world recorded this kind of growth during this period.

The large-scale manufacturing shot-up by 10.4 per cent, which reflects the strong industrial activity in the country. The investment-to-GDP ratio in 2021-22 is 15.1 per cent as against 14.6 per cent of last year – again showing an increase. The agriculture growth – barring wheat crop – did well.

When the final numbers of fiscal 2021-22 will be out, Pakistan's exports – led by the textile sector – will show a healthy growth of 28 per cent which is very strong. In one of my television interviews, I shared the platform with the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) chairman, and according to him, the export sector significantly benefited during the last three years as compared to the previous 70 years. This is the version of the APTMA chairman. This means that our textile sector was booming. According to the APTMA chairman, textile exports this year would be around \$20 billion, and if the current policy continues, they would be targeting \$26 billion in fiscal 2022-23. Remittances are also all set to hit history's highest mark of \$31-32 billion in fiscal 2021-22.

## PTI's weaknesses

However, there were challenges also. I think the previous government did not perform well on at least two fronts. First is the persistence of high inflation in general, and food inflation in particular. Food inflation hits the country's poor and even the middle-income people. Under the PTI rule, the food inflation remained in



double-digit all through. There were two reasons for this. First, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the supply-chain and caused bottlenecks around the world, resulting in higher food and commodity prices. Pakistan remains a net importer of a number of vital food items and other commodities. Therefore, we bought them at higher prices from the international market. It means the inflation was the result of exogenous shocks.

Coupled with this, Pakistan also witnessed what I call the "Reza Baqir" effect. Dr. Reza Baqir effect is synonymous with currency's devaluation which he guided as the governor of the State Bank of

Pakistan. We devalued our currency too much and too fast. This made the life of the people so difficult that on one hand, the international commodity prices were rising and, on the other, the value of Pakistani rupee was declining, resulting in a double inflationary pressure. This adversely affected the people with fixed income, especially the poor and the middle-class. Who installed Dr. Reza Baqir as the SBP governor? On whose instructions, Dr. Baqir was devaluing the currency? Former premier Imran Khan, must answer this. Such decisions caused irreparable loss to Pakistan's economy.

The PTI government's failure in curbing the rising import bill was also a major blunder. For the last four years, I have been urging the government to pursue a selective and yet aggressive policy to curb imports. Neither the previous government paid attention to this nor the present government appears serious about it. This has resulted in the ballooning of the country's import bill to around \$70 billion.

So, on the one hand, we were earning dollars, but at the same time, there was massive leakage of the US currency in the shape of imports that affected our trade and current account balance, putting further pressure on the exchange

*The average GDP growth of the last two fiscal years is close to 6%, which is robust. Not many countries across the world recorded this kind of growth during this period.*





*The PTI Government's 'Sehat Card' scheme proved a blessing for the poor.*

rate. As a result, the country is now passing through a balance of payment crisis.

#### **PTI's performance**

However, several economic indicators improved significantly under the PTI government. The FBR's performance, in my opinion, was excellent. The revenue growth thus far has been recorded at around 27-28 per cent, which is robust. The government also introduced measures like 'the track-and-trace-system,' which resulted in the availability of 2.2 million additional sugar in the market. This also contributed to our large-scale manufacturing growth. Because of the track and trace system, additional sugar was reported and mill owners were forced to pay taxes as well.

Similarly, the government introduced the 'point of sale' and targeted to bring some 50,000 large shopping malls and shops under the tax net. However, the FBR could not register more than 5,000 big shops and malls so far. Yet, at least some progress has been made.

On the social protection front, the PTI government's performance was impressive, though it did not receive much attention because its spokespersons did not effectively highlight all the good work as they were busy confronting political opponents.

The PTI government's 'Ehsaas' Programme has been declared one of the most successful in the developing world by international institutions. Under this programme, the government did a marvelous job, particularly at a time of the pandemic, which had crippled the business and economic activities across the

*The PTI government's 'Sehat' Card programme – which in the western world is known as health insurance – has been an excellent initiative benefiting the poor and the low-income group.*



world and rendered countless people jobless. Under these difficult circumstances, the 'Ehsaas' programme supported the poor segment of the society and gave them relief.

Similarly, the PTI government's 'Sehat' Card programme – which in the western world is known as health insurance – has been an excellent initiative benefiting the poor and the low-income group. Now they can go to a hospital for

treatment at the government expense to the tune of Rs1.0 million. This has been a wonderful project because if a poor person gets sick, the family goes under debt – often for the lifetime.

Then, there was another programme, the 'Ehsaas' scholarships, aimed at developing the human resource. I am teaching at the NUST University where students are given admissions purely on merit. I know the importance of the 'Ehsaas' scholarship programme. People from far-flung areas, who are extremely poor, could now get admission even in NUST on merit now. Under 'Ehsaas' scholarships, thousands of deserving students are studying in universities across Pakistan. If parents' income is less than Rs45,000, a student is eligible for this scholarship. Students have to just maintain their grades to complete their education free-of-cost. And imagine, if a person from a poor family and a far-flung area graduates from a university like NUST, the fortunes of his/her entire coming generation will change for the better. How can you quantify this contribution? That young man or woman who graduates from universities will be contributing to the economic development of the country for at least the next five decades. Can anyone be counting the contribution that he or she will be making to society? But these initiatives of the previous government have not been highlighted properly.

Another initiative of the previous government was 'Langar Khana', where the poor and homeless people eat, stay and spend nights free-of-cost. Daily we see people coming to cities for work. Many of such unemployed people used to beg and spend nights on the roadsides, but the previous government provided them a shelter. But I did not see any publicity from the previous government's media wing to highlight this very important initiative. I don't belong to any political party, but justice demands that all such good, pro-people initiatives must be highlighted.

#### **Challenges for the new government**

Now, let's turn our attention to the current government and its challenges. The first one is the high inflation rate, which has been going on for the last four years. The Russia-Ukraine War, coupled with the rising oil prices in the interna-

tional market, has aggravated the situation. But the Shehbaz Sharif-led government moved like a rudderless ship in its initial weeks in power, and wasted precious time. This caused immense damage to Pakistan because the currency devalued from Rs176 to Rs200 plus against the dollar. This massive devaluation added to the inflationary pressure as oil prices had to be adjusted upward. As a result, now the Shehbaz government is taking such brutal measures which were previously unheard of. The raising of petrol prices by Rs60 in 10 days was unimaginable. Only those can take such a decision, who are heartless.

The PML-N-led government will further raise the prices as it has surrendered to the IMF. But if we continue to bow to the IMF dictation, the oil prices will jump to Rs260 by July 1.

Will this help improve the economy? Will the increased cost of production lead to enhanced production? This will only lead to a fresh round of inflationary pressure. As a result, the SBP will raise the interest rate, which would discourage investments in the country.

These policies would cause unbelievable damage to the economy. I am expecting things to aggravate further by September and inflation to soar to around 20 per cent. Against this backdrop, the SPB would also raise the interest rate.

But how can we check inflation which is the supply-side phenomenon by raising the interest rates? The adjustments in interest rates can address demand-side issues. In developing countries like Pakistan, inflation cannot be curbed through jacking up interest rates.

If the government itself is creating inflationary pressure by raising the prices of utilities and devaluing the currency, it should not expect that an increase in the interest rate would curb inflation. It is a self-contradictory policy. That's why I am saying that the economy will further deteriorate. Why? Because, the government has built a case to go to the IMF's 23rd programme, which may start from October 2022.

The Shehbaz government has built a case to take Pakistan back to the IMF. We have definitely not learned the lesson even from our recent past. What happened to the country in the last three years or so? Has Pakistan's economy



*The continued appreciation of the dollar against the local currency is a bad news for the Pakistan economy as it compounds the inflationary pressure.*

*The current economic crisis is totally different from the economic crisis of post-1998 nuclear explosions and sanctions. If we have to pull the country out of the crisis, sane voices must prevail.*

improved since 2018 after implementing the IMF policies? The answer is absolutely not. And if we go to the IMF for the next three years, should we expect any improvement? No. The situation will only deteriorate. It appears like a race to the bottom. Pakistanis must learn to live without the IMF. Nobody will come from outside to improve our economy; it is we who will have to improve and fix it.

Pakistan faced a difficult economic situation in the past as well. I am a witness to the post-nuclear explosion sanctions when all the inflows were stopped but Pakistan continued to meet external debt obligations. As a result, our foreign reserves declined to as low as \$400 million but we bounced back.

Today, Pakistan economy faces even a

bigger challenge as compared to the post-1998 sanctions imposed on the country to punish its nuclear tests in response to its archenemy, India. The difference between the two eras is that at that time, the government took it as a challenge and addressed it, but today, no one is ready to lift the cross. We are just doing some firefighting and killing time. The second difference is that after the 1998 nuclear explosions, there was no such extreme polarisation as we are witnessing today in the country. This is taking a toll on the economy, which is dangerous. Currently, there is a huge trust deficit among the political parties. No one trusts the other. Therefore, political polarisation is widening with each passing day.

There is no sane voice, which could unite the political leadership and take Pakistan out of the current economic morass. Yes, the current economic crisis is totally different from the economic crisis of post-1998 nuclear explosions and sanctions. If we have to pull the country out of the crisis, sane voices must prevail.

Unfortunately, we have crushed our economy by raising oil prices and devaluing the currency. Political leadership must realise the gravity of the situation and take immediate corrective measures.

Moody's has changed Pakistan's outlook from stable to negative and told the world that Pakistan's default risk has been exacerbated. Our bonds in the international market have also taken a hit, and their high swap rates reflect that the risk of default is getting higher and higher. Now Pakistan cannot float new bonds in





*Can a controversy-marred Election Commission of Pakistan ensure free and fair general elections?*

the international market because no investor will invest in such a negative outlook. Virtually, we have exhausted all options. Things will be aggravated further till September so that we build up a case and go to the IMF yet again.

#### Lost decades

Former SBP governor Dr Ishrat Husain had declared the 1990s as the lost decade of Pakistan. And I say that the years 2008-18 as the second lost decade for the country. There is a similarity in both the lost decades as we went to the IMF for bailouts.

Can we afford another lost decade from 2018-28? Just think about it.

If a country wastes 30 years as lost decades in its 74-year history, will it move ahead? But unfortunately, that is happening now.

In the last 30 years, several countries surpassed us economically. How can we develop with three lost decades?

Instead of going to the IMF, we should plan floating international bonds to get the money Pakistan needs. There are 190 member countries of the IMF. Do you think that they all look towards the IMF to meet their balance of payment obligations?

No, not all. Hardly 16 to 18 countries like us go to the IMF as they have failed to manage their own economy. How do the rest of the countries – many weaker than us – run their economy?

*Free, fair and transparent elections are the only solution to bring Pakistan back to equilibrium.*

Countries like Afghanistan have more stable currency than us and the war-torn country faces no crisis of balance of payment. Why? Because the IMF has not set its foot there. The day the IMF will set foot in Afghanistan, Afghans will start crying like us.

Take the example of Bangladesh, since its independence, in the initial phase of turbulence, it went to the IMF twelve times. Finally, it came out of the IMF clutches and is now managing its economy on its own. Bangladesh's currency is stable and no one tells them about the 'real effective exchange rate'.

Here, we have a mafia which raises the slogan of a 'real effective exchange rate'. Why is no one raising the so-called slogan in Bangladesh, where they have better economists than us and they also work in the IMF and the World Bank. Since 2002, the exchange rate of the Taka is the same at 77-78 against the dollar, and its exchange reserves are \$41 billion as compared to Pakistan which has less than \$10 billion. How do they run their country?

The simple answer is that they don't look towards the IMF. How has India managed its economy and their currency stable for several decades? Pakistanis must think about it. Save yourself from the IMF.

So our hands have been tied and I see things aggravating till September to build a case for yet another IMF programme. They say that if the IMF stops funding, no other lender will lend funds to Pakistan. Let me clarify it. In the 1990s, each Pakistani government used to get one tranche from the IMF and then get out of the programme. We were known as a one tranche country. Did the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other lenders lock their offices in Pakistan? No, they were lending to Pakistan.

Similarly in 2008, Pakistan went to the IMF and in 2010 it came out. During that period too, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank lent money to Pakistan.

The mafia starts crying the IMF mantra whenever the government changes in Pakistan. An echo system has been developed here. Things are aggravated on purpose here. Pakistan's outlook will further be degraded to ensure that Pakistan doesn't go to the bond market or tap any other alternative sources of funding. The only source available would be the IMF. All of us must think about it.

What is the solution?

#### Elections are the only way out

I think, with this extreme nature of political uncertainty, where only one thing is discussed: who is to be booked in a case and who is to be arrested, it is absurd to think that the economy could flourish in such an environment. We have to do away with this logjam. There is only one solution; hold free, fair and transparent elections. The sooner the better. If you delay elections out of your political whims, this deepening political and economic crisis will continue. Is this in the interest of Pakistan? Is this we want to bequeath to our younger generation? Do we want our young generation to be beggars? Do away with this personal ego, for the sake of the people and the country at large.

I appeal to those in power to conduct free, fair and transparent elections at the earliest as we have reached the point of disequilibrium. Free, fair and transparent elections are the only solution to bringing Pakistan back to equilibrium. ■



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# Balance Sheet



**By Asif Ali Qureshi, CFA**

*The writer is Co-Founder and Chief Executive of Optimus Capital Management. He has over 25 years of experience in Pakistan's financial sector & previously served as a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.*

## Fiscal Disorder

A lopsided distribution of fiscal revenues and expenditures threatens to plunge Pakistan into economic turmoil

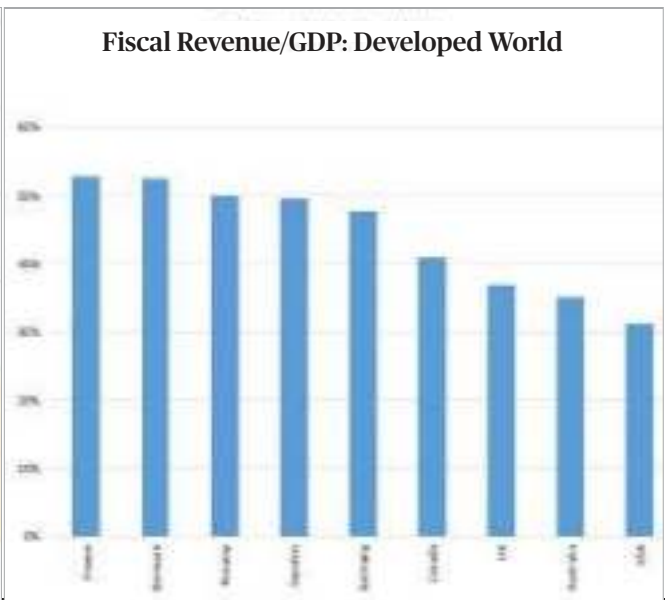
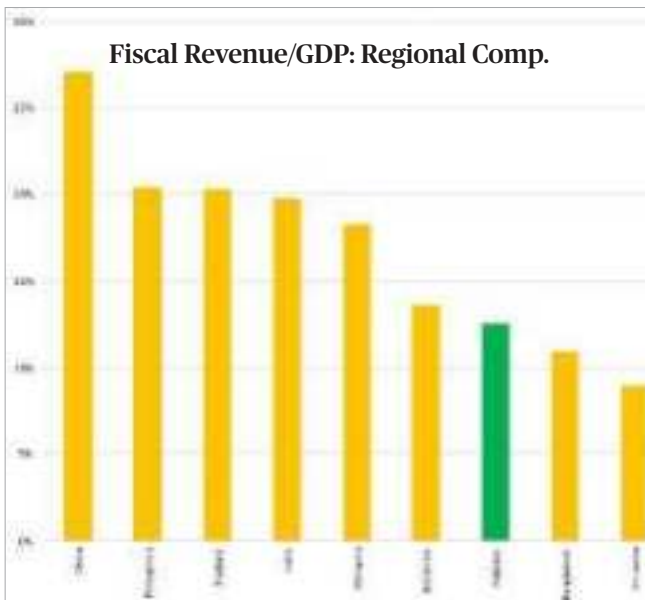
**C**haracterised by an obstinately high budget deficit and elevated public indebtedness, Pakistan's fiscal abyss is the ultimate outcome of a toxic blend of faulty regulatory framework, weak political resolve and poor governance. These structural weaknesses have translated into inadequate budgetary resources, unbalanced distribution of revenues/costs, wasteful expenditures and bleeding Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs), which have all put the country on an unsustainable fiscal trajectory.

Pakistan's current fiscal framework is bound by the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) award and the 18th constitutional amendment (both done in 2010), which brought about sweeping changes aimed at decentralisation and devolution. However, with politics outweighing economics as the primary

motive underlying this structural transformation, the new and constitutionally-protected fiscal order was unbalanced and inflexible with no in-built remedial mechanisms.

Taking effect from Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, the 7th NFC award increased the aggregate share of provinces in the divisible pool, which comprises nearly all taxes levied and collected by the federal government after deduction of a collection charge, from 45 per cent to 57.5 per cent. Moreover, the size of the divisible pool was expanded by reducing the federal collection charge from 5 per cent to 1 per cent, while sales tax on services was removed from the divisible pool and made exclusive domain of the provinces. Federal non-tax revenues in shape of royalties on crude oil and natural gas and Gas Development Surcharge (GDS) remained pass through to prov-





*Pakistan has among the lowest rates of fiscal revenue mobilisation, as a share of GDP, in the world.*

inces based on their respective shares of oil and gas production.

In its July 2017 report on “Fiscal Decentralisation and Macroeconomic Challenges in Pakistan”, the IMF staff provided an assessment of Pakistan’s fiscal framework. The report observed that “the 7th award contributed to substantial vertical fiscal asymmetry” by increasing provinces’ share in fiscal revenues to over 50 per cent but keeping their share in fiscal expenditures at 35 per cent thereby leaving a “significant structural deficit at the federal level”.

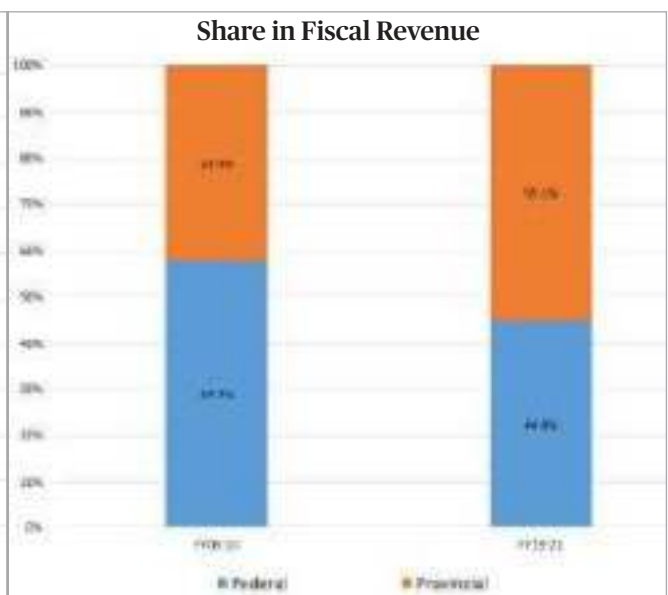
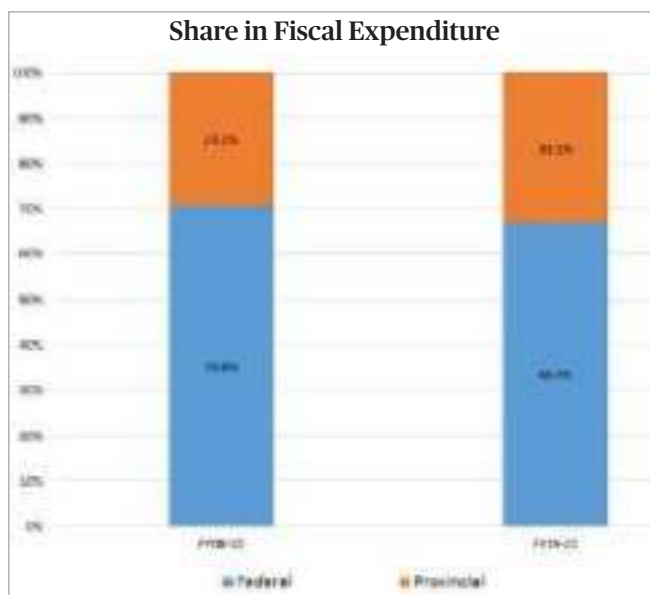
In addition to creating vertical asymmetry, the fiscal decentralisation under the 7th award has been unbalanced, ac-

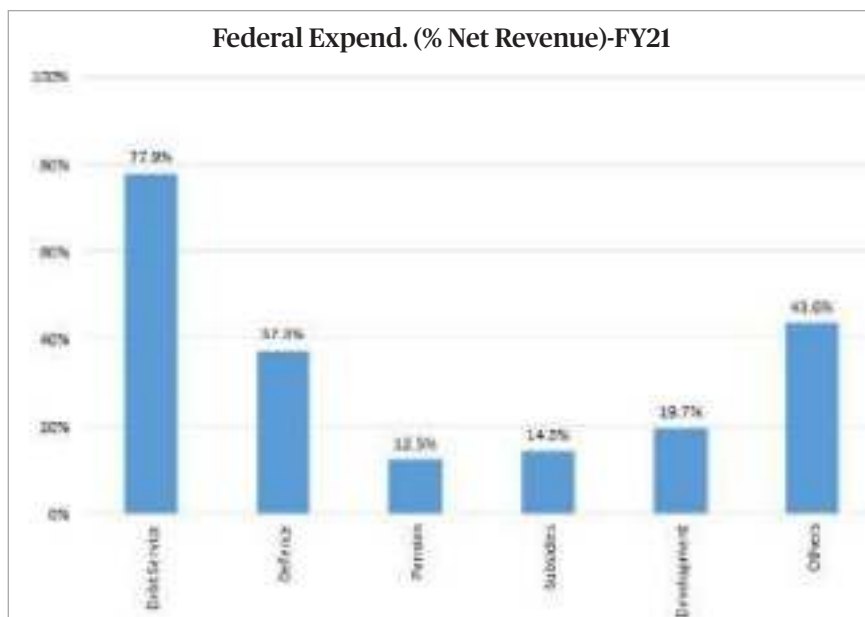
cording to the IMF report, in several other areas, mainly: 1) non-sharing of costs of electricity and debt which as per constitution are joint responsibility subjects of the centre and the provinces, 2) inherent disincentives for both the provinces and the centre towards mobilising revenues, 3) absence of devolution of resources to the local governments, 4) disconnect between devolution of fiscal resources and expenditures and 5) non-provision of contingencies relating to national emergencies.

The vertical asymmetry of the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) award became evident soon after its implementation as the very government that negotiated and implemented the award

also brought in the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) Act in 2011 to generate exclusive revenues for the federal government by sidestepping the divisible pool. However, successive attempts at collecting GIDC were met with legal challenges in courts and declared unconstitutional thereby restricting the federal government’s ability to introduce levies that did not form part of the divisible pool.

Pakistan has one of the lowest fiscal resource mobilisation ratios in the world. According to IMF’s World Economic Outlook (WEO) database for April 2022, Pakistan ranked 180th on a list of 193 countries with total fiscal revenue at 12.5 per cent of GDP in 2021, less than half of





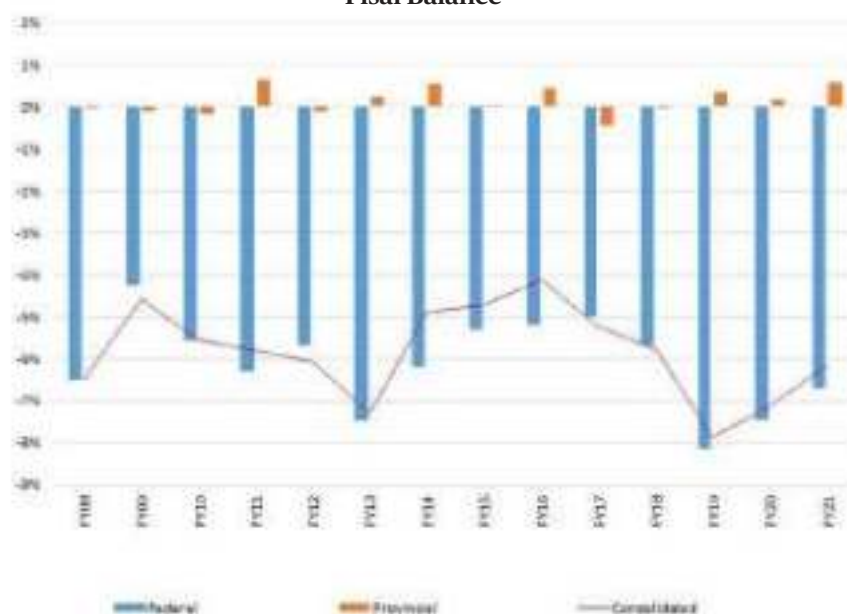
den of subsidies (predominantly energy and food) and subsistence allowances which primarily benefit provincial populations. In addition, the federal government provides development grants to the provinces.

With large structural deficits, the federal government has faced constant pressure from the IMF under successive programs to increase its revenue collection. Moreover, as provinces retain their respective budget surpluses and do not transfer them to the centre, the consolidated fiscal deficit is not a true representation of the overall fiscal position given a larger deficit at the federal level. By running down accumulated cash balances, the provinces tend to overspend closer to the election cycles which dilutes the federal government's control over fiscal policy.

Besides the scarcity of fiscal resources, Pakistan has major problems of weak quality of expenditures and poor governance of PSEs. Overstaffing, project cost overruns, hefty pension costs and cash burning PSEs continue to drain huge amounts from the federal budget although pension costs are becoming a challenge for the provinces as well. In addition to the bureaucratic inefficiencies, there are concerns about the transparency of expenditures especially in the provinces.

Pakistan's current fiscal trajectory is unsustainable and requires an urgent course correction through comprehensive reforms in the current fiscal framework. An immediate engagement between the centre and the provinces on the long overdue fresh NFC award needs to be started. The overarching objective of the next NFC award should be achieving fiscal sustainability through a more balanced distribution of resources and fiscal responsibilities between the centre and the provinces. Provinces should focus on mobilising higher revenues from their own sources as several subjects falling under the provincial domain remain under-taxed. The federal government needs to transfer the burden of subsidies (energy and food) and subsistence allowances to the provinces based on their respective population and consumption shares. Last but not the least, the quality and transparency of expenditures and overall governance must be enhanced at all levels of the government. ■

**Fiscal Balance**



the global average of 30 per cent and median of 27 per cent. However, the regional comparison looks less harrowing with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka faring poorly than Pakistan on total fiscal revenue/GDP benchmark.

Over the past 3 years (FY19-21), provinces collected a little over 9 per cent of the consolidated fiscal revenues (equivalent to 1.1 per cent of GDP) but got a resource share (including federal loans and grants) of 55 per cent. On the other hand, provinces shared only 33 per cent of total fiscal expenditures during this period. In the final three years of the previous NFC award (FY08-10), the provinces were al-

located a 42 per cent share in fiscal revenues while they accounted for 29 per cent of total fiscal expenditure.

Receiving hefty handouts from the federal government and running up budget surpluses, provinces have limited incentive to expand their own revenue sources. On the other hand, net federal fiscal revenue (after transfers to provinces) is not sufficient to even fully cover debt servicing and defence expenditures. Total federal expenditure in FY2021 was 205 per cent of net federal revenues (after transfers to provinces) with debt service and defence comprising 115 per cent. The federal government bears huge bur-



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# REPORTER'S *Diary*

## Trouble In Paradise





# Teargassing Democracy

A first-person account of how police baton-charged and teargassed law-abiding men, women and children who wanted to join former premier Imran Khan's Azadi March



**By Shiffa Z. Yousafzai**

*The writer is a leading Islamabad-based anchorperson and journalist. She hosts a morning show at Hum News.*

**S**tones pelted, baton-charged, rubber bullets fired, civilians tear gassed, people running for water and the only thing you could see for miles was just smoke, bringing everything in the country to a halt.

These are not scenes from occupied Kashmir or Palestine, in fact this is what was witnessed in our own federal capital Islamabad on May 25.

To fully comprehend the whole saga, let's rewind the reel and play it from May 23... Lahore... we started receiving news of former federal minister Hammad Azhar's house being raided by the police followed by attempts to arrest him along with former provincial minister Dr Yasmin Rashid. Then suddenly a stream of videos started circling on social media, where police could be seen barging into houses and illegally detaining Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) workers and leaders. Fake cases were registered to victimise them before and after the Azadi March.



*The new strongman: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah.*

It was later put on record by the Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah that around 1,700 people were arrested by the Punjab Police in 4,000 raids under the Maintenance of Public Order 16. This was an unprecedented 'abuse of power' witnessed on May 23 when the police started breaking into houses of people without warrants or on May 25 (the day of march) when police officials were seen smashing cars of citizens leaving for Imran Khan's Azadi March from Lahore to Islamabad.

*What I found disturbing was to see people in civil dress attacking peaceful protesters and smashing their cars. It was something worse than a dictatorship!*

What I found disturbing was to see people in civil dress attacking peaceful protesters and smashing their cars. It was something worse than a dictatorship!

On one hand we see such extreme measure of the ruling party to limit people attending the Azadi March and on the other hand we the government making claims of the march failing.

The question that needs to be asked is why were the containers placed blocking all entry points to the federal capital if the government did not feel threatened by the marchers?

On May 25 at 4:30pm in the afternoon, I came out to see how many people came out of their homes on Imran Khan's call. I went to the Blue Area, standing in front of Beverley Centre. I was looking at the road; the crowd wasn't too big as the local supporters were still waiting for Imran Khan to enter Islamabad. D-Chowk was the destination they had in their minds. A couple of other reporters were also covering the situation.

I spotted a family of five; parents with three girls. I walked towards them from the main double road and started talking to one of the girls. I asked her some



*Crossing the Rubicon?*

questions and just when I was about to record her believing that the government probably wouldn't use force, a shell came and dropped near my feet. I was not sure what to do as I couldn't see the gas coming out of it right away. So I kept talking to the girl who was as naive as me and knew nothing about how and when the tear gas shell works. We stood there for a few seconds and then within a minute the shell started emitting gas.... I couldn't breathe, I couldn't open my eyes, I tried finishing that interview with the girl, but she was unable to talk. I wanted to rush towards my car which was parked next to PSO petrol station near Beverley Centre, but because I couldn't open my eyes, I couldn't see what direction I was running into. I

somehow got to the car, sat inside, turned the AC on. Fortunately, I had a water bottle and a packet of salt with me in my bag so I poured some water on my scarf and placed that wet scarf on my eyes and took a pinch of salt.

After I regained my senses, I again got out of the car and went towards D-Chowk. I spotted Shireen Mazari standing at the back of a double cabin Vigo, then I saw Amir Dogar PTI's ex-chief whip standing on the roof of his jeep.

This was now about 7pm or so and other PTI leaders like Farrukh Habib, Iftikhar Durrani, Qasim Suri, Zartaj Gul, to name a few, started to gather at D-Chowk. These came there along with their respective rallies. I could see families, kids and

elderly in cars while many had no vehicle available so they were walking. I followed them towards D-Chowk while the police continued firing tear gas on the protesters to disperse them. Shelling did serve the purpose but for a short while. People ran backward as the torrent of shells was thrown upon them, but returned as the shelling paused. This drama continued for the entire night.

After several hours of observing chaos and saving myself from the tear gas, a thought came to my mind whether this was a democratic state at all or was this a state run by goons wearing police uniforms. I am sure the same sentiments were resonated by many.

The tragic Model Town killings started to haunt my mind. Who can forget the day when brutal police force was used against innocent people. And who can forget the shelling on PTI's rally lead by the then K-P chief minister Pervez Khattak in 2016 when they were coming to Islamabad. It was only Imran Khan's tenure when such draconian ways of op-

*...A thought came to my mind whether this was a democratic state at all or was this a state run by goons wearing police uniforms.*

pressing opponents were not used other than one unfortunate incident of using force against Mohsin Baig.

According to reports more than 20,000 shells were fired that night till around 8:00am in the morning in Islamabad. I was there at D-Chowk almost the entire night. I met another couple with a daughter. The daughter was asthmatic and couldn't breathe in all the smoke and tear gas. Her eyes kept watering and the mother, who couldn't keep her own eyes open, continuously kept wiping her daughter's eyes with a wet dupatta. The father, meanwhile, kept running to get more water...

Protesters started lighting fire on the green belts to dilute the tear gas. They





also set a few trees ablaze for the same purpose. But the protesters did not damage any public property. News about metro stations set afire was fabricated. People showed great restraint and did not attack the police.

Though many believed that if the attack on protestors continued it might not have been long before the people retaliated and attacked the police.

But they demonstrated unprecedented tolerance during the 15 hours of nonstop shelling and violence. Hats off to these people because we know violence in our region is not something unique in such rallies but then it also reflects the ideology of PTI where families join the rallies, men come along with their wives, sisters, mothers and daughters and they act very responsibly. This political party, unlike some other parties, does not have any militant wing.

I have covered PTI rallies in the past as well and have always seen families coming out for Imran Khan. In such events, people always care not only for their own family members, but for other people around too. There were armoured vehicles in D-Chowk that night as if some terrorist organisation had launched an attack on the capital. At least I didn't see anyone carrying a weapon on D-Chowk, rather young boys carried water bottles and were distributing them amongst the protesters as water is the first thing you need when you are affected by tear gas. They were also distributing food, biscuits, juices etc. amongst the families and elderly waiting for their leader during the night. I met an old man who told me after three days of travel he stepped out of the car here at D-Chowk. He said that he would keep supporting Imran Khan till his last breath. Girls in groups were present there without any male guardian or member of the family post-midnight.



Smoke and teargas fill the air around Islamabad's D-Chowk as police engage members of PTI's advance party.



*It was a crazy night full of chaos and gloom. Whoever was there must have felt strange depression and thought of being shackled under a police state.*

This explains how safe women felt in PTI rallies and protests.

Fast forward... Imran Khan entered Islamabad between 2-3am that night and

it took him further 3-4 hours to reach Centaurus junction. That's where he addressed the public in the morning on May 26. The crowd that turned out spoke volumes and was still responsive after an almost entire day of travel and a night of terror created by the state. They were still chanting slogans, responding to Imran's questions. And Imran anticipating further violence and bloodshed decided to not proceed towards D-Chowk and end the rally there giving the government a six-day ultimatum.

It was a crazy night full of chaos and gloom. Whoever was there must have felt strange depression and thought of being shackled under a police state. Let's keep Pakistan in our prayers as Pakistan needs them the most now. ■

# BRASS TACKS



**By Raoof Hasan**

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

## A Cauldron Difficult to Extinguish

*"Do you hear the tumult of death afar,*

*The call midst the fire-floods and  
poisonous clouds?*

*The Captain's call to the steersman to  
turn the ship to an unnamed shore,*

*For that time is over - the stagnant  
time in the port*

*Where the same old merchandise is  
bought and sold in an endless round,*

*Where dead things drift in the  
exhaustion and emptiness of truth."*

*- Rabindranath Tagore  
"The Oarsmen"*

**T**he rich baritone of Leonard Cohen or the ceaseless melody of Lata – in their distinct styles, they reflect a fusion of varying, often contrasting emotions seeking serenity. But, as much as one may try, it is not always within an individual's reach. Instead, the dread of "exhaustion and emptiness" may become a permanent feature.

But there are moments when that thought recedes to the background and its place is taken by acts oozing with heroic passion and indomitable courage. We are fortunate to be witnessing such a moment during our lifetimes – a moment that may transform the fate of our country by freeing it of the shackles of slavery and subservience it has been trapped in for decades and transiting it to attain its foundational charter: "We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are



starting with this fundamental principle: that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State” (Quaid-e-Azam, August 11, 1947). These vibrant voices demanding freedom and justice are resonating across the towns and villages of the country and their sound is gradually rising to a crescendo with each passing day.

It all started when Imran Khan came to power. Imran Khan who promised to bring a meaningful change in the lives of the ordinary, impoverished and destitute communities of the country by holding every individual to account for their deeds, more so those who have been in positions of power in the recent to distant past. It is only when he launched an earnest endeavour in pursuit of his goals that he realised that the tentacles of the traditional mafias were deeply dug in and the entire expanse of the governance structure pandered to their wishes even when they were out of power. The seeds of this systemic criminalisation stretched back to times when they first assumed the mantle of power and started embedding it in the clutches of their lust and deceit and coercing and coaxing the institutions to remain subservient to their interests rather than the interests of the state and its people. This emerged as the dominating creed over decades of misrule encompassing both the despotic and the so-called democratic dispensations.

As a consequence, the society was effectively divided into two sections: one comprised the ruling elite and the coterie of their cronies and associates who had control over all levers of power which they exploited to their sole advantage, and the other section comprised the deprived communities who found it hard to have even two meals in a day, whose children could not afford education, who died without access to any health facilities and provision of justice was only a dream in their lives. Worse still, over years, the gap separating these two communities has continued to widen, thus taking the latter farther from any prospect that they may have continued to harbour for things to improve in their lives. Inequality and inequity thus became permanent features impacting their existence strewn with despair and misery.

In giving permanence to guarding the criminal rulers’ interests, state institutions were corrupted to a point of dysfunction. They were effectively instructed



*From sworn enemies to allies...*

*These vibrant voices demanding freedom and justice are resonating across the towns and villages of the country and their sound is gradually rising to a crescendo with the passing of each day.*

in facilitating a ceaseless spree of loot and plunder. In the process, the state was rendered poorer while the personal accounts of the bandit clan kept swelling with pelf. Instead of putting an end to this remorseless binge, each succeeding government invented new methods for making the act of plunder more sophisticated and more ingenious to transport it past the fear of being busted. There came a stage when this went beyond the pale of just individuals. The entire institutional framework of the country was rendered complicit in this sinister undertaking. Pakistan virtually became a mafia land which surrendered before the interests and whims of its dons.

As a consequence of a foreign-inspired and funded conspiracy to oust Imran Khan from power, the country has since been handed over to a bunch of certified criminals to compromise its

core interests internally and externally by swearing allegiance to their masters who facilitated their induction into power. It has been rendered subservient to the machinations of a few individuals who remain wedded to advancing the interests of the corrupt ruling elite in preference to those of the state. Its courts have been compromised before the pressure of the orchestrators of this conspiracy to always find ways to extend the lease of survival of the criminals saddled in power so that they could continue mutilating its character and ethos. In doing so, the judiciary has learnt the art of opening shop at midnight and transgressing into a domain that, constitutionally, belonged exclusively to the parliament, thus damaging the fundamental concept of trichotomy of powers. This coterie of criminals has proceeded swiftly to incorporate person-specific amendments in laws and regulations that would render their conviction in myriad crimes they have committed virtually impossible. The country has also been handed over to the charge of those soul-sellers who have been bought in exchange for hefty sums of money to be hauled as animals and vote for those who invested in purchasing their conscience. Pakistan has been turned into a country where crime and corruption will, henceforth, be celebrated as national traits.

The shame list is endless. There is more of this which will take reams of paper to tabulate. It is such a sad state which apparently adrifts an irreversible wave. That is what makes the task of extricating it from this mess so monumental – a task which, nevertheless, has to be undertaken.



*A new military-civil equation.*

en. Given the sordid role which state institutions have played in this enactment, the remedial task may have to be undertaken by the people who are already demonstrating their resolve to do so. And this is where the perpetrators of this regime-change conspiracy may have gravely miscalculated the ground realities.

They thought that, because of a number of reasons encompassing the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic and its affiliated factors, Imran Khan was a bruised force and could be easily handled after being ousted from power in an unconstitutional and undemocratic manner and bringing in a compromised bunch of convicts, alleged-criminals and absconders to lead the country back in line with its policy of subservience before its traditional masters. That is where they went abysmally wrong. Khan's ouster was received with a spontaneous upsurge of support right across the national spectrum, defying differences and divisions.

*Pakistan has been turned into a country where crime and corruption will, henceforth, be celebrated as national traits.*

He held protest rallies in every part of the country which were attended by an unprecedented number of people charged with boundless passion and verve. When he called for a long march, the criminal state apparatus, fully supported by the rangers, first blocked the roads leading to the capital and then unleashed a draconian and barbaric assault on innocent people – men, women and children – who dared step out to demonstrate their sup-

port for Khan.

While a criminal coterie has been artificially inducted to rule the country to attain pre-orchestrated objectives, the only leader who commands the hearts and minds of the people, is demanding free and fair elections to install a democratic government that would reflect the genuine aspirations of the people who have ceaselessly dreamt of their days of equity, equality and justice. The master minds of this regime-change conspiracy don't even have the courage to take ownership of their project as more people keep surging onto roads to demonstrate their unbreakable resolve that they want their freedom and their dignity back and living with the incumbent criminal coterie is not an option. For the first time in the history of this country, these protests have also been joined in by ex-servicemen who have rejected the incumbent criminals as also the grisly manner in which they have been inducted into power to further subordinate the country to the will of the foreign masters.

The state may have used the entire repertoire of its undemocratic and despotic powers to deal with the protests, but a crude exhibition of the brutal state power cannot control the increasing surge of support for Khan. The only viable and sustainable way out of the deepening crisis and, address the increasing levels of frustration within the society, is by announcing elections and making sure that there is no interference in their conduct from the outside, particularly from the patrons of the incumbent criminal concoction. It should also send a message to the orchestrators that an effort to plunge the country into the dark of yesteryears is no longer a ponderable option. People are much too aware and much too charged to take any of these contraptions lying down. There will be resistance which would be impossible to fight, much less quell.

Already there is widespread unrest brewing which should not be taken lightly as defying a charged expression of the will of the people is not an advisable course. It can further inflame the passions and incense the resolve to resist. The criminal ruling gang and its patrons only have days to take key decisions which will charter the course for the future. Any unnecessary delay may ignite a simmering cauldron which may then be difficult to extinguish. ■



*An era of discontent.*



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# The **Big**? Question

*The recent amendments to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) laws are aimed at favouring the corruption-tainted politicians and save their ill-gotten money which they have laundered abroad*



**Will the changes in  
NAB laws benefit  
the corrupt?**

*Narratives asked three top experts - General (retd) Amjab Shoaib, former Attorney General Shah Khawar and former NAB official Shehzad Anwar Bhatti - to give their views on this month's Big Question.*



# Changes to benefit those facing corruption charges

Gen (retd) Amjad Shoaib

**T**he recent amendment to National Accountability Bureau (NAB) laws is morally and ethically incorrect because the changes have been made by a coterie of people (parliamentarians) who have been facing corruption charges. How can “NAB-wanted and haunted” people amend the laws? Basically, the current rulers, mostly facing corruption charges and under trial have made changes to the NAB laws to cover up their own corruption and save their ill-gotten money which they have laundered abroad. Under the amended NAB law, cases pending beyond five years cannot be opened but the fact is that all cases against the rulers including Shehbaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari are older than five years. This means, under the new law, the big fishes have been given a clean chit and have been exempted from any inquiry and investigation. Most politicians have laundered money and cases against them are genuine and they cannot be let go of. Yet most of the politicians will now be off the hook and will use the laws to their advantage, clearing their records. The second thing is that the NAB officers are not only under qualified but also take bribes from lawyers of the accused to make a weak case against them. NAB officials never make serious efforts to make a strong case against the accused especially politicians and that is why cases linger on and politicians end up being exonerated. The NAB officers leave many loopholes in inquiries and filing references and at times, they approach the lawyers of the accused to tell them about the gaps in cases so that the counsel for the accused picks up and challenges those weak points in the court to get maximum advantage including zero sentences to acquittals. This weakens most cases and charges have to be often dropped which also puts NAB's reputation at stake. Interestingly, in SGS-Cotecna references against Asif Ali Zardari, the NAB presented photocopies instead of original documents pertaining to the award of pre-shipment contracts in which the accused had received a six per cent kickback. The NAB on purpose made a weak case against Zardari and he was acquitted. There is a need to form a joint investigation team (JIT) to oversee the performance of every NAB official and the institution at large. The JIT must evaluate the performance of the NAB officers

*Money laundering cases should be taken up at the earliest and those who have laundered the money are prosecuted so that they could be forced to bring their laundered money to Pakistan... there should be an efficient system in place.*

and the conviction ratio and the poor performers (NAB officers) must be punished and done away with and terminated. The NAB officers should be held accountable for poor performance and their involvement in corruption, poor inquiry and their collusion with the lawyers of the accused, which is tarnishing the name of the anti-graft body. Nab officials should be tried for their corruption and malpractices. There should be an efficient system in place where cases are followed through and NAB officials investigating them should also be scrutinised. The money laundering cases against politicians, business tycoons and their henchmen are genuine and the NAB has solid evidence in most cases. Money laundering cases should be taken up at the earliest and those who have laundered the money are prosecuted so that they could be forced to bring their laundered money to Pakistan. The NAB's plea-bargain law has opened the door for the corrupt and crooks who steal public money and indulge in corruption in billions of rupees and end up getting released after the plea-bargain under which they return a pittance against what they have plundered and looted. There must be a fair system for the recovery of the looted money and the culprits must complete their term behind bars so that others could learn a lesson and avoid stealing and robbing the public money, laundering and stashing them abroad. Examples need to be set to discourage people from laundering money which can only be done if high profile cases are followed through and the culprits are awarded sentences and they are made to serve them. ■



# NAB should be revived with fresh mandate

**Shah Khawar**

Former Attorney General

**T**he latest amendments to the NAB laws are a good decision under which the physical remand of an accused has been brought to 14 days instead of the 90 days which was uncalled for and a lame excuse to keep the accused under habeas corpus.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government also made three amendments to the NAB laws after civil servants stopped to work in protest against the bullying of the NAB and traders also expressed their reservations against the NAB's highhandedness.

Currently, the performance of the NAB's investigation wing is almost zero which makes weak cases against the accused, most of who get bail while taking advantage of the loopholes. The NAB has become one of the most corrupt entities in the country with its own officers involved in corruption from head-to-toe. The lack of accountability of officers in the NAB has let them a free hand to indulge in corruption and take bribes which have adversely affected its overall performance.

The NAB under the chairmanship of former chairman Qamar Zaman inducted and hired incompetent and recommended persons who were just master's degree holders and not law graduates. At that time, even people holding master's degrees in the subjects of Punjabi, Pashtu and Baloch were inducted into key posts and they knew nothing about the law, prosecution and constitution. Officers inducted at the time of Qamar Zaman and by the successive NAB authorities have now been promoted to the rank of assistant directors, directors and directors-generals. Even stenographers and typists have been promoted to the rank of directors not based on their performance but because of their seniority and service in the NAB, which is a blatant joke and a mockery of justice.

Though the NAB, after incessant complaints, dismissed several officers on corruption and bribe charges over the years, most corrupt individuals, who are the blue-eyed of the current NAB chairman, continue to work with impunity even though

*Currently, the performance of the NAB's investigation wing is almost zero which makes weak cases against the accused, most of who get bail while taking advantage of the loopholes. The NAB has become one of the most corrupt entities in the country with its own officers involved in corruption from head-to-toe*



inquiries against them were going-on for years but without any cogent results. The NAB is needed to be purged from such elements or it is disbanded

This is ironic that we expect good performance from the lot who had been inducted without a rigorous test and interview. This has resulted in the overall degeneration of the NAB as the anti-graft and accountability entity. The NAB is allocating less than 15 per cent of its overall budget for investigation and prosecution while a whopping sum is allocated on the administrative side and for other perks and privileges of the officers.

The NAB is needed to be done away with and it should be replaced with an entity with fresh inductions of highly qualified and competent people who could investigate matters on merit. The

NAB has lost its utility and it has become a white elephant and a burden on the exchequer. Successive governments have used the NAB as a tool for political victimisation of opponents and people have no faith in its integrity. Interestingly, the NAB prosecutors are allowed to keep the recovered amount in the anti-corruption body's official account during the investigation of a case or until the last stage of the investigation, instead of the account of the federal government. As a result, NAB officials deposit the initially recovered money in banks and earn interest which definitely be going to someone's pocket instead of the national exchequer. This practice should immediately be stopped and the recovered sum should be deposited in the national exchequer. ■



# Lack of mechanism to probe govt

**Shehzad Anwar Bhatti**

Former NAB official

**A**fter amending the NAB laws, the current coalition government has handicapped the anti-graft body and virtually it has been rendered rudderless. Previously, the army and the judiciary were out of the ambit of the NAB's accountability but now matters of taxation at the federal and provincial level, decisions of the federal or provincial cabinets, their committee, sub-committees, national economic council, national finance commission and the State Bank of Pakistan and other sectors have been excluded from the perusal of the anti-graft body.

Under the amendment, the NAB cannot open or investigate cases involving a sum of less than Rs500 million. It means that those who will be involved in embezzling or misappropriation of a sum of less than Rs500 will have blanket impunity because no other mechanism has been devised to probe financial wrongdoings of less than Rs500 million. Interestingly, it has not been defined who will define or decide how much money has been misappropriated.

The new NAB law will have retrospective effect and it will apply to the date of promulgation of the original National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) 1999, and once become the law, those who are facing corruption cases will benefit the most and up to 90 per cent of cases at the inquiry, investigation or trial stage will automatically come to a halt and the current ruling clique will benefit from it because most cases are against the leadership of political parties who are currently in power.

Currently, there is no law or mechanism in place to probe cases of the ruling government and under the new NAB law, cases beyond five years cannot be opened. It means the current government has given a shield and protection to all its actions because corruption cases only surface once the government is out of power and a new government starts inquiries. Most of the time, the new government has to take two to three years to put together evidence and by the time a case is sent to the NAB, it takes three to four years and in the fifth year, a new government comes to power and the previous cases remain pending. Under the new law, those facing will automatically benefit if a probe is dragged for more than five years.

Under the new NAB law, accountability of the corrupt has been rendered almost impossible as it has shifted the burden on



*There should be no pick and choose policy, which is currently vague and unworkable, and accountability should be carried out across the board and nobody should be a holy cow. The NAB's prosecution wing is not trained in probing white-collar crime and the anti-graft body's prosecutors need a comprehensive training.*

the whistleblower or the informant to prove the charges against those who have amassed the wealth through corruption or whatsoever means. After such sweeping changes in the NAB laws, the anti-graft body should be done away with and closed forever.

The induction of prosecutors for three years is another loophole as part of the amendment as people will join the NAB for a certain period to make their own profile strong. The prosecutors should be hired for an extended period and they should be enumerated according to the nature of their job so that they could deliver.

There should be no pick and choose policy, which is currently vague and unworkable, and account-

ability should be carried out across the board and nobody should be a holy cow. The NAB's prosecution wing is not trained in probing white-collar crime and the anti-graft body's prosecutors need a comprehensive training

Notwithstanding flaws and drawbacks, the NAB has carried out a tremendous job in the five years or so and billions of rupees were recovered and deposited into the exchequer of the federal and provincial governments. Similarly, the NAB has recovered billions of rupees from fake and dubious housing societies and schemes and the recovered money had directly been returned to the people and the investors, whose money had been looted. The NAB is needed to be made a truly independent entity to probe cases against all and sundry. ■



# ***View***point

Testing Times



# Back to Reality

Elections in Pakistan are an auction in which the highest bidder gets the prize but goes on to default because there is no money to pay for the promises made



**By Ali Mahmood**

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

Over the last few months Pakistan has lived through a drama worthy of an Oscar with larger than life heroes and villains, epic battles between good and evil, the fall and rise of rulers and a nation on the precipice of disaster. The question unanswered; who is the hero and who is the villain?

At the start of the battle many saw Imran Khan as the hero and all of the rest as villains, but that changed as some of his supporters rejected him and moved away. The exodus started with Jahangir Tareen but soon other dissident PTI leaders followed and then the allied parties that had given him his right to rule. He turned to the neutrals but they too had turned neutral. The days of IK rule were numbered and coming to an end. But rather than bow down to the inevitable, Imran fought like a wild captured animal. He would turn to the people to restore his rule. But the people were not too sure that they wanted more of Imran Khan, his misgovernment, his collapsing economy

of inflation, unemployment, and a rupee in free fall. How could Imran win back their allegiance?

Imran's tactics to win back the masses were beyond belief. He announced that the parties who had formed the coalition against him had sold out to America, were involved in a massive conspiracy against Pakistan and were traitors. He claimed he had the letter to prove it. Despite the fact that the COAS, the NSC, the Supreme Court and America refuted Imran's claims, the fans at Imran's rallies believed him. A series of jalsas followed, each bigger than the last, to reach the crescendo of a long march to take Islamabad. He compared his movement with Mao's Cultural Revolution and one of his key supporters, Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, threatened bloodshed if early elections were not announced. The government, under the pressure of Imran's mass movement, considered giving way to the demand for early elections within a few months and rumours of the formation of a caretaker government grew with the sudden arrival of Hafeez Shaikh from Dubai. The Shehbaz government was ready to accept early elections, but not willing to commit political suicide by raising petrol and electricity prices, demanded by the IMF, just before the election.

The economy, on the verge of default, could not wait, and the powers that be, agreed that raising energy prices to win

back the IMF took priority over early elections. When Imran Khan marched on Islamabad, the strength of the street was met by the strength of the state, and the long marchers were sent back home with their tails between their legs. The changed perceptions of the business community gave new hope to the collapsing rupee and the crashing stock market, both of which reversed their trend, strengthened, and moved up. Was the economic crisis over or was this just a dead cat bounce! Without a doubt the IMF was back on board after the government announced the raise in petrol, diesel, and electricity prices, but the economic fundamentals had not changed. Inflation continued to rise, state debt remained at unsustainable levels, investment stayed away, taxes remained difficult to collect with leakage and wastage in expenditures, and Pakistan's inability to earn dollars left the rupee in collapse. Pakistan followed Sri Lanka in electricity brown-outs due to inability to raise the dollars to buy the fuel imports to feed the power plants.

In the new budget, the government's strategy to increase tax revenues has resulted in higher taxation for the corporate sector, particularly high profit sectors such as banking, oil and gas, and also higher taxes for affluent individuals. Tax collection will grow but would still remain below expenditure – Pakistan and Pakistanis spend more than they earn, particularly in a pre-election year. The expenditure side will be more problematic. Defence expenditures and subsidies will continue to burden the economy, but neither side will suggest reducing defence expenditure. Imran Khan, in his new role as leader of the opposition party, is calling for greater subsidies for the downtrodden poor which would aggravate the problems of the economy if he were to form a government after the coming elections, and continue to attack the rich as money launderers and looters. The ruling party would be reluctant to reduce subsidies to potential voters, but would carefully weigh up whether they could afford to reduce the enormous subsidies to the

*The economy, on the verge of default, could not wait, and the powers that be, agreed that raising energy prices to win back the IMF took priority over early elections.*



*The steep hike in petrol prices has all the potential to spark social unrest.*

state-owned white elephants by privatisation in a pre-election year. To do nothing is usually safer than risky moves which would inevitably be attacked by the other side regardless of merit or economic justification.

So with elections looming in the not-too-distant future, the budget will aim at getting through the coming year without disaster, rather than trying to put in place reforms and a new direction aimed at turning round our sick economy. Shehbaz Sharif's credibility with international sources of finance will ensure that Pakistan can find enough dollars for the coming year and avoid default, the only real contribution to the economy, but no other breakthrough can be expected in the short time before the election. There will be gimmicks on the part of government, such as banning luxury imports which really does not make any difference other than playing with perceptions. Imran Khan will continue his tirade on his political foes, blaming them for the problems which he has created in his three-year rule, and making more impossible promises to an electorate which cannot even understand the questions, let alone the answers.

The budget will come and go. Inflation will continue to rise, the panic of default when the IMF programme stalled due to Imran dropping oil and electricity prices, will recede. For a while, the crash of the rupee and the stock market will be reversed, but then as the elections come closer and instability prevails, investors

*Imran Khan, in his new role as leader of the opposition, is calling for greater subsidies for the downtrodden, which would aggravate the problems of the economy if he were to form a government after the coming elections.*

will again realise that the fundamentals remain negative. Optimism will be suspended till the elections have passed and the direction of the next five years can be clearly seen.

The real problem lies with the electorate, young, illiterate, and desperately poor. Politicians, hungry for power, work on the principle that in Pakistan, you can fool all the people all the time. It is easier to inspire the growing horde of uneducated, uninformed, unemployed, young Pakistanis with passion, idealism, patriotism, and Islam than to teach them to become a competitive and disciplined work force. Elections in Pakistan are an auction

in which the highest bidder gets the prize but goes on to default because there is no money to pay for the promises made.

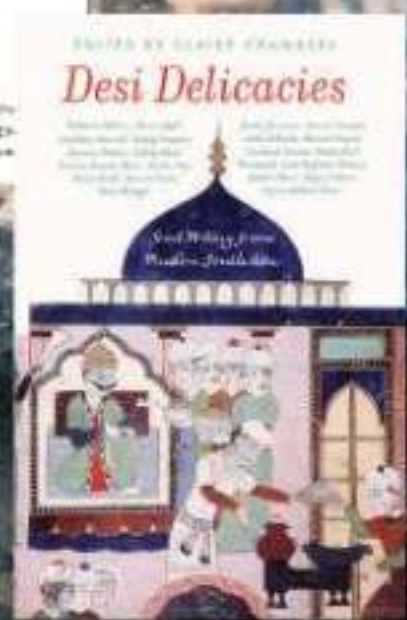
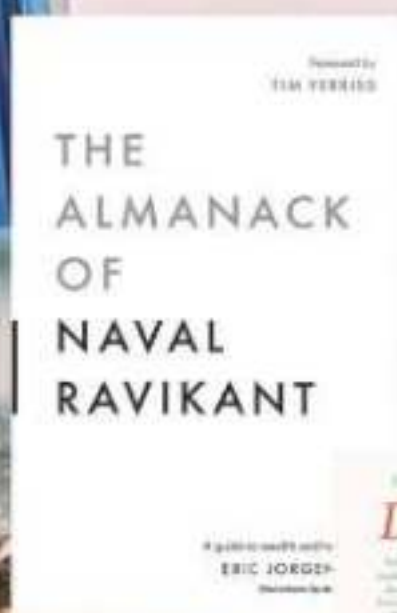
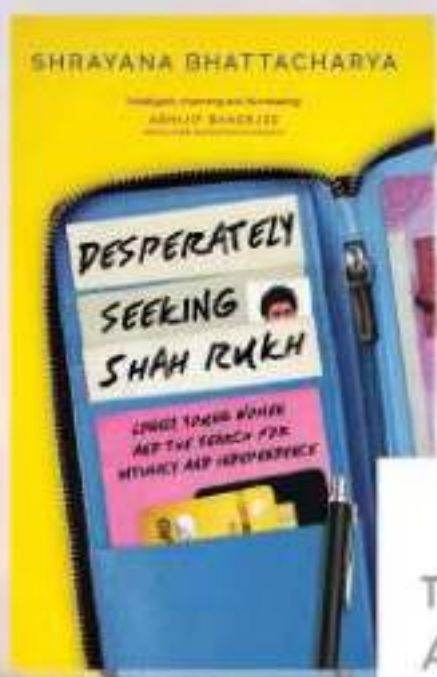
Even in the worst of times, hope does not die. As inflation forces a tightening of belts, and young job-seekers discover there are no jobs, they look to ways to build their future. Some join madrasahs, some become criminals, some become party workers as a way to get lucrative government jobs in the police, taxation departments, or in the revenue departments, some try to get to Dubai or Saudi Arabia, though even in these countries, Indian, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, or Filipinos are preferred to difficult and unskilled Pakistani workers. Middle class professionals, doctors, lawyers, bankers, try to find jobs overseas, with the US and UK being their preferred locations. Those with IT skills join companies providing services to overseas corporations always ready to offshore support services.

Political demagogues have portrayed businessmen as the villains. Hungry government departments continue to fleece businesses at every opportunity. As a result, capital is shy and entrepreneurs have become cautious and wary about risking new business. Instead, they invest in luxury property, gold, dollars, and even cars rather than in industry or businesses that would create new jobs and contribute to the economy. Pakistan's savings rate is low at 12 per cent of GNP. Real savings are more than this, but they bypass official figures and need policies that induce them to put their spare money into investment that benefits both them and the national economy. There are still a lot of dollars owned by Pakistanis and kept outside Pakistan, but it needs the carrot, not the stick to entice these dollars to come back.

The lead article in The Express Tribune of June 2 states that Imran Khan has warned that if the establishment did not take the right decision then Pakistan would break into three parts. His statement reminds us of Bhutto's statements in 1970 before the secession of Bangladesh. If Pakistan's future is really under threat, then who is to blame? And how can the threat be removed? Perhaps we need to look beyond elections if we really want to achieve the two goals of political stability and an economy restored to health. Carrying on doing what doesn't work is not a solution, we must start to think out of the box. ■



# Best Summer Non-Fiction



# Interview

## A Conversation with Abdul Malik Baloch

Making space among conventional tribal leaders, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch became the first non-tribal, middle-class chief minister of Balochistan in 2013.

In stark contrast to the powerful tribal leaders holding power for more than two decades such as the Marris, Bugtis and Mengals, Baloch is a simple man hailing from one of the most backward areas of Balochistan, Makran.

Previously, he served as the provincial health minister in Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti's cabinet and has also served as the provincial education minister in 1993 and was later elected to the Senate in 2006 after forming National Party in 2004. He's currently the president of the latter.

During his tenure as chief minister Balochistan, Baloch focused on health, education, and the law-and-order, situation bringing about an evident decrease in violence and target killings across the province.

Following the vision of Mir Ghaus Bizenjo, one of the founding members of National Awami Party (NAP), Baloch claims to be anti-tribal, anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, secular and pro-democracy and believes in working under the constitutional framework of Pakistan. However, he deems dialogue with narrow-nationalist, separatist Baloch militants important for curbing insurgency in the province.

Even though he was born in a political family, Baloch started his political journey by joining Baloch Students Organisation (BSO).

He recalls going to anti-Ayub Khan protests as a school-going child reinforcing that politics was, indeed, in his blood.

Baloch received early education from a local school in Turbat, followed by intermediate education at Ata Shad Degree College, Turbat. He specialised in ophthalmology from Bolan Medical College. Baloch talks to *Narratives Magazine*...



# The Unconventional Baloch Leader

“If elections in Balochistan are manipulated on a continuous basis then the people of Balochistan would further not trust the democratic process”



By Gulrukhsar Mujahid

*The writer is an Editorial Assistant at Narratives Magazine.*



*Hailing from a middle-class political family, Abdul Malik Baloch is one of the few prominent anti-feudal and progressive political leaders in Balochistan.*

**D**o you think the ouster of Imran Khan was due to a foreign conspiracy or interference?

I personally think that it wasn't a conspiracy but a democratic process through which he was voted out in the vote of no-confidence motion. This parliament can both elect and impeach. Imran Khan is arrogant because of which it is the first time in Pakistan that a prime minister didn't accept the Constitution, the Supreme Court and high courts.

It is common knowledge that Imran Khan and his leadership isn't anti-imperialist. To the contrary they have imperialist tendencies. Unfortunately, the public in Pakistan can be manipulated easily which is why they're buying his concocted narrative and slogans.

Even if Imran Khan is depending on sloganeering to move forward in politics do you think these corrupt, self-professed democratic leaders with dynastic fiefdoms an alternative to him and his party?

If you look at the legacy of Pakistan, there are two parties, who have mostly ruled the country and they are known through their families. Most of the parties have no collective leadership and decision-making. It's a one-man show. There is no room for criticism. In my opinion, this 12-party coalition government must go towards immediate elections. There

is a need to take a fresh mandate... and the establishment will have to stay neutral. Unless the establishment wouldn't respect public's vote, electioneering process will keep being disrupted.

**PTI, despite its drawbacks, at least isn't dynastic. Why didn't your party enter into an alliance with the PTI?**

No, I don't see myself supporting PTI or Imran Khan since I'm a product of politics. PTI hasn't gone through a political process. We have done politics since we were in high school, have seen martial law, difficulties. This didn't happen with PTI. PPP struggled initially and if you look at the PML-N's history, they faced obstacles as well. I mean to say that PTI runs the show through sloganeering which isn't the solution to problems of the masses. In their almost four-year tenure, the country didn't go in the right track, economically, or in terms of foreign policy. Neither did they work with the opposition or enter into a dialogue with them. PTI didn't deal with power and governance well.

**You formed a coalition government with PML-N and held power as chief minister Balochistan, through the Murree agreement. PML-N is considered a Punjab-centric party. Once upon a time, nationalists blamed**

**Punjab for taking most of the resources from all provinces, including Balochistan. What made you take this decision? How did it help the people of Balochistan?**

During PPP's government from 2008-2013, the state institutions were crippled, violence prevailed on a daily basis. When we took part in the 2013 elections, we were successful on 11 seats and Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) had 14 seats. At that time PML-N and PkMAP's Muhammad Khan Achakzai took the decision that this time around such a political leadership should come forth which will have their own vision, as I have mentioned, during the previous regime the conditions in Balochistan deteriorated. We didn't ask for it from PML-N.

The Murree agreement stated that we would take power for two-and-a-half years and PML-N would step up for the remaining tenure, we shouldn't have agreed to it. But Mian Nawaz Sharif assured us that his party would calm down by then and we can continue with our government and the position of the chief minister of Balochistan. Basically, this was our understanding, which didn't materialise.

**It has been noted that the poverty in Balochistan exists because of the Baloch elite and sardari sys-**



Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch now regrets entering into the Muree Agreement with the PML-N.

tem. Don't you think Baloch politicians manipulate the masses where Mengal, Bugti and Marris have ruled for years apart from being in the limelight?

Balochistan's problem has to be seen from a broader perspective. For instance, we have our own grievances against the centre, bureaucrats and the army which is that Islamabad wants to own everything, but they neglect us in the sense that we are a majority province (area-wise), we have resources and are situated strategically. They own Balochistan but not its public.

This, I believe, is because they haven't been given complete power to set their own candidates at the helm of power in the province. It has been their formula to take sardars to their side and then exploit the masses. Most of the sardars, who were with the centre and changed parties, are equally involved in this exploitation by Islamabad but unfortunately when we talk about sardars we only mention Bugti, Mengal although there are 70 other sardars and the same sardars were in PML-Q, then PPP, PML-N and now in BAP.

**Your party, National Party (NP) have two senators but no seat in the provincial and national assemblies. Why were you unable to garner mass support or get seats in the parliament?**

We are the product of Baloch Students Organisation (BSO) and haven't paid much heed to being in power.

When the vote of no-confidence was tabled against Sanaullah Zehri in

*Balochistan's problem has to be seen from a broader perspective. We have our own grievances against the centre, bureaucrats and the army which is that Islamabad wants to own everything, but they neglect us.*

Balochistan Assembly it was us and Mahmood Khan who took a stand for him although he later went on and resigned.

It is then that our trouble with the establishment began.

We suggested Sanaullah Zehri to not resign and leave it on the public of Balochistan to choose their leader.

When Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) was formed they said that PkMAP and NP wouldn't win elections in the constituencies where we could have won. Right now, the establishment says that we won't interfere in the elections while back in 2018 they rigged the elections.

We believe complete rigging took place by the establishment.

**Why do you think that establishment will stay neutral in the next**

**elections?**

I don't say they will be; I'm stating that they should be neutral. Because if elections in Balochistan are manipulated on a continuous basis then the people of Balochistan would further not trust the democratic process, just a few of us are left, now our workers will also leave us if this trend is not dealt with. Therefore, we demand that Balochistan and the people of Pakistan should be able to elect their candidates and parties.

**There was news of NP, Awami Workers Party (AWP) and Pakistan Mazdoor Kissan Party (PMKP)'s merger. However, your party chose to join PDM. Why would you not form a front or a robust alliance with progressive regional and national-level parties instead of the mainstream parties' movement that no longer holds any kind of popular support?**

We are ready to work on both fronts. PDM is a mainstream, broader front and the left, secular, democratic front, we tried our best for it, but it didn't materialise. Nevertheless, it's still our wish. We think that our vision is – even though very few people share our vision – to make our principles a priority and strengthen our perspective. We want to keep intellectuals and students of the same principles that we hold.

**But your party also keeps a sub-nationalist leaning...**

Look, if you see our history, we preached progressive nationalism. We were anti-tribal, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and we struggled for a secular society. If you don't turn nationalism into fascism – which could mobilise masses – then it's fine. But if you dig history then the largest left-wing alliance was that of National Awami Party (NAP).

**What's your take on militant Baloch nationalism and militancy, insurgency? How can it be curbed?**

There are two schools of thoughts in Balochistan from the beginning. One was that of Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo that we must work with Pakistan, with its democratic forces to make it a federal, genuine democratic state where nations should be treated equally, their rights and resources, their languages are protected. The other school of thought, of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri was that we can't stay with Pakistan, they were separatists. Now, Balochistan's insurgency consists of those people who



think there will be no real democracy in this country and the solution to this problem is through the use of force. However, we want to work under the constitutional framework, peacefully.

**What fuels the insurgency?**

If these grievances were dealt with in the past 73 years the insurgency would not have initiated. This has been an outcome of constant injustice.

If the government of today, fails to address the missing persons' issue in Balochistan the insurgency will only rise.

I don't think taking up rifles either by the state or the insurgents is the solution to these problems. It should be resolved through negotiation which we started but unfortunately was discontinued afterwards.

**Although many say when politicians are not in power, they speak for missing persons but when in power, they ignore it...**

No, this isn't the case when it comes to us. I went to Nawabzada Bramdagh Bugti, spoke to him, also spoke with the Khan of Kalat, that you should come and do politics under the law and Constitution of Pakistan. The solution to missing persons' issue is that the grievances and despair of the people of Balochistan are addressed and a dialogue should be initiated. Without dialogue this matter won't be resolved.

**When you were the chief minister of Balochistan what developments took place, could you root out corruption in the province, the vision you came with?**

I was running a coalition-government, a very difficult one, although our vision was revolutionary but when it came to implementation it wasn't the same. I tried my best. I improved the law-and-order situation if you take statistics into consideration. We increased the education budget from 4 percent to 26 percent. In a year, we formed six universities and colleges. So, we focused on health, education and law-and-order. We also promoted Baloch and Pashtun culture, other cultures too and we made seven languages legal officially. We also published books. This all ended after us.

**What was the toughest, most challenging decision, or measure you took after becoming CM Balochistan?**

To improve law-and-order we had

to take tough decisions, for example, we made the police independent of MPA, we made its IG autonomous. We doubled the salaries of police officials. It is then that the police became a veritable force, although when we came to power it was in a dilapidated state.

**Do you think that the situation in Balochistan improved after the 18th Amendment which made the provinces autonomous to a large extent, did it help alleviate the problems of the province?**

18th Amendment is a huge feat in itself. I was involved in the struggle for it. But the centre is encroaching upon it.

*If the government of today, fails to address the missing persons' issue in Balochistan, the insurgency will only rise.*

They have formed agriculture department, health department which are controlled by the federal government. 18th Amendment will be successful when there is pro-people government in provinces; only if you have a government that cares about the interests of the people of Balochistan and if they don't compromise like they did in the Reko Diq case.

**You once stated in a conference that CPEC is a strategic corridor instead of an economic corridor. What did you mean by that?**

We think that it is more strategic. The Baloch have concerns regarding it. Who will make sure that people are helped in terms of businesses and employment? Currently, 93 percent of the revenue is taken by the Chinese and seven per cent by the federal government. We are left with nothing.

Most of our land has been bought by the land mafia, the residents will resolutely feel that they are occupying our land, moving towards colonisation. Development should be pro-people not like colonisation, making the indigenous people a minority, exploiting their resources.

**Now coming to basics, what**

**made you join politics, what was your vision when you joined Baloch Students Organisation (BSO)?**

I was very little when Ayub Khan's regime was in place. My family was involved in politics. My brother and father were with Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo. We were children when the movement against Ayub Khan started when my father went, we went along to protests with them. Then eventually joined BSO.

**What did you learn from student politics that today's members of BSO or youth in general could benefit from politically?**

The trends of those days were different when we were involved in politics in the 70s, 80s. There were two blocs of politics. We were pro-Soviet Union, anti-imperialist, anti-feudalism. The politics of NAP was the politics of BSO. We were like a student wing of NAP. Now that situation doesn't exist.

In Pakistan, Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq gradually put restrictions. First Ayub Khan banned trade unions and Ziaul Haq banned student unions. These martial laws intellectually and politically undermined the politics of working-class, of the oppressed. Students got demotivated, disillusioned. The state hasn't left any space for student politics in Balochistan or even Pakistan. If anyone does something, the very next day a notification is issued. In all our universities, politics has been vilified, vehemently discouraged.

**BSO dispersed in 1980s, was there an external or internal reason for that?**

We disseminated in 1985. There was no external reason for it. There was a leadership conflict. We had internal elections in which Raziq Bugti lost and he made his own group with Jalib Baloch and me and Ayub Jatak, and Maula Bakhsh went the other way. It was not a conspiracy. We are responsible for it. We break away ourselves and then blame others for it, such as state power and agencies. At least, I honestly say that whoever has been involved in its dispersal were internal members of BSO. The breakup wasn't on an ideological basis. In 1977, the conflict was ideological between Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Khair Bakhsh Marri after Hyderabad Jail. Former was pro-federation and the latter anti-federation. Presently, us, the National Party has formed BSO-Panjar. Panjar is the name of our newspaper. ■

# FRONTIERS

## Stifling Kashmiris





# De-Muslimisation of IOJK

The deliberate attempt to undermine and under-representing Muslim majority Kashmir region shows the Delimitation Commission's utter disregard to law and their own constitutional provisions



**By Altaf Hussain Wani**

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

**S**idelining all the social, ethical and legal basis of redrawing the electoral maps, the controversial and politically motivated Delimitation Commission for Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir formed by the Hindu-dominated right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recommended six additional seats for the minority Jammu region (now total 43) against only one additional seat for the majority Kashmir region (now total 47). The controversial move caused huge uproar and resentment from people living on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC), particularly in Indian-held territory of Jammu and Kashmir where leadership across the political spectrum denounced the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of Kashmiri Muslims and termed it as a deliberate attempt to change the region's demography, tilt the power balance in the favour of Hindu-dominated Jammu region and further exclude the Muslim majority Kashmir region from political representation.

The constitution of such a commis-



Based in Delhi, the J&K Delimitation Commission is redrawing the region's electoral districts in a way that systematically disenfranchises the Muslim majority of Kashmir.

sion for redrawing political boundaries to favour a particular community is a brazen violation of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on Kashmir. The UNSC resolutions on Kashmir clearly bar concerned parties from taking any decisions aimed at bringing material change in the state.

The commission's recommendations are blatantly unjustified and illogical as the population, which happens to be the cardinal parameter in such processes, has been grossly overlooked and ignored while creating new constituencies.

A fair delimitation, based on population, should have given 51 seats to Kashmir and 39 to Jammu. Notwithstanding the

fundamental principles, the commission on the contrary has recommended six additional seats to Jammu and just one for Kashmir region, which is bigger in terms of population.

Secondly, the panel's proposed draft suggests higher population size in 47 constituencies located in Kashmir (with an average population size of 1.46 lakh) as compared to 43 constituencies in Jammu (with 1.25 lakh). Disparity in the population size clearly reflects the commission's mala-fide intentions to bring Jammu at par with Kashmir in terms of seats in the state legislature. Therefore, the commission's recommendations are clearly politically motivated, aimed at changing the demographic character and composition of the state.

According to the 2011 census, the Muslim population comprises around 68 per cent of the region, followed by the Hindu population which is around 28.4 per cent. The majority of the Muslim population is based in the Kashmir region, which is around 97 per cent, making it a Muslim-dominated region.

Surprisingly, the commission announced nine additional seats for Scheduled Tribes. Of these, three will be in Kashmir (Gurez, Kangan, Kokernag) and six in Jammu (Gulabgarh,

*One can connect this entire exercise with the BJP's old wish to install a Hindu chief minister in the disputed state to undermine the Kashmir region.*



*The Altaf Bukhari-led Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party protests against the proposals of the J&K Delimitation Commission, December 29, 2021.*

Rajouri, Budhal, Surankote, Mendhar, Thannamandi) which again is an attempt to benefit one region by downplaying the majority.

The broad daylight gerrymandering and political engineering in Kashmir by the BJP started soon after the radical regime led by Modi abrogated article 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution that had guaranteed special status to J&K. Such erroneous assessment of the ground situation with a clear intent to marginalise the Muslim majority is also a part of the ruling BJP's nefarious agenda to crush the Kashmiris' ongoing struggle for the right to self-determination.

BJP's political agenda in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir is to build around the politics of disempowerment and dismemberment, through marginalisation of Kashmiri Muslims, muzzling dissent, promoting hate, division and perpetrating the worst human rights crises. The delimitation commission is an extension of this strategy, feared and forecasted by the people of Kashmir after the illegal abrogation of their statehood.

The Delimitation Commission doesn't stand on merit on various accounts; there are a number of grave discrepancies in its

*The Commission has recommended six additional seats for Jammu and just one for Kashmir, despite its larger population. It is a deliberate attempt to tilt the power balance in favour of Hindu-dominated Jammu and further exclude the Muslim majority of Kashmir.*

report for instance geographical realities, which along with population are prerequisite for drawing of electoral constituencies, have been grossly ignored.

Thirdly, the Commission has gone out

of the way in dealing with the issue despite the fact that the 84th amendment to the Constitution of India in 2002 declared that delimitation will be carried out after 2026. It clearly shows that the current commission has violated constitutional provisions and, therefore, its observations whatsoever stand illegal.

Besides, India's Delimitation Act 2002 guarantees that no delegates are "over-represented" or "underrepresented" and preservation of the "population seat ratio." The Commission recommendations on Jammu and Kashmir are clearly violating the aforementioned provisions by giving "over representation" to the Hindu-dominated Jammu region, which is roughly 28 per cent of the total population.

This deliberate attempt to undermine and under-represent the Muslim majority Kashmir region shows the Delimitation Commission's utter disregard of the law and their own constitutional provisions.

On the other hand, Article 330 of the Constitution of India which deals with allocation of seats for Scheduled Castes, states that the allocation for the tribes should correspond to the total population of the state but the current Delimitation



Commission undermined this parameter and allocated seats for Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Schedule Castes (SC) just to extrapolate numerical balance in favour of the Hindu-dominated Jammu region. According to the Indian census 2011, the tribal population is less than 11 per cent of the total population of the Indian Administered State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Practically, the Commission, through its contentious observations, has greatly augmented the BJP's plan to further polarise the less privileged and economically downtrodden minorities of the state by allocating six seats for Jammu and three seats for ST & SC from the Kashmir region – a perfect recipe to polarise and pit two tribal communities and regions against each other.

The BJP escalated the divide between these two tribes, the Gujjars and the Paharis, during the last elections by granting 4 per cent reservations for Paharis resulting in disdain towards one another. Now the new redrawing of maps and allocation of seats has further widened the fault lines – be it linguistic, ethnic or tribal – in communities who have been living peacefully together for ages.

Ironically all seven of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes are in the Jammu region, again excluding the Muslim majority in the Kashmir region. First the BJP wooed Gujjar tribes as ST and later in elections exploited Paharis for the same purpose.

One can connect this entire exercise with the BJP's old wish to install a Hindu chief minister in the disputed state to undermine the Kashmir region, which is the epicentre of legitimate resistance against Indian occupation. One can call it a De-Muslimisation Commission as it not only disempowered the Muslims of the valley by adding only one out of a total of seven seats, but also slashed three seats of Muslim majority areas in Jammu where a total of six seats were added to the Hindu majority regions. The discrepancies in the commission's report are obvious and so blatant that leadership across the political spectrum rejected it out rightly.

Moreover, the decision to merge Poonch and Rajouri districts (with sizeable Hindu population) with Anantnag parliament constituency in south Kashmir with almost 500km land distance between the two as per se has no



*The BJP's religiously motivated gerrymandering is part of a long term plan to turn Kashmiri Muslims into a political minority.*

*Given the nature of the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Delimitation Commission has no legal standing. The whole exercise is a part of a larger conspiracy intended to marginalise and isolate the Muslim majority.*

logic except to thrust Hindu voters into Muslim-dominated constituencies in order to change the voting dynamics in favour of the former, and thereby achieve the political objectives of the BJP – a party which thrives and excels on the religiously motivated platform of Hinduism.

A close look at Kishtwar and Poonch district further exposes BJP's dangerous agenda of communal rift. With a total population of 2.3 lakh – 40 per cent Hindus and 57 per cent Muslims, with already two Muslim majority seats, the new arrangement allotted three seats to the district – two of them carved out as Hindu-majority seats. On the other hand, Poonch with a population twice the size of Kishtwar has only three seats since it is a Muslim majority district. Likewise, Doda district

with four lakh population, more than 53 per cent Muslims, had both Muslim majority seats and with new arrangements two out of three seats are Hindu majority constituencies. A clear message to all Muslims of Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir that the BJP will forcibly and illegally change their demography from democratic majority to minority.

Given the nature of the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, such a commission has no legal standing. The whole exercise is a part of a larger conspiracy intended to marginalise and isolate the majority community in the region where dissent is a crime and people have no freedom to speak. With the fear of public resentment, Indian authorities have locked up thousands of Kashmiris, including their leadership, and carried out a massive crackdown on media, and civil society.

This Delimitation Commission too is the continuation of previous attempt of changing Kashmiri majority into minority by issuing over 3.4 million so-called domicile certificates to outsiders (non-state-subjects) who were made eligible for citizenship rights after modifying the state's domicile law following the repeal of Article 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution in 2019.

Such malicious attempts, which are a part of the BJP regime's long-term plan to turn Kashmiri Muslims into a political minority, are bound to further polarise an already divided region and lead to chaos if the international community and United Nations do not pay heed to such unlawful, brazen and egregious gerrymandering of the BJP government. ■

# Interview

## A Conversation with Mushal Mullick

Yasin Malik has been the face of the Kashmiri freedom movement. The campaign to secure the right to self-determination and basic human rights.

Malik heads the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), one of the first armed freedom fighting groups to come into existence in occupied Kashmir. It supported an independent and united Kashmir. Led by Malik, the group gave up armed resistance in 1994.

A resistance movement broke out in occupied Kashmir in 1989 with fighters demanding an independent Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

Malik began his struggle against the Indian occupied forces in the late 80's and valiantly fought for the rights of the Kashmiris. The Kashmiri leader later renounced violence and adapted an ap-

proach of non-violence to continue his struggle for the independence of Kashmir.

Malik, in his three decade-long freedom struggle, has been in and out of jail on a number of charges many times. An Indian court recently sentenced the Kashmiri leader to life imprisonment for funding "terrorist" activities and other charges.

His movement, however, has not stopped, and is now spearheaded by his wife Mushal Hussein Mullick. Malik met Mushal during one of his trips to Pakistan and married her in 2009. The couple later had a daughter, Razia Sultana.

Mushal along with her daughter has been residing in Islamabad and continues to raise her voice against the violence against Kashmiris and persecution of Yasin Malik. She speaks with Narratives Magazine today...



# Face of Resistance

Before Yasin Malik along with other arrested Kashmiri leaders are killed in India, Pakistan needs to wake up and knock at the doors of international forums



**By Zafar Ali Khan**

*The writer is a senior journalist and contributes to Narratives*

**W**hat should Pakistan immediately do to take up the Yasin Malik issue internationally?

Mullick: Pakistan needs to urgently explore ways and means to get the United Nations and the International Court of Justice involved on the issue of Yasin Malik and make sure that he has had access to an international counsellor during the appeal against his conviction.

**Do you plan on visiting New Delhi to pursue Malik's case in Indian courts?**

Mullick: I had planned to visit New Delhi to engage a lawyer to fight the case on behalf of Yasin Malik but I cancelled it after my mother-in-law advised me not to visit India because she feared I could be arrested and put behind bars once I landed in the neighbouring country. Now I am planning to visit the West to highlight the issue of Yasin Malik and the overall plight of the people of Kashmir under the brutal Indian regime. Indian lobbies have cancelled my international visa and I am constantly in touch with Pakistan's Foreign Office to help me lift the ban on my international travels so that I could highlight the Kashmir issue at the international forums. It's time, I travel to the West to get my voice heard.



*Yasin Malik remains one of the iconic faces of resistance in the Indian-held Kashmir.*

**Were family members allowed to meet Yasin Malik during his detention and the trial by Indian authorities?**

Mullick: No not at all. This is the height of the cruelty that even family members were not allowed to meet Yasin Malik during his incarceration and the whole trial, neither was he allowed to engage a lawyer for himself. Under the Geneva Convention, even terrorists are allowed to engage a counsel and meet their family members. The Indian government

has blatantly flouted all international laws to punish Yasin Malik. Yasin Malik has been in solitary confinement since when he was arrested and jailed. Indian authorities will kill Yasin Malik in custody through beating and slow-poisoning. Yasin Malik has to be released. If he is killed in custody, all other arrested Kashmiri leaders will be killed and India will have a field day when the top leadership is eliminated. Before all this happens, Pakistan needs to wake up and knock at the doors of international forums.

**Will you highlight Indian plans in the occupied Kashmir?**

Mullick: India is actively working on a project to turn Kashmiri Muslim majority in the valley into a minority by settling non-local Hindus through giving them jobs and other perks and privileges besides allotting them lands. Pakistan must take up this issue with international powers before it is too late. After the settlement of non-local Hindus in the valley, India can even go for a plebiscite (as it had promised to the UN) and the results may be in favour of India if it succeeds in set-

*India is actively working on a project to turn Kashmiri Muslim majority in the valley into a minority by settling non-local Hindus.*



Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb (C) and Yasin Malik's wife Mushaal Malik (L) at a press conference in Islamabad

ting a large number of non-locals, especially the Hindu population. The United Nations Security Council resolution 47 on Kashmir calls for holding of a plebiscite among Kashmir's residents on whether they wanted to join India or Pakistan. Pakistan must wake up to India's nefarious designs. Pakistan's backdoor diplomacy, bilateralism and talks with India have failed to achieve any tangible results over the last several decades because of New Delhi's stubbornness.

Pakistan must immediately call for the enforcement of UNSC resolutions on Kashmir. Islamabad instantly needs to

*I will lead rallies and protest marches in the western capitals to highlight the Kashmir issue and particularly the injustice being meted out to Yasin Malik.*



plead the Kashmir cause at the forum of the UN, the Amnesty International and the International Court of Justice and India should be held accountable at these international platforms for the barbaric brutalities it has committed against the unarmed and freedom-seeking people of the occupied Kashmir.

## **Do you plan protest rallies in Pakistan and abroad to highlight the conviction of Yasin Malik?**

Mullick: We are planning to hold rallies across Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir in the coming weeks and I am in touch with all stakeholders including the Pakistan government. It is a long battle and we will fight it till Yasin Malik is released from jail and Kashmiris get their right to self-determination.

In the second phase, I will lead rallies and protest marches in the western capitals to highlight the Kashmir issue and particularly the injustice being meted out to Yasin Malik. My first aim is to get Yasin Malik released from the notorious Tihar Jail.

## **Did Pakistani media aptly highlight Yasin Malik's issue or do you feel it was overshadowed by political events on the same day when he was convicted?**

Mullick: Though the Pakistani media highlighted the conviction of Yasin Malik vehemently, it needs to highlight the issue till he (Malik) and all incarcerated Kashmiri leaders are released from jail. It is needs to be kept alive in the Pakistani media, especially on social media. Pakistani social media users must avoid being offensive in their comments (on the issue of Yasin Malik) so that they are not blocked by social media platforms and their message is delivered and heard by the world at large.

## **What is the solution to the Kashmir dispute?**

Mullick: The successive bilateral talks and engagements between Pakistan and India have failed to achieve any tangible results on the Kashmir issue. Pakistan must expedite its efforts to enforce the UN resolutions on the Kashmir issue. The implementation of the UNSC resolutions on Kashmir is the only solution to the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan is left with no option but to ask for the implementation of the UNSC resolutions. The implementation of the resolutions is the only solution to the Kashmir dispute. ■



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# DEFENCELINE

## Terrorism Challenge





# Understanding the Baloch Liberation Army

Once an ideological proxy of Soviet Union is now working as a proxy of regional and extra regional forces against Chinese and Pakistani interests. The BLA has become a formidable group



**By Abdullah Khan**

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

**W**ith a history of violence, Balochistan Liberation Army has always been in the news for all the wrong reasons.

What started as a Soviet proxy soon gained momentum as a separatist movement with its ties and linkages to the Indian spy agency RAW and Iran.

Today, the group remains as a terrorist organisation and most of its leaders living in self-exile across European countries.

Narratives takes a look at what went into making BLA what it is today.

## Inception

Balochistan Liberation Army or Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) is a terrorist group fighting against Pakistani state to make Balochistan an independent country.

The original BLA was formed back in 1964 as part of Soviet Union's plan to expand into Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its inception and leadership was inspired by

communist philosophy.

The military, in a counter insurgency campaign during the 60's and 70's had defeated all the armed proxies of Soviet Union in Balochistan including BLA. Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, BLA's key leader, then fled to Afghanistan and lived there till 1992 when Soviet backed Najibullah government was overthrown by the Mujahideen.

With the demise of Soviet Union, its proxies in Pakistan also vanished overnight. However, with the start of war on terror separatist armed struggle in Balochistan was reignited by the next generation of Baloch leaders. BLA was resurrected by Nawab Balach Marri— one of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri's sons— in 2000 and carried out its first attack. Until his death in 2014, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri remained an ideologue of the group promoting Marxist ideologies among his followers. Nawab Balach Marri was killed in Afghanistan in 2007 and Nawab Harbyar Marri, another son of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, took over the reins of BLA. He was living in exile and always denied his involvement to justify his political status in Europe.

2010 saw the first defection in BLA when Harbyar Marri's brother Mehran Marri defected and formed United Baloch Army. BLA chief Harbyar Marri had accused Mehran of fund embezzlement. However, Mehran, the alleged head of UBA, had denied the allegations saying the differences were due to Harbyar's authoritarian attitude and disregard for senior commanders of the organisation. There is also a general impression that Mehran had the support of his father, the late Nawab Khairbakhsh Marri.

In October 2021, UBA split into two more factions when differences arose between UBA spokesman Sarfraz Bangalzai alias Mureed Baloch and central commanders, including the head of the organisation. On October 2, 2021, another UBA spokesman, Mazar Baloch, issued a

statement saying that Sarfraz Bangalzai had been fired for violating organisational principles and that Mazar Baloch would be the only UBA spokesman.

In response, another spokesman for the organisation, Mureed Baloch, announced that he was being punished because he was pressuring UBA to join the alliance of Baloch Raji Ajoji Singer (BRAS) in the wider national interest. But Mehran did not believe in unity.

Mureed's UBA and Gulzar Imam Baloch's BRA later merged to form the Baloch Nationalist Army and became part of the BRAS Alliance.

## Major Split in BLA

In 2017, the Baloch Liberation Army once again had to face internal administrative differences, as a result of which the leadership of the organisation for the first time came out of the Sardar family into the hands of an ordinary Baloch commander Aslam Baloch alias Aslam Achu also known as General Aslam among the militant circles. Without naming the chief Harbyar Marri, Baloch Liberation Army spokesman Jayand Baloch said in a statement in 2017 that the organisation will have no representatives in London, Europe or the United States. However, the BLA faction loyal to Harbyar Marri declared Aslam Baloch and others as rebels. The spokesman Azad Baloch accused Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and Iran to conspire against the main group. Currently there are two BLA groups. The most lethal and active one is the one which was headed by Aslam Baloch and now by Bashir Zeb while the BLA loyal to Harbyar is least active and its only known face is Azad Baloch who claims responsibilities of attacks or issues statements.

Aslam Baloch was the most prominent commander of the BLA and later remained the chief of the BLA until he was killed along with five others in a suicide attack in Kandahar in December 2018.

Aslam Baloch was also the creator and



*Majeed Brigade are the deadliest in the Baloch terror networks*

leader of the Majeed Brigade, the deadliest group in the Baloch terror networks. The Majeed Brigade is known for its suicide attacks, which the organisation calls Fidayi attacks. The first suicide attacks after Aslam Baloch became leader of BLA was conducted by his son Rehan Baloch which inspired many young educated Baloch youths to join ranks and files of BLA.

Aslam Baloch is also said to be the creator of the Umbrella Organisation and the broad coalition of Baloch militant groups, the Baloch Raji Ajoji Sanger (BRAS), which was formed on November 5, 2018 by BLA and BLF. Later, it was joined by the Baloch Republican Army and the Baloch Republican Guards. Sindhudesh Republican Army has also joined the BRAS in 2021. Factions of United Baloch Army and Baloch Republican Army have united as Balochistan Nationalist Army which is now also a member of BRAS.

#### **Change in tactics with the change in command**

When Aslam Baloch became chief commander of his faction of BLA in 2017, he decided that fighting be brought down from mountains to urban areas. Since 2017, it has been witnessed that BLA is gradually increasing its footprints in urban areas. When the command came out of a tribal elder (Sardar) the BLA started to attract well educated Baloch youths too. Thus, it has been witnessed that unlike the past when most BLA fighters were from poor illiterate followers of the Marri tribal chieftains, now the group also has fighters and even suicide bombers from well-educated and well settled families. BLA's ideological nursery is Balochistan Student

*It has been witnessed that unlike the past when most BLA fighters were from poor illiterate followers of Marri tribal chieftains, now the group has fighters and suicide bombers from well-educated and well-settled families.*

Organisation Azad (BSO-Azad) which is a banned organisation but works covertly in educational institutions of Balochistan. Its ideologies are mostly derived from communist/Marxist teachings.

Previously, BLA used to carry out low intensity IED attacks against government infrastructure like blowing up railway tracks, electricity pylons, mobile phone towers, targeted killing of non-Baloch laborers etc. Now the group has become more sophisticated in its tactics. Its IED qualities have tremendously improved. It has acquired modern weaponry of American made weapons left by NATO in Afghanistan. Sniper attacks are also increasing. The most important improvement observed is the ability of BLA to carry out complex style guerilla attacks in which multiple armed attack-

ers storm buildings of potential targets, hold up against security forces, prolong the attacks as long as possible and inflict as much damage as possible. Attacks on FC camps in Panjgur and Naushki in February 2022, Pakistan Stock Exchange Attack in June 2021 are few example of such complex attacks.

Suicide bombing is another new addition in the list of BLA attacks. Previously, suicide attacks were attributed only to religious militants. However, BLA's Majeed Brigade has become a breeding ground of Baloch suicide bombers. The attackers involved in Naushki and Panjgur as well as PC Hotel Gawadar attack were all basically suicide bombers who were tasked to fight till death.

Target killing of 'informers' and pro-Pakistan people in areas under BLA's influence is also a regular activity. The objective is to create fear and terror among the local population.

In the past it was not even imaginable that BLA would be able to carry out attacks like it did in Panjgur and Naushki from February 2 to February 5, 2022. BLA claimed that both attacks were part of the same operation which was code named as 'Operation Ganjal'. Ganjal was a BLA commander who hailed from Lyari in Karachi and headed the Qalat camp of BLA. He was supposed to take part in these attacks but was killed in a raid by Pakistani forces on the Qalat camp five days before the attacks. A total of 16 militants of BLA took part in Operation Ganjal. Nine of them stormed Frontier Corps' camp in Naushki while seven attacked FC camp in Panjgur. It was beyond imagination that BLA would be able to carry out such well-coordinated and lethal attacks simultaneously on two different locations.

In both these attacks the BLA used Vehicle Based Suicide attacks at the gates of both the camps of FC. Vehicle based suicide attacks are rare in Baloch militancy. The first such attack was carried out by Rehan Baloch in 2018 against Chinese engineers in Dalbandin. Using two suicide vehicles laden with explosives against Naushki and Panjgur camps of FC show that the group has access to high quality explosive material in abundance.

BLA has also claimed that it had complete support of BRAS for the two attacks. BLA also uses BM-12, BM-85 mm missiles, RPG-7, hand grenades, snipers, kidnapping, target killings and IEDs.



## Trends

At the start of 2022, BLA released a detailed report of attacks on Pakistani forces, government departments and Pakistani intelligence personnel and projects in 2021. The 31-page report is titled "From Battle Field to Last Victory".

According to the report published by BLA media channel, Hakkal, 135 military personnel and 23 local agents were killed and 67 injured in 88 attacks across Balochistan in 2021. The report said that 59 bombs were detonated last year, three

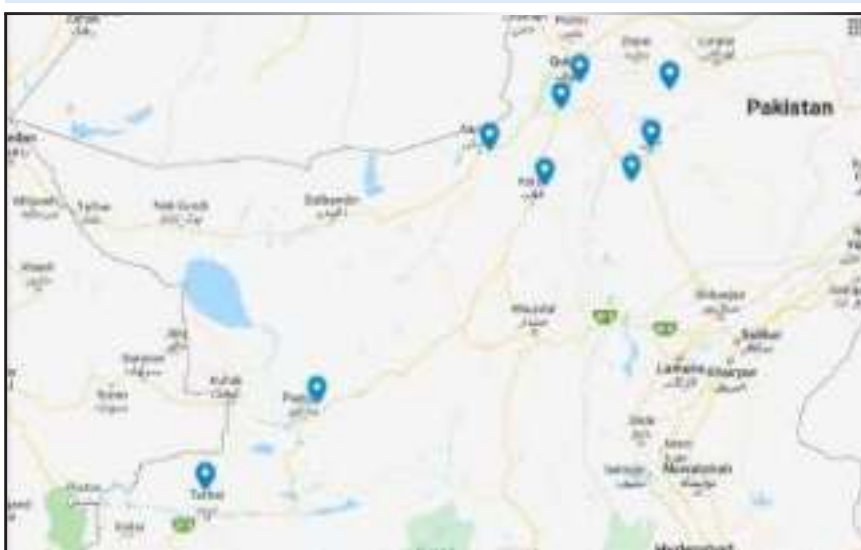
*A visible increase in BLA's attacks has been observed in 2022. The group has claimed 41 attacks in first 4 months of 2022 which means almost 50 per cent of the attacks in previous year has been reached in just four months of the current year.*

military camps and outposts were seized and 24 military vehicles were destroyed in attacks on forces during the year. It has also claimed to have carried out one suicide attack in Gwadar by its Majeed Brigade in 2021.

A visible increase in BLA's attacks has been observed in 2022. The group has claimed 41 attacks in first four months of 2022 which means almost 50 per cent of the attacks in previous year has been reached in just four months of the current year.

The map below shows that BLA (Bashir Zeb) is more active in northern parts of the province but its attacks in South an Eastern part were more high-profile and lethal. Traditionally BLA remained more active around Kohlu and areas under influence of Marri tribe. However, the split in 2017 and coalition with BLF on the platform of BRAS has helped the group increase its reach and influence in other areas especially areas

District	Deaths						Injured					Arrests	Kidnappings
	No.	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
Kech	11	19	0	0	0	19	8	0	0	2	10	0	0
Kalat	7	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kachhi	6	10	0	0	0	10	4	0	0	0	4	0	0
Sihl	6	13	0	0	0	13	8	0	0	0	8	0	0
Hub	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Panjgur	3	10	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Harnai	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karachi	1	0	0	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mastung	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nushki	1	90	0	0	0	91	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quetta	1	5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>



closer to Iranian border. These areas were considered BLF's stronghold. However, BLF leadership has paved way for other BRAS member organisations to enhance their outreach.

BLA Bashir Zeb's operations in Kech-Turbat area topped the charts with 11 attacks and almost all of them against security forces as per the claims of the group. As many as 19 security personnel were killed by the group in the district Kech in first four months of the year.

The map below shows spread of BLA-Marri's militant activities in the province. The map shows that its activities are mostly limited to and around Kohlu district which is considered the birth place of the group. The group's rare activities in the south are of very low intensity. Even its activities in the north have no match to BLA-Bashir Zeb group. Bashir Zeb group has claimed 41 attacks in first four months while BLA-Marri group claimed only 11 attacks. With the passage of time the group

has become almost irrelevant to the militancy in the province. BLF has exerted its influence on almost all other groups and brought them under the umbrella of BRAS while BLA-Marri is left alone. BLF and BLA-Bashir Zeb group accuse BLA Marri group that its militant activities are not aimed to get liberation from Pakistan but for providing better bargaining opportunities to its leaders in exile while negotiating with Pakistani authorities. There were efforts in place few years back to bring Harbyar Marri and Brahmdagh Bugti (Head of BRA) to Pakistan and give them some political role to quell the militancy in the province. However, as the middle class well-educated leadership in these groups emerged, the Sardars and Nawabs have become politically irrelevant.

## Majeed Brigade of BLA

A Baloch militant Majeed Lango on August 2, 1974, failed in an assassination attempt on the then prime minister Zulfikar

District	No.	Deaths					Injured					Arrests	Kidnappings
		SFP	RZ	M	WA	Total	SFP	RZ	M	C	Total		
Kacchi	4	11	0	0	0	11	8	0	0	0	8	0	0
Kohlu	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kharan	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barkhan	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sondhar	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kach	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Ali Bhutto during his visit to Quetta as the hand grenade blasted in his hand. After his death, his brother was named after him. The second Majeed Lango also joined BLA and was killed in Quetta in February 2010 in a gun fight with the security forces. After few weeks, in March 2010, BLA commander Aslam Baloch announced formation of suicide bomber's unit and named it as Majeed Brigade in honor of both the killed brothers.

Majeed Brigade introduced a new dimension of terror tactics in the Baloch militant movement, showed the youth the way that they have the choice to attack the enemy very effectively. Although the Majeed Brigade is a military wing of the BLA, it is not limited to the BLA. BLA claims that it is a national platform. Any Baloch, affiliated to any organisation, or any Baloch militant group fighting against Pakistan can be a part of the Majeed Brigade.

The books in the training center of Majeed Brigade include Franz Fanon's book *The Falling Dust*, Guinea-Bissau's Marxist leader Amílcar Cabral's *Living Conditions* and the teachings of Mao

*Majeed Brigade introduced a new dimension of terror tactics in Baloch militant movement, showed youth that they have the choice to attack the enemy effectively.*

Zedong. Ironically, Chinese targets are hit by those who are inspired by Mao Zedong.

#### How BLA selects targets for Majeed Brigade

Before choosing a target, its political and symbolic significance and global influence are considered. Each target has its own political and military dimensions. Military targets may seem large at times, but their effects are far-reaching. While the target for political gain may not seem

big at the moment, the effects are far-reaching. The symbolic significance of a goal, therefore, plays an important role in BLA's selection process. The attack by female suicide bomber Shari Baloch against Chinese teacher of Confucius Center in Karachi University in April 2022 was a classic example of getting media attention internationally.

In addition, it takes into account the economic significance of the target for Pakistan. The attack on Pakistan Stock Exchange on June 29, 2020 was an attempt to damage Pakistan's economy by shattering confidence of investors in the stock market. BLA teaches its fighters that if they reach their target and open fire regardless of any losses to the enemy, their mission would be considered successful as their primary goal is to grab attention for their cause.

BLA claims that suicide bomber of religious militant groups like Daaish, TTP are given a target with very less or no knowledge of the target while BLA's suicide bombers are involved in the process of target selection as well as planning.

Majeed Brigade of BLA has three main units

- Intelligence Unit: Gathers information about the potential target
- Logistic Unit: Responsible for arrangements, transportation of men and material and other aspects of logistics
- Operational Unit: Comprises of actual suicide bombers who attack the target

#### Funding Sources

**Baloch Living in Exile:** Reportedly Aslam Baloch parted ways from Harbyar Marri in 2017 with the help and funding from Naela Quadri Baloch— a local politician and activist based in Canada with Canadian citizenship. Naela Quadri runs a political party, Baloch People's Congress, as well as an NGO with the name World Baloch Women's Forum. She collects funds from Canada, America and Europe in the name of women and human rights in Balochistan and a hefty amount of these funds go to BLA-Bashir Zeb group through different means. Interestingly, the lady is not an ethnic Baloch. She is basically from Abbottabad district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa but has successfully portrayed herself as a Baloch politi-





cal activist. She has strong ties with Indian intelligence agencies and often appears on Indian TV channels on the Balochistan issue. She is also a founding member of the Hind-Baloch Forum which was formed in India to promote Baloch separatist cause. She was a frequent traveler to India. However, after Pakistan lodged strong protest with strong evidence of her involvement with BLA, India had denied her visa in November 2021. However, her son Mazdak Dilshad Baloch is still in India to campaign for Baloch separatists.

Apart from Naela Baloch, BLA also receives funds from Baloch people living in exile in different parts of the world.

All funds collected are mostly transferred to UAE or Oman to BLA representatives who then transfer the money through different illegal Hawala and Hundi channels to Iran, Afghanistan and Balochistan. Since top leadership of the group mostly hides in Iran and Afghanistan, the funds mostly go to these countries. A recent crackdown by Taliban government against Baloch separatists in Afghanistan have shrunk space for BLA in Afghanistan but it still has significant presence in Afghanistan's southern areas with the help of former NDS networks who operate underground.

**Smuggling:** BLA facilitates smugglers who traffic illegal petroleum products from Iran and drugs from Afghanistan. It charges commission from these smugglers. Some reports also reveal that BLA itself is involved in drug smuggling from Afghanistan to the Middle East.

**Extortion:** BLA has a very strong extortion network in areas under its influence. Even small traders have to pay extortion money every month to BLA. In case of refusing extortion, BLA kills traders and businessmen and declare them Pakistani agents. Many times local businessmen have protested and requested Pakistani security forces to help them against BLA's extortion activities but all in vain.

**Ransom:** BLA regularly conducts kidnappings for ransom. These activities are managed from Afghanistan. BLA militants kidnap people from Balochistan

and the commanders would call their relatives from a satellite phone or Afghan number. BLA has a dedicated setup for kidnapping for ransom, ransom collection and sending it to the top leadership. The setup has intelligence wing which monitors a potential target's financial position, activities, routines and linkages.

**India:** India has been providing active covert support to Baloch separatist militant groups including BLA. Apparently, the BLA-Bashir Zeb group



is the closest Indian ally in Balochistan. Its founder Aslam Baloch had travelled to India in 2017 before parting ways with main BLA. Other BLA commanders also stayed in Delhi for years. BLA's connection with Indian intelligence RAW is beyond doubt. The BLA-Naela Quadri nexus is also supported and funded by India. Pakistan has officially accused India on countless occasions that it funds BLA's terrorist activities.

According to sources, Indian financial support is of two types. A general support for BLA's propaganda machinery for which RAW-erected network of websites, TV channels, social media accounts work day and night. The other is direct funds for operations. BLA's high profile attacks get direct funding from India. According to sources RAW also gives extra rewards to BLA if an attack gets more international attention.

**Iran:** Iran's support for BLA and BLF is increasing. BLA-Marri had accused BLA-Bashir Zeb back in 2017 that Aslam Baloch and Bashir Zeb were acting on Iranian agenda with Iranian funds. The reason why Iran supports BLA and other Baloch militant groups is that it wants to develop Charbahar Port as an alternative to Gwadar. It wants to send China a

message that Balochistan will never be a peaceful area and thus China should look towards Iranian ports and territory for reaching to the Arabian Sea. According to sources, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is actively involved in such activities.

### Collaborations

BLA is an active part of BRAS the umbrella group of Baloch terrorist organisations. It collaborates actively with the other member of BRAS alliance. Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) provides significant support to BLA's Majeed Brigade activities. Apart from Baloch terrorist organisations, BLA has also developed operational collaboration mechanism with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Both the groups have carried out many joint attacks. However, they never publicly acknowledge the collaboration.

Externally, BLA is well connected with Indian, Iranian as well as former Afghan intelligence network NDS's secret operatives who are still active in parts of Afghanistan.

The group is also well connected with Baloch political networks active outside Pakistan. Its collaboration with smugglers and criminal elements in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan is also a fact.

### Conclusion

Once an ideological proxy of Soviet Union is now working as a proxy of regional and extra regional forces against Chinese and Pakistani interests. The BLA has become a formidable group. Recent suicide attack by a female bomber will attract more well educated youth to join BLA while its support base within Baloch people will increase tremendously.

As BLA threatens to attack Chinese interests, more high-profile attacks are expected over the next few months. Pakistani forces may launch a major operation against BLA in Balochistan. An intelligence-based operation is already going on in Pakistani educational institutions to arrest BLA sympathisers and other Baloch militant groups. Pakistani forces face serious allegations by human rights organisations for picking up Baloch students from educational institutions—a heavy handed approach which will help BLA and other groups in the end. ■



**By Tahir Mehmood**

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

## Reinvigorating Economic Spirit

A healthy work culture and lifestyle rather than foreign loans and grants would help build a strong, modern and prosperous Pakistan

**M**an is essentially born free and alone. This is evident from the unique individuality of each human in bodily attributes to mental bent, habits, prejudices and priorities etc. However, man also possesses a gift endowed by nature of nurturing associations, and influencing and dominating others individually or in groups. The human conduct which gets affected by his current circumstances, also bears a host of factors that are related to his past. Therefore, history plays a dominant role in the lives of individuals, groups and nations. Usually, culture is defined by the ways people live, including what they wear and eat. But culture is a very complex phenom-

enon that includes various overlapping layers of history, religion, ideology, geography and climate among others. As we live in an age which champions individuality, thus nothing can be imposed in the personal domain for reaping collective outcomes. However, cultural ethos remains a powerful agent to influence the lives of individuals and groups at the very basic level. Thus, subtle but with a certain craft, efforts can be made to affect the behaviour of individuals and groups through repeatedly emphasized cultural ethos.

Pakistan is home to various ethnicities that bear a separate and distinct culture based on geography, local history, language, customs and traditions.



However, being adherents of the same religion, irrespective of political boundaries, these distinct ethnic cultural expressions do bear a similarity and confluence towards oneness. Since Pakistan came on the world map as an independent country, these ethno-cultural crisscrosses have thickened and tilted towards the centre. Whereas the local or provincial cultures add to the diverse beauty of Pakistan, our national cultural expressions drawing strength from one religion, language and history – often on display on important occasions – does bring a sense of unity in the nation, despite that we are committed to preserving the distinctiveness of ethnic cultural expressions. A host of new cultural ethos can be nurtured at the national level for the collective good of the society.

It is time that we move towards a new national cultural dimension, which can strengthen and reinvigorate the economic spirit for the collective good of our nation.

### Our Distinct Historical Legacy

Muslims have lived for centuries in the areas which today comprise Pakistan. However, it was during the Pakistan Movement that the people of these areas were connected towards a single cause to win a free country. The core idea of struggle for Pakistan was the 'Two Nations Theory,' which was essentially linked to religion as it stood for separateness of Hindus and Muslims on the basis of their beliefs. In the political and economic sense, the leaders of the Pakistan Movement wanted to liberate the common Muslims from the ills of the authoritarian majority of Hindus in a democratic, free but united India after the British leave, and from the economic dominance of Hindus, who dominated commerce, trade, industry and other modes of economic activities. However, during the struggle for winning the freedom, Muslims rallied on the 'Two Nations Theory,' which had a scope that did not restrict to the winning of a separate country for the Muslims only but also shaping it according to the teachings of religion once Independence had been achieved. This is the reason that after 1947, for a very long period, faith-related issues dominated the national debate. Whether it was the Objective Resolution, joint electorates demanded by minorities in Pakistan and opposed by many on religious grounds,

subsequent efforts to formulate the constitutions, or national thought and narrative where emphasis remained focused on religious primacy.

Despite that the 1973 Constitution which was adopted after a national consensus and gives central point to Islam as a religion of the country, the national debate somehow is still dominated by faith-related issues. This is obvious from various recent political happenings and steps taken by the consecutive governments to win political mileage in the past. This all has come at a tradeoff in time and effort to deliberate on issues like politics and economy on pure rational cost benefit basis, as these are also very essential for the functioning and survival of the country.

*Our lives will remain dependent on 'others' for all the inventions and discoveries that have added comfort, beauty and stability to the life on this planet.*

Economy is one such field which has not been given a sufficient share in the national debate based on pure economic logic, and thus today has become an Achilles' heel and a great vulnerability for not only a prosperous future but also for our honourable survival. Though of late, there is a hue and cry on poverty-related issues and burgeoning foreign loans, but these are mere howls and moans, and nothing substantial is done to address the core economic issues; first in the minds and lives of peoples, and then implemented through national economic policy. The very economic idea is hostage to a phenomenon which usually sanctifies it on the basis of faith rather than economic logic. The word 'economy' is missing from our national culture which is more a manifestation of ostentation, waste and apathy. Here, it is important to notice that once an idea is given great importance at a cultural level, it does not remain an idea but also impacts the life and progress of a nation.

Now in 2022, once it is an established fact that Pakistan is an independent Islamic country, and its constitution guarantees primacy to religion in all political, legal and social sense, it becomes important that we give a new focus to economic affairs of Pakistan to guarantee survival and a prosperous future for the coming generations. 'Work and Economy' should supersede all other debates and need to be entrenched so deeply in the soul of the society that it gets manifested in every aspect of our nation.

In this regard, one can also draw a lot of strength from our religion, which allows individual property, abhors concentration of wealth, sanctifies honest and fair contractual business deals, glorifies work, and assures that one will surely get what he will strive for. It also clearly enunciates that God never changes the condition of a people who do not strive to change it themselves. So far we have invested in other aspects of faith, but have neglected such injunctions which give primacy to action and follow a simple rationality of output equaling the input. We live in this physical world which may have a soul but surely is composed of matter, and till the time we do not descend from metaphysics to ground level of physics, nothing will get invented to ease and comfort our lives. The euphoric pleasures of final destination notwithstanding, but our lives will remain dependent on 'others' for all the inventions and discoveries that have added comfort, beauty and stability to the life on this planet. The realm of action is in want of men, who steer the life themselves and not look for others to accumulate and share the wealth.

In some way, our thoughts, ideas and debate must transcend from abstract issues of faith, and focus more on the power of action, which gets translated into productive work by each adult individual of the nation that relieves us from the economic burdens of today and tomorrow. For any strong man and nation, the words like 'default' on foreign loans, beseeching for more loans to run the affairs of state and nation, and celebrating the grants by other countries should remain a place at abyss and deep dissatisfaction.

### Economy & Its Linkages to Capitalist Thought

Irrespective of absence of the government control in regulating the market



*Pakistan needs a progressive new work culture.*

which is a hallmark of capitalist economy, or state control of the market and capital as claimed by communism, modern world economy is driven by the capitalist thought, which accepts the primacy of machine and factory, fierce competition and resultant innovation, a consumer driven market and, working on capital investment, profit and reinvestment principles.

Today's world is highly connected and called a global village where it has become difficult to sustain the redundant technology and inefficient industrial units. The surest path to richness is by adopting the export-led policies and practices which purely depend on efficient, reliable and cost effective products. When facing the economic crunch, as a short-term measure one can adopt strategies like banning imports, fixing quota or resorting to import substitution industrialization, notwithstanding their immediate efficacy, it is finally the efficient domestic market which has the potential to capture foreign markets and is the surest path to extract some share from the foreign riches. The capitalist thought working behind this growth-and-export-led economy is the insatiable hunger for profit, and further investment for more profit. This is a cruel, greedy but self-sustaining system which works on survival of the fittest principle. We may like or dislike it, this is the world where today's Pakistan has to survive, and move toward prosperity on the pure basis of investment, efficiency, and profit.

When confronting a world market

*Needs to have a skilled national manpower comprising both adult men and women who can work and produce most efficient goods.*

which is working on above mentioned principles, a society like Pakistan which is still quasi-agrarian, tribal, and religious, concepts like profit, market competition, investment and riches can be viewed with distrust and negativity. However, these remain the primary tools of the modern economy, and we will have to adjust to the world market rather than expecting it to restructure itself for our peace or pleasure. An agrarian society is usually slow to change and labour intensive, a tribal society caters for affinity and affiliation rather than following the ruthless merit, and a religious society mostly preaches for a frugal life, promotes charity, and abhors profit and riches. It will not be easy to change these ethos, and most likely these will stay there in a quasi-conservative and quasi-modern society. However, the ethos that our religious thought and culture can and must be applied to promote are: work, efficiency and investment.

It is important for the survival and prosperous future of our nation that our national idea, debate and policy should be driven by economic thought. Pakistan and Islam are a living realities, and now through our economic strength we have to prove the enemies of Pakistan wrong which doubted its economic viability at its inception, and continuously grade us a near failing state. It is time that we relegate any other thought or idea in favour of industry, modern agriculture, trade and economy. We cannot afford as a society to relegate our competition in this world, and remain dependent on foreign countries for not only daily provisions, but also for loans, grants and material support to manage national sustenance and survival.

Our national debate, culture, education curriculum, media and politics must focus on using all our time, effort and resources to economic nationalism for the good of Pakistan.

Our words must get translated into action, and action must be exhibited through work, and work through efficiency assures us a better economy.

When one talks of work, it should mean only productive work. A productive work should range from small to large scale industry including agricultural industry that produces goods which meet the demands of both domestic and foreign markets. Pakistan needs to have a skilled national manpower comprising both adult men and women who can work and produce the most efficient goods whether working in small cottage industries or the large scale industrial units. The efficiency will depend on less time spent, labour employed, durability and convenience, and cost effectiveness. Until the time our products do not penetrate foreign markets, there will be no scope for us as an exporting nation.

The nation must be put to work, and the government can generate healthy competition by resorting to a fair regulatory system and merit-based economic policy.

### **New Work Culture**

While living in the first quarter of the 21st century, it should remain quite obvious that no culture can be imposed at the cost of personal freedom, individual-



ity and choice. However, nothing stops prudent and consistent persuasion. It remains the job of nationalist elite in the field of academia, media and other fields to spread a new economic thought through social activism that both government and society are made to respond to the economic callings of the time.

The glorification of work through religious teachings and traditions should fill the space of religious debate. The work is a power, and an honest work which results in the economic power of the nation deserves all sanctifications from a religion which asks its followers to make ready the strength to the utmost of the power to deter the enemy. In today's world it is economy and self-sustenance that serves as the core foundation of all other forms of power. There is so much emphasis in our religious teachings and traditions on honesty, fair dealings, condemning bribery, forbidding hoarding, truthfulness, and sanctity of work by one's own hands, modesty in spending which can help promote savings and investment, and strongly forbidding from adulteration etc.

The productive work should become a new article of faith for all of us to save this country which our forefathers achieved for us after a long struggle of strife and blood.

In addition to earlier mentioned religious values, the core national ideal should be that all male and female population of Pakistan must perform productive work from homes, and, under small cottage industry to advance industrial units to supply the market from small household items to highly-sophisticated manufactured goods. This will one day save us a big chunk of national exchequer spent on imports and, gradually by supplying the same to the foreign markets will earn us foreign exchange.

A casual glance at various expressions of our national life like eating habits, lack of care for health, waste of time in gossips and aimless debates particularly political, luxurious bent and ostentation in social functions/rites, sluggishness at work place, lack of book reading, encouraging petty charity thus encouraging begging, and so on. There are numerous examples of these ills which have now almost become a part of our national culture. Late night eating has become a common habit and particularly in cities people take pride in late dinners, forgetting

that it negatively impacts early rising the next day or work at office.

Similarly, there has been a consistent growth of housing societies which have all facilities except sports. The same policy is followed by private schools which operate in small buildings. The government and the nation have almost forgotten how important it is to raise a healthy youth and workforce. It is ironic that the whole nation has accepted medical hospitals as health guarantors rather than

*It is ironic that the whole nation has accepted medical hospitals as health guarantors rather than sports grounds.*

sports grounds. Although it is against the commonly accepted perception in which cricket is projected as a game which unifies the whole nation, but as a matter of fact, this game consumes more time and its contributions towards physical health and stamina are far less than the other fast paced sports like athletics, marathon races, hockey, football, basketball, boxing etc. There is a need to encourage all other fast paced sports so that the majority of our population becomes healthy and fit to sustain the rigours of work and life. It is encouraging that our women now take part in all the fields of national life, but still their participation in sports and physical fitness-related activities is negligible. If we are able to promote a national culture which gives top priority to women's health through sports and physical activity, then it will be a truly game changing achievement.

Another detrimental national trait which can be easily noticed is that almost everyone buys the most expensive decorative and luxury items for the house they live in, except buying books. A population without books and shrinking from acquiring knowledge is sure to waste time in useless debates, conjectures and gossip.

In addition to other cultural ills, time is one commodity which our nation likes to waste in abundance with maximum

ease and neglect. We eat food which takes hours to prepare, but is hard to digest, wear dresses, particularly women, which are fancy but consume a lot of time and money to prepare, and are not impractical for daily work. We also waste a lot of time in social functions, including marriage ceremonies.

The list is long but these habits which have now become part of our culture do not encourage a society which is efficient. All these ills directly and indirectly impact our work habits, and thus economic performance.

There is a need to launch deliberate and consistent campaigns by the nationalist forces using all mediums of influence to cure these social ills and promote a culture which can create responsible and industrious citizens. The nationalist must not wait for a government and the ruling elite to do this for them. This is a new economic revolution, which will come through great awareness. The nationalist writing books, novel, drama, plays and poetry, should take a lead and guide the nation in the realm of action that is manifested through productive work and nothing else. Our work and its efficient output should be the goal of neo-progressive and economic nationalism.

A regimented disciplined behaviour is neither expected nor desired, but definitely efforts must be made for a happy, healthy and confident populace which can be transformed into an efficient workforce. It is time that we glorify the work as well as create conditions which facilitate the whole nation doing productive work.

While we are facing great economic difficulties, one trend is the most alarming that we have mentally accepted that relief is only possible if we get foreign loans and grants. However, it is far from reality and we can build a happy, healthy and responsible citizens just by promoting a healthy culture. A national emphasis on time and its strict observance, health through sports and not medicines, simple and balanced food habits, general cleanliness of our cities and places of work etc., are such basic changes that are direly needed to be adopted and they require no foreign funding.

Nothing will survive our freedom and independence but our capacity to dominate the world through our productive work. ■



**By Lt. Gen. (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi**

*The writer is a former defence minister and defence secretary. He has held major command positions in the Pakistan Army.*

## Shifting Sand Dunes

Small and mid-level countries are re-evaluating their old economic and military affiliations throughout Asia, Europe and Africa

**T**he world is passing through a transitional phase, where the existing order is under stress, politically, economically and militarily. Unipolarity has been formally challenged by a clearly visible strong Sino-Russian pole on one hand, and few more poles morphing in near future (five to ten years) like certain European and Asian powers. The small and mid-level countries are re-evaluating their old economic and military affiliations throughout Asia, Europe and Africa. United States of America, after enjoying more than two decades of unfettered absolute command in geopolitics, is misbehaving like a spoilt adult,

that is not ready to adjust to the shifting dunes of reality at the global horizon. Universal time-clock moves slowly but surely indicating a certain eastward direction, that can only be altered by some disruptive events. The political philosophers and economic strategists at all significant intellectual centres should be pondering on the future trajectories of the world polity and economy, and where do they find themselves if the path of the dotted curve is not altered. And then there will be a clear distinction drawn between the status-quo loving and the disruption wishing powers. And this is the crux of the entire debate in this scribe.



It seems to be the earnest desire of China to continue on its spree of economic development and expansion, both in terms of time and space. But they are quite aware of the adage that “You may not be interested in war, but war may be interested in you” thus doing a lot in the military field to create deterrence against any ill intended entities. But China has not been able to forge an alliance strong enough similar to NATO, European Union etc. Its endeavour to create and strengthen platforms like SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Org), BRI (Belt and Road Initiative, AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) is presently no match with what the US, the West and the Allies wield influence in world bodies like IMF, ADB, FATF etc. Thus, in spite of the Chinese rise in manufacturing, agriculture, development in high techs and mammoth exports, it probably lacks the compatible strength in political influence and military prowess (not yet seriously tested). Also because of the language barrier and not enough spending in the fields of mainstream and social media, they are no match to US and Western perception management and psychological-influencing techniques. Their main ideological partner, Russia, has already been drawn into the Ukraine War that might leave Moscow weakened and mauled. North Korea is barely surviving because of its political isolation and suppressive regime. Iran, Syria and the likes are in no position to provide any worthwhile support to China in case of any future expanded conflict. Pakistan has been left economically and politically weak due to internal wrangling and confused policies. Whereas China kept encouraging Pakistan to continue their good relations with the US and the West, but Americans have made it amply clear that deepening of Sino-Pak relations, flourishing of CPEC and any positive gestures toward Russia are no more acceptable to them. Failure of China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran to forge a unified policy on Afghanistan has encouraged India, Turkey, Qatar and other countries to reappear significantly in the war-torn Afghanistan, that is desperately looking for international political legitimacy and economic support. This could have been easily provided if China had endeavoured to make around 10-15 countries to recognise the regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan, in my opinion has blundered by lumping



*Unlike other big powers, the Chinese military might is seen as defensive in nature.*



*Members of Aviation Industry Corporation of China displayed a model of the JF-17 jet at an exposition in Beijing last month.*

*After dealing with Russia effectively, if they succeed, the US and its allies next target is likely to be China.*

its vital interest in Afghanistan with regional and international players do not have the same level of interests as that of Pakistan.

By not giving all out support to Russia in Ukraine War, China has also low-

ered its reliability index in the eyes of its friends. So while US and the West are sapping away the strengths of Chinese allies, (Russia, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) which are already few and far, thus goading them to veer away from China and come back in their embrace. China is watching these happenings unfold like an uninterested onlooker. This attitude – whether due to present weaknesses, deliberate avoidance or unintended lethargy – is going to cost China heavily in the foreseeable geopolitical scenarios.

On the other side US and the West along with Australia, Japan and India are creating brand new political, economic and military alliances. Though India is



*Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy examines the site of a recent battle, in Bucha close to Kyiv, Ukraine.*

still trying to assert its independent policies specially related to Iran and Russia, nevertheless for the time being they have joined the Western block mainly to thwart China and intimidate Pakistan. This factor alone should have brought China and Pakistan closer, but reluctant China and fearful Pakistan remained at a certain distance from each other.

The outcome of Ukraine conflict whenever it ends will shape the future world order in a big way. For the time being, US and the West are adding fuel to the fire and have no sympathy or concern for the loss of human lives that Ukraine has to bear. During this conflict, Russia is also flexing its economic muscle (whatever little they have) by challenging the hegemony of Petro-Dollars and an endeavour to break through the economic sanctions and isolation that the US and its allies are trying to enforce. If Russia succeeds, even partially, a big dent may appear in the prevailing political and economic order of the world. But if West effectively neutralises Russia, which is a possibility, because of China's reluctance to outrightly provide support to it otherwise avowed ally, then the existing world order will get further strengthened, at least for a decade or two.

India is an important wildcard in this entire game plan, and has very cleverly kept all the choices open. In the Russo-NATO conflict, New Delhi may immedi-

*The outcome of Ukraine conflict whenever it ends will shape the future the world order in a big way*

ately join the winning side. Keeping trade and communication open with Iran and China, India can mend their fences with them in little time. Their new overtures towards Afghanistan have checkmated Pakistan's special position throughout this conflict. And, unfortunately, Pakistan's internal turmoil and foreign policy confusion is consuming all its intellectual and diplomatic prowess.

After dealing with Russia effectively, if they succeed, the US and its allies next target is likely to be China. The strategists in US must have decided to engage China in a military conflict before it becomes too strong to be dealt with. The main warzone could be Indo-Pacific, and the Casus Belli could be Taiwan or other Indo-Pacific Islands. If the West succeeds in their second phase without invoking any big response from other countries (not likely) then a weakened China may retract

and shrink back to its own old land and ocean borders. The existing world order will get further prolonged for a few more decades.

The nature and character of war is undergoing some fundamental changes. Strategic gurus have always been advocating that the character of war keeps changing due to technological revolutions, but nature of war remains constant. This notion may be reviewed under the era of disruptive ideas and techniques. As this is not the main theme of this script, so deeper indulgence in this area will be avoided. But as we discuss the possibilities of great transition in geopolitics and geo-economics, geo-strategy and warfare cannot remain unaffected. Use of non-state actors, false-flag operations, misinformation, disinformation, economic hitmen etc. are some of the main ingredients of modern hybrid conflicts. Ukraine War offers a great insight to the interested military minds.

Pakistan's position during this transitional phase is precarious. The politico-economic situation at the global level is still not clear and we have been forced to make decisions and take sides. If the environment reading and shaping was left to the experts, that is the diplomats, they could have found some way out. But this delicate balancing act was undertaken by political forces and institutions that do not excel in diplomacy, international relations, and negotiation skills. Resultantly, we may land up in annoying all friends, to the delight of our enemies. All is not lost, not yet. Only if, we as a vibrant nation, can forge political stability that is the only recipe to usher in economic revival. A non-partisan caretaker setup that should ensure fair and free elections, seems to be the only way forward. Lowering political temperature, resulting in some modicum of economic relief, may give us a breather to review the entire geopolitical landscape, and provide us some space to take important decisions according to long term national interests. Whether the ticking clock will wait for us to catch up... or we have missed the train, is yet to be seen.

Adroit diplomacy, with some good luck, may put us on top of the newly formed politico-economic dune, or Allah forbid, bury us under the old sands of wasted time.

Plan, act and then pray, in the same order, to get out of this morass. ■



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# Comment

## Another Dimension of Hybrid War



# Lawfare & Bilateral Treaties

India has unilaterally terminated 60 treaties and developed a model bilateral investment treaty document 2016, for the future. An EU Ambassador said at that time that the model was a non-starter but India has since signed 6 treaties on the basis of this model draft and is negotiating another 13



**By Shahid Hamid**

*The writer is a Senior advocate supreme court and former governor Punjab.*

**G**one are the days when the weapons of war were by and large confined to armoured tanks, mobile infantry, artillery, fighter jets and bombers, and submarines and warships. We are now in the age of hybrid war in which countries can be defeated without the enemy firing a single shot. I quote former US president, President Barack Obama:

"You just have to flood a country's public square with enough raw sewage. You have to raise enough questions, spread enough dirt, (and) plant enough conspiracy theories that citizens no longer know what to believe. Once they lose trust in their leaders, in mainstream media, in political institutions, in each other, in the possibility of truth, the game is won."

Lawfare is part and parcel of today's hybrid warfare. It is the deliberate misuse of law and legal principles to damage or delegitimize the legal system of another country and to waste its time and money.

If you want to read more on this subject, you may like to pick up a copy of Orde



Kittrie's book 'Law as a weapon of War' or listen to the 2017 keynote address of USAF Major-General Charles Dunlap Jr before the American Bar Association on "Lawfare and Warfare" or see the various publications in the weekly journal of the US Lawfare Institute which works in co-operation with the Brookings Institution.

And it is not just the Americans. The practice of lawfare is increasing world-wide and one of the active practitioners is the enemy in our immediate neighborhood.

Truth is the first victim of lawfare.

*Lawfare is part and parcel of today's hybrid warfare. It is the deliberate misuse of law and legal principles to damage the legal system of another country.*

Permit me to give you some examples relevant to our own context. Kill one of their civilians in the so-called civilised world and it is: unacceptable Islamic militancy, possibly a war crime, to be suppressed and condemned by all right-thinking people.

Kill several of our residents in the tribal areas in drone attacks and it is: regrettable collateral damage, they should not have been hobnobbing with terrorists. Freedom fighters in Kashmir: undoubted terrorists. Terrorists waging war against our troops in Balochistan: nationalists fighting for their rights.

Pakistan's ranking in the Rule of Law index of the World Justice Project is 130 out of 139. Therefore, in international contracts with Pakistan or its entities, the applicable law cannot be that of Pakistan regardless that the contract has to be performed here. Dispute resolution has to be through outside arbitrators as the Courts in Pakistan cannot be trusted to deliver justice. Even the venue of arbitration has to be in some foreign country as the law-enforcing authorities in Pakistan may try and over-awe the arbitrators.

This is a part, a small part, of the subservient mentality created by the lawfare



*Courts of Pakistan are manipulated to legitimise and justify lawfare by other countries.*

waged against us in which we have unthinkingly/unwittingly entered into as many as 53 Bilateral Investment Treaties with 48 different countries. In 1965 we signed the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and the Nationals of Other States. Our basic obligations under this Convention, namely, fair and equitable treatment to foreign investors on par with and not less than the treatment given to our own citizens, rights to repatriate the original investment amounts and profits in the currencies in which the investments were made, no expropriation or nationalisation and, in any event, not without adequate compensation, were fulfilled when we enacted the Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act 1976 and the Protection of Economic Reforms Act 1992. Several of the provisions of the bilateral treaties go well beyond our obligations under the 1965 Convention. For example, the treaty with Australia bars Pakistan (Article 13 refers) from raising any counter-claim or right of set-off or a defence that the investor will receive compensation for any alleged loss from an insurance or guarantee contract, despite the fact that Article 46 of the 1965 Convention specifically permits counter-claims and its Article 42 places no bar on other defences available under the laws of Pakistan. Apart from a number of other objectionable features, these treaties enable the foreign investors to take their disputes directly to the arbitral tribunals set up under the auspices of the International Center for Settlement of Investment

*The Board of Investment figures show that foreign private investment was a little more than a billion dollars per annum in the five years that followed. It crossed the 2 billion mark mostly because of CPEC investment after 2016.*

Disputes (ICSID) located in New York, under Article 36 of the 1965 Convention, by-passing the Courts in Pakistan. Let us be clear that these are unequal treaties of little, in fact no, use to us. They are designed to protect the nationals of capital-exporting countries like the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Netherlands, the UAE, Kuwait and others, and not capital-importing countries such as Pakistan.

I have to say with regret that our decision-makers signed these treaties with no understanding of the implications of the various clauses extending unwarranted rights to foreign investors.

In 2011 we passed the International Investment Disputes Act to give full force and effect to Articles 18 to 24 of

the 1965 Convention relating to the immunity of ICSID and its properties and personnel from all legal process in Pakistan. In the same year we enacted the Recognition and Enforcement (Arbitration Agreements and Foreign Arbitral Awards) Act to give effect to Articles 53 and 54 of the 1965 Convention providing for the binding enforceability of the arbitral awards not only against the federal government but also all constituent units of the State of Pakistan. Both laws were hailed by our then government as “a giant leap forward” that would create confidence among foreign investors, and we looked forward to a bonanza of foreign investment. Did this happen?

The Board of Investment figures show that foreign private investment was a little more than a billion dollars per annum in the five years that followed. It crossed the 2 billion mark mostly because of CPEC investment after 2016, and although we did sign a bilateral investment treaty with China way back in 1989, the CPEC investment has come within the framework of the Free Trade Agreement 2006 which has investment provisions. For settlement of disputes the FTA allows the Chinese investor to invoke ICSID arbitration but only after amicable negotiations over a period of six months have failed to produce results to the satisfaction of both parties, and administrative review procedures under Pakistan law have been exhausted by the Chinese investor. Furthermore, the applicable law is the law of Pakistan. Apart from China we have entered into six other similar treaties with investment provisions with Malaysia, the USA, ECO, SAFTA, OIC and EU.

The Board of Investment figures show that the bulk of foreign investments in Pakistan have come from China, UK, USA, Hong Kong, Switzerland, UAE, Italy, Netherlands, Austria and Japan.

The 10 largest multinational investors are Nestle, Coca-Cola, KFC, Unilever, Pizza Hut, Procter and Gamble, Mobilink, Toyota, Standard Chartered and Microsoft. None of these 10 multinationals have engaged us in ICSID arbitrations. We do not have bilateral investment treaties with USA or Hong Kong. Investments by USA nationals are covered by the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement 2003 between the two countries. It provides for joint consultation at the level of the US-Pakistan Council on Trade and



Investment to resolve disputes.

The level of foreign private investment is determined, in the main, by factors such as the ease of doing business, the tax regime relevant to the investment, the threat of terrorism, energy shortages, political instability and the adequacy or otherwise of skilled human capital in specialised fields, and is not dependent on wholly unjustified legal advantages to foreign investors at the expense of the State of Pakistan and its entities.

Let us go to Wagah, cross the border and on to Delhi. Although it did not sign the 1965 ICSID Convention, India entered into as many as 83 bilateral investment treaties. India faced 20 ICSID arbitrations before it was confronted with the Award in the White Industries versus Coal India case. The applicable bilateral treaty was the one with Australia but the arbitration tribunal relied on the terms of India's bilateral treaty with Kuwait to hold that India was in breach of its obligations under the Australian treaty. White Industries had been deprived of "effective means" of enforcing its claim for supply of equipment to Coal India on account of unreasonable delays in Indian courts. The "effective means" provision in the Kuwait treaty was read into the treaty with Australia. Subsequent to this Award India has unilaterally terminated 60 treaties and developed a model bilateral investment treaty document 2016, for the future. An EU Ambassador said at that time that the model was a non-starter but India has since signed six treaties on the basis of this model draft and is negotiating another 13. The model provides amongst other things that the investor must exhaust all administrative and legal remedies available in India for a period of not less than five years and if there is still no resolution satisfactory to him, only then can he give notice for referral of the dispute to international arbitration.

Back to Pakistan. For us the wake-up call is, or should be, the Reko Diq case. An Award scandalous beyond words - the \$6 billion equal to inflow of about five years of private investment; \$6 billion against the 200 to 250 million dollars investment of the Tethyan Copper Company in exploration activities. I am sure you all know the facts better than me but one aspect may have escaped your notice. The treaty with Australia was signed in 1998. Antofagasta is Chilean. We do not have a treaty with



Board of Investments figures show that foreign private investment was a little more than a billion dollars per annum.

*For us the wake-up call is the Reko Diq case. An Award scandalous beyond words - the \$6 billion equal to inflow of about five years of private investment; \$6 billion against the 200 to 250 million dollars investment of the Tethyan Copper Company in exploration activities.*

Chile. Barrick Gold is Canadian. We do not have a treaty with Canada. In the year 2000 both Antofagasta and Barrick Gold flew across the Pacific Ocean to register the Tethyan Copper Company, as equal partners, in Australia. The number of Australians in Tethyan Copper; a big fat zero. Please note how carefully Antofagasta and Barrick Gold prepared themselves to invoke international arbitration in case they ran into problems with the Pakistani State.

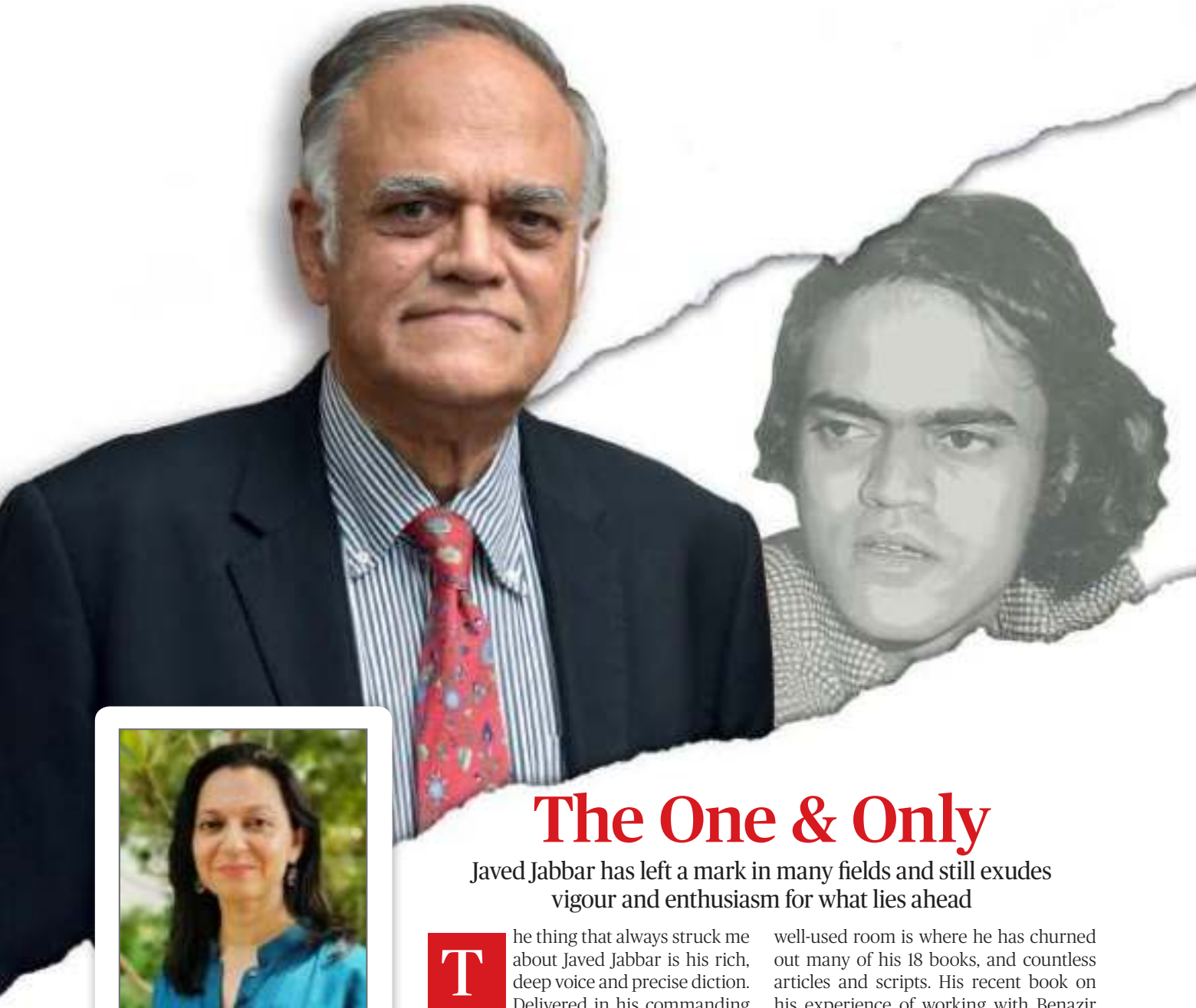
Apart from Reko Diq foreign investors have taken us to international arbitration in 10 other cases. The Swiss SGS, and the two Italian Impregilo cases were settled amicably during the course of the arbi-

tration proceedings. The Kuwait Agility case was a draw; liability was found but no damages awarded. The UK Allawi and the linked Mauritius Progas Energy Mauritius were decided in favour of Pakistan. The Bayindir Turkey case was also decided in favour of Pakistan but Bayindir has again invoked ICSID arbitration in yet another matter which is pending. The Saudi Al-Tuwairqi case is also pending. Finally, Karkey Kardeniz Turkey; we lost badly, penalty of \$1.2 billion but President Erdogan came to our rescue.

Out of the 53 treaties that we have signed, five have been terminated and 16 are not in force as we have not ratified them. We should not ratify and instead issue notices for their immediate termination. This still leaves 32. Reportedly, in 23 cases the 10 to 15 to 20 year periods, after which they can be terminated on giving one year's notice, have expired. We should give such notices without further ado. In the remaining 9 cases we will have to wait. However, even after we terminate them the treaties provide that they will remain in force for a further period of 15 years in respect of investments made prior to dates of termination.

For the future we need to develop a model treaty document. I am informed that the Board of Investment is already doing so. The Board could borrow a leaf or two from the Indian model.

And, finally, we should pass a law that categorically prescribes that no person, public or private, shall sign an agreement providing for the applicability of a law other than that of Pakistan in cases where the bulk of contract performance is to be in Pakistan. ■



**By Zahra Chughtai**

*The writer is a prominent freelance journalist and runs her own interiors and lifestyle online publication.*

## The One & Only

Javed Jabbar has left a mark in many fields and still exudes vigour and enthusiasm for what lies ahead

**T**he thing that always struck me about Javed Jabbar is his rich, deep voice and precise diction. Delivered in his commanding style, one listens carefully to even commonplace phrases. But more often than not, he has something of value to say. Adman, filmmaker, writer, development worker, former senator and former federal minister – Javed Jabbar has left a mark in many fields and still exudes vigour and enthusiasm for what lies ahead.

He ushered me into his study, lined with books and stacked with papers amongst which he seems to know exactly where to find what he is looking for. This

well-used room is where he has churned out many of his 18 books, and countless articles and scripts. His recent book on his experience of working with Benazir Bhutto titled “But Prime Minister” has made it to the Amazon bestseller list in the United Kingdom.

Jabbar was born into an Urdu-speaking family which traces its roots to Central Asia but had settled in Hyderabad, Deccan. His father was employed by the Nizam of Hyderabad, famously known to be the world's richest man at that time. He enjoyed a rank equivalent to that of a Deputy Commissioner and Jabbar and his older sister enjoyed an idyllic childhood



until one day everything was rudely shattered. “Two days after the Quaid died, the Indians decided to invade and take over Hyderabad,” recounts Jabbar. “The state had a tiny army and could not resist. My father, posted at a border district, was arrested and asked to sign a surrender document. But he refused to do so saying he had no instructions to that effect.” The next thing they knew, the entire family, including children and servants were lined up in the compound outside to be shot. “The soldiers were asked to take aim and fire,” recalls Jabbar. “One of my earliest memories, seared into my mind, is being held tight by my mother while my panicking sister was being restrained. It was chilling. Then like a scene from a movie, in the nick of time, a jeep screeched in carrying a Brigadier who halted the execution. Instead, we were all bundled into trucks and taken to prison.” On being released from prison, the family had little choice but to migrate to Pakistan.

They moved to Karachi without knowing a soul in the city but, fortunately, Jabbar’s father managed to get a job with the government of Pakistan. Unfortunately, however, his parent’s marriage could not hold and the couple separated. Jabbar’s mother wanted to return to India where she had left behind property and jewellery and the six-year-old Javed left with her. Later, both his parents remarried and at the age of eleven, Javed moved back to Karachi to live with his father. It was a tumultuous childhood but Jabbar harbours no rancour and has a remarkably good relationship with his step siblings. “Parents shouldn’t be tyrannical by their children,” he maintains.

Javed Jabbar grew up in Karachi and attended the Cant. Public School, where he formed bonds which have endured over 64 years. This was followed by St. Patrick’s College which he says was notable chiefly because of the annual debate between St. Patrick’s and St. Joseph’s Colleges. “It not only gave me a chance to represent my institution but allowed me access to the girl’s college,” he laughs. “The debates led to the principal of St. Joseph’s asking my help to stage a play. That’s where I spotted a certain girl called Shabnam and after that I didn’t concentrate on the play as much as on who this girl was.” Jabbar went on to marry the young lady and the couple have two children; his elder daughter Mehreen is a critically acclaimed film and

television director, and his son Kamal is a well-established lawyer.

After college, Jabbar spent a memorable three years at the University of Karachi from where he earned a Bachelors in International Relations. It was the Ayub Khan era and the age of burgeoning political awareness. A powerful student’s movement was raising its voice against repressive state policies. In keeping with

*“One of my earliest memories, seared into my mind, is being held tight by my mother while my panicking sister was being restrained. It was chilling. Then like a scene from a movie, in the nick of time, a jeep screeched in carrying a Brigadier who halted the execution.”*

the spirit of the times, Jabbar and some friends launched a student newspaper called the Pakistan Students Observer. “I was the editor and we took up all kinds of issues.” At that time, student unions were politically aware but the strong nexus between political parties and the unions did not prevail – the Jamaat-e-Islami being the only exception. Student activism was unmarred by the violence that came to plague it in later years. “We were combative but not violent,” recalls Jabbar.

After finishing his Bachelors, journalism beckoned but Jabbar made a very pragmatic choice. “The monetary aspect of journalism wasn’t what I wanted for myself and so I decided to go into advertising. It was a selfish decision,” Jabbar says candidly. “But it gave me the material security that I wanted. Also it allowed me to pursue writing and creative work.”

Meanwhile, Jabbar had been persuaded to sit for the CSS examination, and despite his lack of enthusiasm for it, he

topped the exam from Sindh. Now there was pressure to join the civil service from his own family as well as from his future in-laws. “But I wanted to be able to write and speak freely. The only person who backed my decision was my then fiancée, Shabnam.” And so Jabbar chose the adventure of setting up his own ad agency over the security of the civil service. And MNJ Advertising was born, formed with his partners Majeed and Nafees. “By the grace of God, MNJ took off and became one of the leading ad agencies in the 70s.”

Javed Jabbar is, in fact, considered one of the pioneers of advertising in Pakistan. “We borrowed 10,000 rupees from UBL and set up an office in a room in the Central Hotel,” he recalls. “We had to teach ourselves everything. TV had just started and there was no heritage we could draw upon. By some miracle English Biscuits appointed us as their agency and the Peek Freans ad campaign followed.”

Featuring the iconic Peek Freans’ Pied Piper, this went on to become one of the most recognised and enduring advertising campaigns in Pakistan.

Many more trend setting advertisements followed and as the agency flourished, Jabbar found time to pursue other creative leanings. “I have always been interested in different disciplines; writing, film, radio, stage... one discipline enriched the other. In particular, cinema has always fascinated me.”

In 1974 Jabbar wrote, directed and produced Pakistan’s first English film, Beyond the Last Mountain. “I made it to reflect the reality of the English-speaking segment of Pakistani society, which was small but very influential. They had their own ethos and norms yet were thoroughly Pakistani,” explains Jabbar. “Of course, I was mad enough to do the whole thing in Urdu as well and so there was an Urdu version called Musafir.”

Released in 1976, the film was not a commercial success but it did make some ripples and was screened at various festivals. In fact, it was the first Pakistani film to be shown in India after the 71 war. “We didn’t make money on the film, although we recovered our investment,” says Jabbar. “But we had great fun doing it and it was a tremendous learning experience. Several scenes were shot in my house. There were no professional actors, even for the lead. In fact, it was the first film in our cinematic history in which educated



*With Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg, South Africa, as Global Vice President, International Union for Conservation of Nature, November 2006.*



*With President George H.W. Bush and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the White House, DC, June 1989.*



*With Saira Bano, Dilip Kumar and Khawaja Shahid Hussain at the First Bombay International Film Festival, January 1976.*

women played the leads; Shamim Hilaly, Moneeza Hashmi, Marianna Kareem, Shireen Sanaullah. It was also Usman Peerzada's first film."

In the early '70s, Jabbar had turned to documentary filmmaking. His film *Mohenjo Daro: The City That Must Not Die* became the first PTV documentary to win an award abroad. Around the same time, Jabbar was involved with a campaign for the National Bank of Pakistan.

"The visionary banker Jamil Nishtar had come up with the radical concept of sending bank officers on bikes to the villages to extend credit." Travelling through the interior of Sindh was an eye-opening experience for Jabbar. "I realised how much there was to learn about Pakistan. That led to my interest in social development and took me to Tharparkar."

In Tharparkar, Jabbar laid the foundations of Baanh Beli, a social welfare organisation which is now in its 37th year. Bannh Beli brings rural and urban residents together and has served as a bridge between different religions and castes. "Most of our members and office bearers were from the untouchable caste. We don't have any buildings or offices and the organisation is completely diffused into the village level." Bannh Beli focuses on education, water resources and women's health,

with a strong emphasis on local participation. Today, the organisation has spread its work to other cities in Sindh as well. "A particularly interesting project we have currently had success with is the breeding of vultures which are in catastrophic decline the world over," says Jabbar. "The locals have taken on the responsibility of protecting the vulture's nest."

Jabbar is also the Sindh chairman of the SOS Children's Villages. Working in rural Sindh at the grassroots, Jabbar has built up an admirable network. "Some time ago, a Hindu family from Thar donated 10 acres of land to build a new SOS home in Islamkot," he says. Jabbar has also co-founded the SPO (Strengthening Participatory Organization) with branches spread across Pakistan. The organisation works to support and strengthen disadvantaged communities by increasing awareness, developing skills and much more.

It was his passion for social service that led to Jabbar's entry into politics. When the non-party based elections were announced by General Zia-ul Haq in 1985, Javed Jabbar ran for a senate seat. "My wife insisted that I contest," says Jabbar. "I wasn't totally convinced but other friends agreed with her and urged me on. I was a complete newcomer and contested on a

technocrat seat," he recalls. "A very senior political personality told me that 'you have to spend around 50 lakh rupees or forget about being elected.' I spent a grand sum of 8,000 rupees to print my credentials on pamphlets and started canvassing; and I was helped greatly by friends who introduced me into political circles." Jabbar was elected by a large margin and despite being a political novice, he took to the senate, in his own words like "a duck to water."

Of the 80 members of the senate elected on a non-party basis, 68 decided to join the pro-government party of Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo. Jabbar was one of the few who refrained. "We remained independent and demanded that General Zia relinquish one of his two positions and that martial law should be lifted. Gradually, momentum built up and we got support from people like Fakhar Imam, Syeda Abida Hussain and Nur Khan in the National Assembly."

When Benazir Bhutto became prime minister, she asked Javed Jabbar to join the PPP. "She was in the bizarre position of being elected by the National Assembly but she had no members of her party in the Senate which had been elected earlier," explains Jabbar. "I felt very empathetic to Benazir. She was under tremendous as-



sault and pressure and since my views aligned with hers, I agreed.” Jabbar became Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting for 10 months. “Then my free media policy proved too much,” he laughs. “And so I was asked to move to another ministry, that of science and technology.”

Earlier, Jabbar left the PPP and set up the Millat Party with former president Farooq Leghari. “He may have made some errors in judgement but he was a sincere man, well-educated and very capable,” Jabbar says of Leghari. Jabbar was Secretary General and the party organised itself to contest the elections announced by General Pervez Musharraf in 2002. “We won 10 seats,” says Jabbar, who later took leave from the party to join Musharraf’s cabinet. He became Advisor on National Affairs and then Minister for Information and Broadcasting. It was during this time that Pakistan saw an unprecedented opening up of the media and the burgeoning of private channels.

“I had been urging the need to end state monopoly on television and radio for many years, even before joining politics, but there were no takers,” says Jabbar. “In 1997, in the caretaker government, I proposed and drafted a law to this effect and an ordinance was promulgated. It was expected that the next elected government would convert the ordinance into an act of parliament. But alas! Mr. Nawaz Sharif was not interested and it lapsed.”

Jabbar set up the Citizens Media Commission of Pakistan, with Justice Nasim Hasan Shah as chairman, and continued to mobilize public opinion on the issue. “Ironically, it took an unelected military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, to revive the law. We introduced it under the tongue-in-cheek name RAMBO, to show how tough the independent media and state can be,” he smiles.

He unearths a magazine featuring a cover image of himself depicted as the muscle-bound, bandana-sporting movie character and we have a good laugh. “The cabinet approved it in principle but, meanwhile, my political differences with Musharraf had grown and I resigned. Musharraf delayed implementing the bill until, finally, in March 2002 it was implemented.” Rambo later became PEMRA, the regulatory body which now monitors all electronic media.

The electronic media landscape was



*Celebrating a 58-year friendship in 2021 – originally formed in the University of Karachi, 1963. L to R: Javed Jabbar, Anwar Maqsood, Irfan Hussain (who sadly passed away a few months after this picture was taken), and Javid Ali Khan.*

*It was his passion for social service that led to Jabbar’s entry into politics. When the non-party based elections were announced by General Zia-ul Haq in 1985, Javed Jabbar ran for a senate seat.*

undeniably transformed but many argue that the Pakistani media is still far from free. Jabbar disagrees. “Our media is free. I mean look at our news anchors and papers. There are some occasional instances of attacks on journalists and coercive pressure to take anchors off screen which is so wrong. But other than that, our papers write very candidly, they are openly critical of the establishment. In the age of social media, it is self-defeating to suppress information when anyone can open a YouTube channel.”

After resigning from the Musharraf government, Jabbar also parted ways with the Millat Party some time later. “Farooq Leghari called me up one day and said that he and the other members had decided to merge with the PML-Q,” says Jabbar. “I was astounded. We had a vision, a manifesto but I was the only one who was resisting the move. I have heard of an

individual quitting a party, but on this occasion the entire party left me!” he laughs.

Jabbar’s erudition and interest in political and international affairs made him an ideal candidate to engage in the Track-2 dialogue with India. He was part of the Neemrana initiative, the longest running Track-2 dialogue, set up by former Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik. “It was a government approved, but not controlled, non-media reported dialogue,” says Jabbar. “So the discussions were very candid and on the basis of these discussions we made proposals to our respective governments. It became the basis for the Four Point Formula agreed upon by Manmohan Singh and Musharraf. Singh was supposed to visit Islamabad in 2007 to sign it but, unfortunately, Musharraf decided to dismiss Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry which completely derailed the process. Now India is not interested in anything but this hysterical projection of Pakistan as the demon. But they will have to come around.”

Ensnared in his study during the Covid-19 pandemic, Jabbar wrote and produced a documentary on the separation of East Pakistan. “16th Dec 2021 marked the 50th anniversary of the split, and I realised that not a single documentary had been made on the subject from the Pakistani perspective.” Titled 1971: The Untold Story, the film interviews several scholars abroad as well as in Pakistan. “It demolishes many myths,” says Jabbar. “It has been screened in many universities and not only students, but so many others have told me that they have learnt so much.” ■

# INFOCIS

## Women Power





# To March or Not to March

Despite all the threats, the 'Aurat' march perseveres



**By Tahira Abdullah**

*The writer is a development practitioner, researcher and a human rights defender.*

**M**arching on 8th March for women's rights has been a global annual occurrence for 166 years; in Pakistan for 75 years; and in the federal capital Islamabad for over four decades now.

Our slogans are many and diverse:

"We are marching for bread and roses," "We want peace now," "We want to save mother earth from environmental disaster," "We are marching to save the constitution," "We are marching for democracy," "We are marching for freedom of expression and independent media," "We want a just world economic order," "We want education," "We want reproductive health rights and services," "We want jobs," "We want equal wages," "We want a decent living (not minimum) wage," "We want humane working conditions," "We want an end to exploitation of women workers in factories, fields, brick kilns, homes," "We want an end to increasing feminisation of poverty," "We want an end to homelessness, joblessness, hunger, inflation," "We want an end to gender-based violent crimes," "We want to end forced conversions and forced marriages," "We must end jirgas and panchayats,"



*Demonstrators at the 2022 IWD Aurat March in Islamabad.*

"We want equal participation and political representation," "We want to smash the glass ceiling," "We want parity, equity and equality," "We want justice," "We believe women's rights are fundamental human rights," "We will exercise our right to choose and have the agency to do so," "We are marching to end patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, harassment, violence", "We want everyone to get this message: women are human beings too."

We are marching, marching, marching. Until all the above is attained, we will continue marching.

Whether under 34 years of military dictatorship regimes and juntas, or under civilian, ostensibly 'democratic' dispensations, we have continued marching on International Women's Day (IWD), overcoming all obstacles, hindrances, threats and attacks on us.

And since February 12, 1983, we also observe Pakistani Women's Day annually. This is to commemorate that momentous landmark event in Lahore, when, at the height of General Ziaul Haq's brutal military regime (1977-88), a group of brave members of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) and Punjab Women Lawyers Association (PWLA), protesting the draft of the Evidence Law (Qanun-e-Shahadat) were physically attacked, injured, arrested and jailed. It was reported worldwide. The general subsequently promulgated

a much watered down version of that infamous law via presidential ordinance, i.e. not enacted legally by an elected Parliament.

But all Ziaul Haq's brutal repression and censorship could not stop us from marching, demonstrating, rallying, protesting, awareness-raising, advocacy, conscientisation, speaking and writing. Neither could subsequent hostile autocratic civilian governments, along with their bureaucratic administration henchmen and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) at their command.

Over the past four decades, we have never let direct/indirect threats, and even physical attacks from extremist theocratic entities deter us, whether religious-political parties in Parliament, or militant terrorist groups outside, or coalition partners in government. Women's rights activists have never stopped celebrating IWD – even when there was nothing to celebrate.

Since 2018, there is a younger cohort of feminist activists, teaming up to observe IWD with their senior predecessors, such as WAF, Tehrik-e-Niswan, Aurat Foundation, Shirkat Gah and others. Called the Aurat (woman) March, it has drawn an unprecedented number of younger women, men and TGI/NB-persons into the fold – and has spread to secondary cities and towns countrywide

– including Balochistan.

Our IWD marches have always remained peaceful, no matter how intense the provocation. However, religious-political parties/groups do not play fair. In fact, they play dirty and deadly games. They physically attacked us in 2020. In 2021, they lodged FIRs against selected members of the Aurat March organising committee on false, fabricated charges of blasphemy, via a doctored video posted online – which, if proved and convicted by a court, would carry a mandatory death sentence, again under a law illegally changed by the military dictator Gen Ziaul Haq via an ordinance, minus an elected Parliament.

The sad irony is that while Zia was eliminated 34 years ago, he indemnified himself and his unconstitutionally promulgated ‘laws’ via his illegal 8th Constitutional Amendment (CA, 1985). They are still operative. No civilian political party subsequently in power under an ostensibly ‘democratic’ dispensation, has mustered the required will or courage of its convictions to repeal the 8th CA, in order to restore the 1973 Constitution to the status quo ante. Zia is long gone, but retrogressive Ziaism is still alive and kicking.

It was demonstrated yet again in February 2022, when then-sitting federal minister for religious affairs in the recently-ousted PTI government of ex-PM Imran Khan, wrote a publicly released letter to his PM, saying that since the traditional annual IWD marches and rallies are “obscene (bay-hayaa), with vulgar (fahaash), immoral sloganeering, banners and placards” (sic), thus the PM should: ban them countrywide; declare 8th March as “Hayaa and Hijaab” (women’s modesty and enforced veiling) Day; and order mandatory Hayaa marches to be held everywhere, in place of Aurat Marches, countrywide.

To be fair, two of the then-sitting PTI federal ministers (human rights and information) disagreed with their cabinet colleague – also publicly, via social media. Thus, it is obvious that the PTI government was not a monolith. In fact, it



*Our most-reviled slogan remains “Mera Jism Meri Marzi.” Local fundamentalists (including ex-PM Imran Khan) always mansplain it away in just one populist meaning, denoting sexual promiscuity, obscenity, immorality.*

was a house divided within.

In Islamabad, religio-political parties, including JUI-F and TLP, extremist groups and terrorist outfits like Jamia Hafsa-Laal Masjid and others of that ilk, went on the offensive well before March 8. They declared the Aurat March as being ‘unIslamic’, immoral, obscene and vulgar. They threatened to physically attack anyone who dared to organise or participate in it. Then-federal interior minister, the LEAs, and Islamabad Capital Territory

(ICT) Administration took no preemptive measures to prevent a repeat of the 2020 violence against peaceful, unarmed IWD marchers by radical theocratic entities.

The women’s wing of the much less radical Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) political party announced they would observe March 8 as “Tahaffuz-e-Niswan” (women’s protection) Day, and marched peacefully in several cities. Police provided protection to large Aurat March events in Karachi and Lahore.

In Islamabad, the Aurat March was organised by young women members of the leftist political party AWP-WDF for four years (2018-2021). In 2022, they decided not to organise it, in view of the mullahs’ attack in 2020 and the violent fallout in 2021. So an informal group of feminists and rights activists came together to organise Islamabad’s March 8, 2022, IWD event, in order to continue our four-decade old tradition.

As always, a formal application was sent to the Islamabad Capital Territory Administration (ICTA), requesting (a) the required No-Objection Certificate (NOC), and (b) police protection, in light of the events of 2020-2021, as well as overt public threats of violence from the religious right.

Despite continued follow up with ICTA and senior police officials, no NOC was issued by the PTI government, nor were we assured of protection against the threatened attacks. On the contrary, senior bureaucrats and police officials constantly pressurised us – insisting that we should cancel our planned rally and march from the Press Club to D-Chowk.

When we flatly refused, they directed us to either change our date (because the mullahs would not change theirs); or change our venue to the secluded Sports Complex or Fatima Jinnah Park (because the mullahs would not); or change our timing to early morning (because the mullahs would not). Naturally, we remained steadfast. So did the PTI government: no NOC, no LEAs protection.

On March 7, we petitioned the Islamabad High Court, but got no relief and no orders to ICTA to issue the re-



quested NOC and to provide us police protection.

Hence, we prepared for the worst – along with contingency plans. When we showed up at the Press Club ground, we discovered that the LEAs-ICTA had sealed and cordoned it off on all sides with huge containers, with just a small pedestrian path available.

Naturally, only a miniscule hard core committed enthusiasts eventually arrived. The rest were either intimidated and decided not to participate, or tried to reach the starting point but turned back on seeing huge containers sealing off the venue. Another sad deterrent factor for potential participants, was the rift occurring within the original Aurat March organisers from the AWP-WDF political party. But that is a whole different, separate discussion – better left for another day.

As per the published programme, we started marching towards D-Chowk for our main event, but a contingent of LEAs materialised at the F-6 markaz junction, blocked our path and forcibly prevented us from marching any further, due to “groups of mullahs already heading in our direction, using the same route, and planning to converge exactly at the same spot.” We could actually see two of the four mullah groups at a distance of around 150 metres, marching towards us, carrying large flagsticks.

A very senior police officer (name/rank being withheld) became extremely aggressive, informing us that their intelligence was predicting a violent armed confrontation (albeit one-sided as we were unarmed), and the LEAs-ICTA would not be responsible for any loss of life or injury. Our event came to a sudden abrupt end at 2:30pm, after iconic feminist author Kishwar Naheed recited her rousing poems, with the LEAs forcibly dispersing us on Aga Khan Road, in full view of the mullah marchers.

We question ICTA's and LEAs' refusal to disperse the rabid mullah contingents, or to try to persuade THEM not to schedule their event in conflict with ours, which we announced long before theirs. We also know that the mullahs did not apply for an NOC or police protection for their publicly announced event. It would be really instructive to know who is backing them – since no one was backing or funding us.

We wonder: what happened to the rule of law across the board? And to the reason for the existence of laws and measures pertaining to the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO)? Or is only the Religious Right in the right, and is the left always wrong, unpatriotic, seditious, treasonous – and now blasphemous too?

Of all our demands, our most-reviled slogan remains “Mera Jism Meri Marzi” (my body, my choice/decision). But of course, in the minds and words of our detractors, it is completely misrepresented, misperceived, and deliberately distorted. Instead of trying to comprehend our vast

*We remain defiantly committed to reclaiming our public space. We have defied all hurdles and have sent a clear message to all patriarchal extremist forces that women's place is in the Resistance.*

scope of meaning underpinning this simple slogan, local fundamentalists (including ex-PM Imran Khan) always mansplain it away in just one populist meaning, denoting sexual promiscuity, obscenity, vulgarity, immorality. The question is: do they know that they succeed only in exposing their own depraved one-track minds?

It was ironic that, despite withholding the NOC, yet ICTA-LEAs actually instructed us not to voice this particular slogan, since it has become such a red rag to the fundo-bull over the past four years of annual IWD Aurat Marches. It goes without saying that, in keeping with our traditions of four decades, we chose to defy the PTI government this year too – especially since they refused to provide us the requested NOC and police protection.

“Mera Jism Meri Marzi” has become an iconic rallying cry and demand in Pakistan. If past trends are any indication, we do not foresee it going away any time soon.

The print, electronic and digital media were present in huge numbers. We heard taunts about our numbers. Our response: what we lack in numeric strength, we make up for, in our energy, zeal and passionately sustained commitment to all our causes and rights-based activism.

Our marches and rallies have always been peaceful – and remain so. We do not respond in kind to actual physical attacks, or threats of violent attacks, e.g. “women like you are just asking to be raped” was the gist of what a sitting male senator of a retrogressive mainstream religio-political party said to a woman human rights activist on a television talk show, while physically intimidating her. We choose the high moral ground instead. Also, despite the clear and present danger, we remain brave and fearless in our ongoing struggle, in the face of daunting odds.

Responding to those who objected to our “lakh laanat” (a hundred thousand curses) slogan against our enemies: be thankful we refrained – and have always refrained – from using their women-centric gutter language. Our language remains generic, non-sex-specific.

We remain defiantly committed to claiming and reclaiming our public space. We have defied all hurdles and have sent a clear message to all patriarchal extremist forces that women's place is in the Resistance: “8 March ko march toh hoga” (we will continue marching on March 8).

Our foremothers would have been so proud of us – a handful of old women, along with a sprinkling of the younger generation of women, men, TGI-NB persons, students and activists who were brave enough to show up on March 8, 2022 in Islamabad. It took personal courage, raw guts and commitment – especially in the young – in the face of well-publicised credible, concrete, serious threats we continued receiving from diverse mullah groups; and the severe obstacles from the PTI government and ICTA-LEAs.

In the end, it may remain a bit hazy as to who called whose bluff in Islamabad on March 8, 2022, but what is crystal clear is that we, Pakistani women, are no longer to be repressed, cowed down, silenced, invisibilised, or forced to knuckle under. We stand up, speak out loud and clear, demonstrate, rally, and keep on marching for our rights and freedoms. Our peaceful struggle continues. ■



## A Conversation with **Taymur Mirza** Principal of the International School

Breaking barriers with challenging the standard form of education in Pakistan, Taymur Mirza has worked hard to introduce a system that breaks from the status quo of examination-based education to an education programme for life based on the concepts of skill, inquiry-based learning and criterion based assessment.

Pakistan's first International Baccalaureate Organisation-based (IB) school, The International School, has become the third school in Asia offering this newly conceived innovative education system, which incorporates the latest trends and philosophies in education.

Taymur discusses the vision for his school and education in general across Pakistan with Narratives...





# Education Par Excellence

The International School (ITS) imparts inquiry-driven education which is vital for developing critical thinking in young minds

By Gulrukhsar Mujahid

**W**hy did the international school choose the IB system, specifically?

There was a prevalent culture where the schools and students were just preparing for the tests, for the grades. Schooling was just about getting the grades, whatever means necessary. So, people were preparing students for exams as opposed to teaching a subject. Secondly, when it comes to the higher order learning skills, if you move away from memorisation and all, there is analysis and evaluation. Although O level does claim to have the latter elements but it is not as truly visible as in the IB program. And the third reason is that in the 21st century skills where knowledge is accessible at a click of a button. No longer the role of the school is to give knowledge but now comes more important to teach them the skills to become lifelong learners. It is about how to learn than just giving them knowledge. These were the key reasons why we chose IB programme.

**As you mentioned that knowledge is accessible at the click of a button, so has technology changed the mode of education for the better?**

Technology is a tool. It is primarily a tool. It's a tool where it allows student to do research where you live in a country, there are no public libraries here where you can get education so how do you teach the students to do research and then academic honesty about when you write a paper you quote something how do you do that to be acceptable in the form of a research paper. For example, constantly in the media you read about plagiarism that how have students and professors plagiarised their papers maybe perhaps knowledge skill set has not been laid in students entering the universities and colleges; the institutions responsible to lay the research skills are secondary schools. However, schools are all about knowledge and getting grades while not giving you skills req-



*Technology has served as a veritable tool for disseminating inquiry-driven IB education*

uisite to be an academic.

**How does your school disseminate knowledge to students while countering the age-old practice of rote learning?**

A more basic question is if you're sitting today, you have a body of knowledge, how did that body of knowledge come about in the first place and then what's the process of knowledge when someone asks a question, is curious about something then they start finding answers to it. That's been the purpose of education from day one so why can't the school system be as such that it allows minds to do that. Ask questions, have skills to find the answers. So, if you'll look at the IB education you'll see it's inquiry-driven. What does inquiry-driven mean? Students ask questions and then their teacher assists and joins then in finding the answers. Teaching of that knowledge, even if the knowledge exists, goes through the process of inquiry. A human mind is designed to be curious. Young minds, that's what they do? In our age, the underlying rule or law was, don't ask questions and just follow. But the generations have changed, the times have changed. Here at the International School, the more questions

somebody asks, the more knowledgeable the better it is. When our students take the final assessments, the students are not tested on a certain body of content or knowledge, they are taught some set of skills and they're tested on a concept or idea. The concepts become the body of knowledge and content. So, for example you're talking about war, some sort of multimedia, or articles or some sort of prompts or cartoons will be given in the exam and then you have to apply your knowledge that you've built up on the concept and idea of war.

**One of the visions of your school is creating 'love for knowledge', an affectionate and nurturing environment. How do you implement it in practice?**

Your first question was about why IB? IB has laid down the culture of how it is to be taught, how is the approach of teachers for provide learning for the students. The curriculum itself drives the culture of the school. That by and by in no means is sufficient in achieving, bringing about love for knowledge. It goes from person to person, varies from person to person and the applicability and how they listen and adopt the system. But because the approach



*Students at the International School celebrating their graduation ceremony with zest*

to learning is that you push inquiry, you push concept learning, you believe in skill set, you're going towards the nature of curiosity in leaning for children because of which they own their education. Once they have ownership of what they're learning and they enjoy what they're learning, that's where the love of knowledge will come. Therefore, the system of IB instils affinity to knowledge in children and that's how the child functions and moves in the system, that also defines the love for knowledge.

#### **How do you train teachers?**

When parents come for education over here, the first question is that do you have trained teachers? And the moment they ask this question, I ask them

*IB system instils affinity to knowledge in children and that's how the child functions and moves in the system, that also defines the love for knowledge.*

would they ask the same question from a Cambridge school then they're absolutely quiet. Suddenly the element of trained

teachers come for the IB school; when it comes to the standards of the rest, they don't ask these questions. Can the other systems survive without trained teachers, perhaps they can, that's why there is no such requirement and need, therefore, the parents don't question them? In the IB system it's a requirement to train teachers to teach the IB way.

**It could be because they don't have much exposure to the IB system...**

If you understand Cambridge, it is all about teaching a syllabus, maybe they're not looking for a skill set required in a teacher. For example, if you look predominantly what is bigger in Pakistan when it comes to the Cambridge market, the schools or the academies and the tutors? Academies and tutors shadow the schools, there is more of a tuition culture than school culture, which is much much bigger.

**You intend on seeking a departure from postcolonial knowledge as mentioned on your website. Could you elaborate on it?**

What I'm talking about over there is the O level and A level system, it's a creation by the British. The Fsc., matric system, who created that? What's the difference between matric, Fsc and O level and A level? Not so much. Even in matric, Fsc. you do the syllabus and then just take the examination like the latter. So, those two programmes are almost the same. Now, the only difference lies is that the people who are the guardians and the deliverers





of the programmes are different. Matric is more localised and is allegedly corrupt within, whereas the foreign Cambridge system is considered more sought after because of which it becomes acceptable globally as opposed to the former. So, my debating question is that if tomorrow suppose the government hands Fsc., matric over to someone outside to deliver and manage it and to make the exams, suddenly the quality and standards would go high.

**But then we also have to look at the affordability of education...**

Absolutely correct. Yes, that's the flip side. So, when one questions why IB is not growing as fast as it should be, it is because of the affordability factor.

**Then how do you make it affordable?**

Only when it becomes a national and global effort then the government can invest. In any country, it has to be the government that takes charge. So, for example, if you look at the IB schools, there are about 4,000 IB schools around the world over. More than half of them are in US. And a large portion of the ones in the US are state schools. So, tax paid is benefiting the taxpayers, the government is investing even though it's not their own program. They're taking the taxpayers' money to invest in a foreign qualification offered to their nationals because that's the demand. Tony Blair also made an effort in England, in his ten years, to give grants to state schools to convert to IB or add IB as an option. The education in UK, in the public schools, is free. In US, you have to be in the catchment area, so basically if you live in a certain address that is in the catchment area, you go to that school, and it offers IB system.

**What are your future plans, what does The International School intend on doing differently in future?**

We came in to give an option, an alternative, it's worked. Its acceptability is there. Kids have gone to universities, colleges in Pakistan and all over the world and in the working force. The ones who were critics, who said it won't find acceptability in Pakistan, that answer has already been addressed. Now the whole idea is we want to reach out to the nation and the parents to tell them that this is there, and it works, and you should invest in your child to give them something like the IB education to put them in the 21st



*Extracurricular activities have been cooperated effectively as part of the curricular in the IB system*

*We should start with change of curriculum, as initiated by Single National Curriculum (SNC) which is the right step.*

century. As the demand rises and people start accepting it, schools will start taking up the IB system. It has to come from the people, the people have to rise up, to have a clear demand for it.

**How do you publicise it?**

That's one of our weaknesses, we publicise through parent community at large which has now become small, we need a much bigger voice to reach out for people to understand it. I understand it is an affordability issue. So now we know, and we are giving financial assistance. It's on merit-basis and need-basis.

**What more can be done when it comes to the education system in Pakistan? What should be done according to you as principal of a formidable school?**

Very noble efforts are happening. Single National Curriculum (SNC) was one of those. The whole idea is that you develop a curriculum, the curriculum is adopted by schools then once that is done you start training the teachers as well as the management of the school to deliver

it. Start with change of curriculum, which is the right step. The next thing is that you start resourcing and do capacity building for the educators for that. Recently, there is a white paper being floated by the Agha Khan Institute of Education Development on teacher licensing. Once teachers are trained, they get licensed. That's also a good effort and step but then again what kind of training is it? what are you training them for? This is all based on curriculum. Curriculum is the most important thing. There has to be a multi-pronged approach across the nation but the biggest challenge is, this will work for large majority of Pakistan but there is another element that is the out-of-school children, that has to be addressed as well. There is a major percentage of them and that has to go. So, you have to give incentives to the kids to go to the school. Some countries abroad have introduced free meals, free lunches which encourages parents to send their children to school.

Moreover, if the curriculum is strong and the way it's being delivered is strong then the students themselves will not want to drop out of school as well. Then you have to make them have love for knowledge and drive. Once you get them there, you have to keep them there. It all then depends on how well you deliver. In some ways, I do agree there should be a single curriculum across provinces but within a diverse Pakistan it has to have flexibility. The curriculum has to be ingrained so it allows for diversity; the multicultural and multireligious society that we live in. ■

# Tribute

**Khalid Hameed Farooqi**

**Feb. 6, 1961 - May 6 2022**





# Farewell My Friend

Mentor, friend, family and man of many parts, Khalid Hameed Farooqi's demise leaves the world a sadder place

By Amir Zia

**T**his is one obituary I never imagined I would write. Only two days before his sudden demise, Khalid Hameed Farooqi and I spent hours together discussing politics, arguing, laughing, remembering our good old days of student politics and making plans to meet again in the next couple of months.

He had come all the way from Belgium at my call to London, so we could spend a few hours together. Over the years, this had become par for the course. Whenever I visited London, Khalid Hameed always took the trouble to come and see me – an old friend, to whom he had introduced the world of student politics.

A star student leader of Karachi's leftist circles during the 1980s, Khalid Hameed was highly focused, a fiery speaker, a passionate political worker, and above all, a trustworthy, reliable friend and comrade. During the peak of the anti-Gen. Ziaul Haq movement in the early 1980s, Khalid had been imprisoned, beaten up, and even nominated in a murder case. But all this did not stop him from fearlessly forging ahead with his political activities – whether it was organising demonstrations and rallies, pasting posters and chalking anti-martial-law slogans on walls in the dead of the night, or giving vent to his often anti-establishment ideas and opinions in speeches at assorted forums, including educational institutions. He worked tirelessly. In his little frame throbbed a giant's heart! And all through his life, he remained committed to the ideals he had harboured since his student leader days.

Khalid was not my childhood friend. We had met at the University of Karachi sometime in 1985. And since then our friendship had withstood all our often heated political debates, our recently increasingly conflicting party lines, and our geographical distance (he being in Europe for the last 35 years and I in



*Khalid with his son Kamil and daughter Maya.*



*Khalid with Malala Yousfzai.*



*Those were the days: Khalid with his wife Ela Wysocka*



*Khalid & Ibrahim Sajid Malick – two longtime friends.*

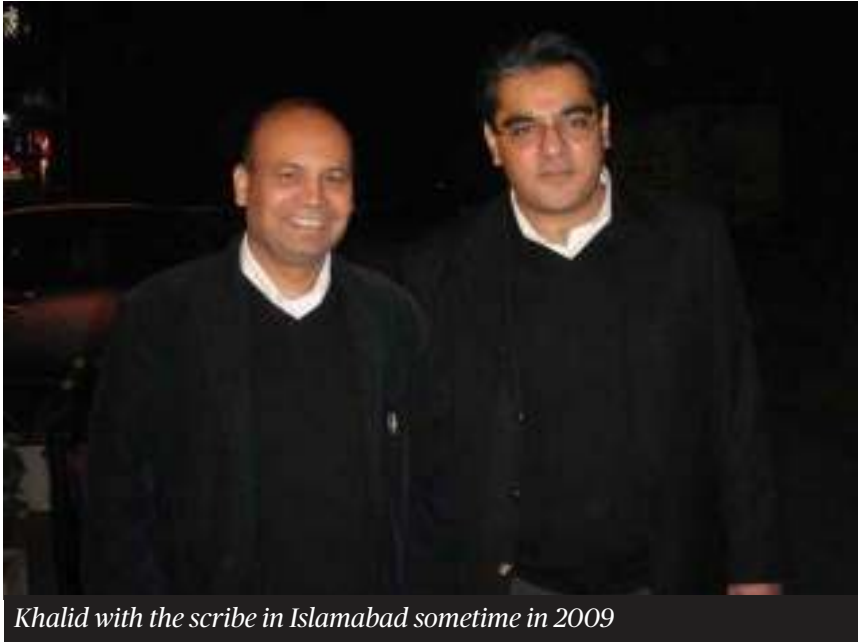
Pakistan).

I vividly remember our first meeting even after the passage of 37 years. I was a first-year student at the Department of English's B.A. (Hon.) programme and because I had Mass Communication as one of my subsidiary subjects, I often read newspapers and magazines in its Seminar Room.

Khalid Hameed Farooqi was only Khalid Hameed then and was in his final year of B.A. (Hons.) at the Department of Mass Communication. He initiated the discussion by asking questions about my studies, the books I read, etc. He had 'Waheed Murad style' thick straight hair and a mustache at that time. Soon we were joined by a tall, lean and bearded youngster, whom I came to know as Osama bin Razi – an activist and student leader of the Islami Jamiat-e-Talba (IJT).

Later, Osama became the IJT's university 'nazim,' and after that held several other senior positions in his organisation. (Now Osama is one of the central leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami.). Khalid at that time was the General Secretary of the National Students Federation (NSF), Karachi Division. Soon, the three of us were engrossed in an interesting debate about whether the state should be secular or theocratic. Yes, despite all the violence at the educational institutions during the 1980s, there was still space for good discussion between ideological rivals.

Osama and Khalid being class-fellows knew each other well and there appeared to be a lot of mutual respect between them. I, being an apolitical novice at the time, knew very little about them or student politics and its lethality. But in that first 'historic' discussion, Khalid's ideas



*Khalid with the scribe in Islamabad sometime in 2009*

and mine somewhat converged. That was where Khalid spotted a political worker in me. A couple of days later, he was in my department, noting down my home telephone number (there were no mobile phones in those primitive days) and my home address. We started meeting regularly at the campus and thereafter at my house, where he never came without a gift – usually some old book from the treasure trove of some NSF friends.

There were the works of Maxim Gorky, Syed Sibte-Hasan, Shaukat Siddiqui, Abdullah Hussain, Che Guvera, Chairman Mao Zedong, political biographies, the Communist Manifesto and many more. It was often overwhelming, there was too much to read, too much to discuss. In those initial days of our acquaintanceship, Khalid would preach the party line, giving ideological sermons for hours at a stretch. In me, he found a good listener. Meanwhile, my mother would wonder what kind of friends we were. “He speaks all the time,” she said.

But friends we were, and Khalid Hameed knew the art of transforming an apolitical student into a political worker for an organisation that was hounded by the right-wing and so-called progressive rivals alike. Members of the NSF, affiliated with Mairaj Mohammed Khan’s Qaumi Mahaz-e-Azadi (QMA), were not even allowed to wear party badges at that time in the University of Karachi by the rival faction of the NSF-Rasheed Group, which later evolved into the NSF-Gandapur Group.

*Khalid was often harassed, even thrashed, by our comrades in the NSF’s rival faction. The hostility among the rival NSF factions was intense, brutal and unforgiving. But this never stopped Khalid from staying steadfast to his beliefs and jumping into political discussions at the first given opportunity, even with bitter rivals.*

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first given opportunity, even with bitter rivals.

During these discussions, I recall, he would look his listeners straight in the eye, trying to make a connection, and would lean forward to emphasise each point he wanted to make in his clear broadcast-quality voice. He was the only recognised face of the NSF-Mairaj Group at the Karachi University in those days. We had few other comrades in different departments, but they kept a low-profile, probably to stay out of trouble. When I became an NSF member a few months later, we quietly met in some classroom and following our meetings, dispersed as quietly.

Barring the Urdu Arts College, where our group dominated, the NSF-Mairaj had open units only in a few colleges. In all the other major educational institutions – Dow Medical College, the Sindh Medical College, the NED University and Dawood Engineering College – rival factions of the NSF dominated, while our members kept a low profile. But they were organised in neighbourhood units – the active ones being in Shah Faisal Colony, North Nazimabad, Malir, Landhi, Lihquatabad, New Karachi and few others.

After University classes ended, Khalid usually visited neighbourhood units – often travelling on bus from one corner of the city to the other. He would walk for miles to hold individual or collective meetings. His energy, dedication and commitment to the cause was amazing.

Whenever I and a couple of others accompanied him during such stints, Khalid kept our morale up often with stories of Chairman Mao’s long march or Che Guevara’s struggle, making most of the others too ashamed to complain or grumble about our tired feet and hungry bellies. But being the junior-most and an ardent foodie, I have to admit, my protests, difficult questions and cheeky remarks would continue. And so, Khalid would invariably give in and we would stop for a bunkabab at some roadside ‘thaila.’ And of course, being the senior, he would insist on paying, and when the pocket permitted, even buy us a cold drink – which was a luxury. This special treatment, I learnt, was however, mostly reserved to when I – the spoilt one – was part of the long marches.

More than two decades later in New York, in the office of our host – and the



third-member of our troika – Comrade Ibrahim Sajid Malick, Khalid announced he would lead a long march on the NY roads, with me in tow. That comprised walking past one roadside café after another, and I could see Khalid was more focused on aimless sightseeing than anything else. After some serious grumbling and protests, he gave in and bought an ice cream from a vendor. This triggered memories of sharing bunkababs in Karachi, and we laughed like mad on the footpath. On the same trip – sometime in 2013 – Khalid had to go and visit his mother in some other city in the US. But of course, two emotional blackmailers – myself and Ibrahim Sajid – didn't let him go. "How can you leave Amir when he is in New York," Sajid argued. And it required little pressing to make Khalid stay until I was there. Yes, he was a friend's friend. Now I realise that we may have been selfish in forcing Khalid not to visit his family as he had planned. But on second thought, we too were one another's family and our bond was greater than that of real brothers.

Khalid had always been generous, gracious and self-sacrificing with his comrades – whether there was a need for that sacrifice or not. If he was a firebrand and an unflinching political worker when it came to fighting for his ideology, he was a gentle soul among friends and while managing individual relations.

Once I got stuck at the Karachi University hostel for some longish meeting. It was past midnight and no public buses or vans were available. At that time, there were hardly any residential apartments or houses between the six or seven kilometre patch between the University and the NIPA Square. I had no choice but to walk back as staying at the hostel was out of the question because of strict parental rules. Khalid offered to give me company, which was readily accepted. And we two walked, talked and smoked (by the way Khalid was not a smoker, but he would even join me for a smoke for the sake of being better company) all the way, and shared an engrossing conversation. I do not recall seeing anyone all the way on the dark University Road. At NIPA, which was close to my home – Khalid said goodbye and walked back all alone.

Another memorable 'long march' was one from somewhere near Hotel Mehran to the Karachi University hostel, though

I parted ways with my comrades for my house somewhere near Hasan Square, in Gulshan-e-Iqbal. It was New Year's Eve, and I dragged my puritan comrade Khalid and a few other friends to the party somewhere. As usual, we had no conveyance – there were no buses at 2 or 3am in the morning and pockets did not permit hiring a taxi or a rickshaw.

In 1987, Khalid left for Holland for further studies. We had long arguments before his departure. Like many comrades, I did not see the point of going abroad for studies and pleaded with him to stay home and carry on with the NSF.

*A star student leader of Karachi's leftist circles during the 1980s, Khalid Hameed was highly focused, a fiery speaker, a passionate political worker, and above all, a trustworthy, reliable friend and comrade.*

But Khalid wanted to end his NSF career alongside the completion of his Masters. He did not want to be counted among those 'professional student leaders' who remained a university student even 10 years after completing their studies – moving from one university department to the other, or cooling their heels after taking admission in M.Phil programmes, which they never wanted to complete. Khalid stuck to his decision and proved himself right.

I was among those two or three friends, who bid him farewell at the Karachi Airport. He left to build a new world for himself with a small backpack and a copy of Faiz's collective works – "Nuskha-e-Wafa" – in his hands. His departure was my personal loss. Other NSF seniors befriended me and kept me going, but I missed Khalid because he was not just my political guru, but also a dependable friend.

In the pre-email and WhatsApp days,

we kept in touch through occasional letters and very rare telephone call exchanges. After a gap of many years, he started visiting Pakistan off and on. And whether I was in Karachi or Islamabad, Khalid would make it a point to come and meet me. Now even without a party, we considered ourselves part of the party discipline.

Like myself, Khalid also chose to become a journalist while first living in Holland and then moving to Belgium. And he did make a name for himself through his quality reporting and news writing. In fact, he was the first Pakistani journalist working for a Pakistani media organisation, who made a name for himself both, among the Pakistani diaspora and among European stakeholders. He was always on the move – rushing from one country to another. His last assignment before he came to see me was in Ukraine, from where he shared his photos. I asked him to stay safe and refrain from adventure as we were not getting any younger. But Khalid remained young at heart till the end. Always motivated. Always passionate about his work. Always on the move. And always ready for discussion.

In our last meeting – on May 4, 2022 – while we did discuss politics, I think for the first time ever we talked more about our families. Khalid was his usual smiling self. He instantly connected with Tehmina, my daughter and guide in London. That was his first meeting with Tehmina as a young university-going adult. The two agreed to explore the art galleries and museums of Europe later this year.

Khalid shared a few anecdotes about his Polish wife, Ela Wysocka, and the cultural challenges he faced at home, between East and West, especially when his mother visited them. We had a hearty laugh. For Khalid, Ela was the fulcrum of his life, and his two children – Kamil and Maya – his pride and joy. Like previous occasions, he shared how his children, right from a tender school-going age, were trained to be independent and encouraged to play sports and take part in other extracurricular activities. And we had a 'short march' – this time on the banks of the River Thames. We casually said goodbye to one another with plans to meet in July. A day later, I heard that comrade Khalid Hameed had passed away. I still can't believe it. ■

## Author of the Month



**Nida Kirmani**

## Woes of South Asian Cities

This book is a welcome addition to the literature around urban transformation for its diverse scope and authentic reading, analysis of cities in the Global South

**By Gulrukhsar Mujahid**

*Tumhein fikr hai apne ghar ki  
Mujhe har gali ka gham hai*

**T**his heartfelt couplet by people's poet Habib Jalib encapsulates the soul of this activist-academic piece of work edited by Nida Kirmani, comprising nine papers presented at a conference in Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) in 2016 with an afterword by trailblazing urban studies' specialist Nausheen H Anwar. Marginalisation, Contestation, and Change in South Asian Cities aims at unveiling the pertinent and negative effects of neoliberalisation/marketisation in urban transformation of South Asian Cities. The papers are mainly about Indian and Pakistani cities experiencing urbanism in the form of marginalisation, exclusion, segre-

gation and changing the imagined connectedness of their people from the landscape they have inhabited for decades. This lucid book argues that the phenomenon of converting urban landscape into 'world-class' or megacities causes displacement of the urban poor or snatches away their familiarity, usage of resources from the land they occupy along with many other vagaries of such sort and the resistances that these changes accompany.

The first paper titled "Entangling the Global City: Everyday Resistance in Gadap, Karachi" by Shahana Rajani and Heba Islam talks about how Bahria Town has erased from the public memory that a local community has existed and still inhabits beyond its boundaries. The new vision envisioned for Gadap isn't a clear-cut process but an entanglement whereby 'progress' and



'development' lead to violence and erasure. The architecture, visuals and the materiality that the new geography brings, are analysed while making a point about the development of Bahria Town serving as forgetting and erasure that doesn't only relegates the locals to the past but also tries to make their spatiality non-existent. The chapter alludes that Bahria Town's utopic existence as a global city aims to identity itself as the future and the local as the past. These kinds of ventures are illusory that use a glossy outlook to hide the remnants of the previous residents. Hence, Bahria Town, an initiative for urban transformation, sets out to present 'the world-as-exhibition.' Over here in the paper, the larger phenomenon of the ongoing erasure of indigenous landscape and histories is revealed as one of the methods of enacting structural violence, historically, where the post-colonial state tries to put forth policies that discriminate and displace the indigenous people of the city.

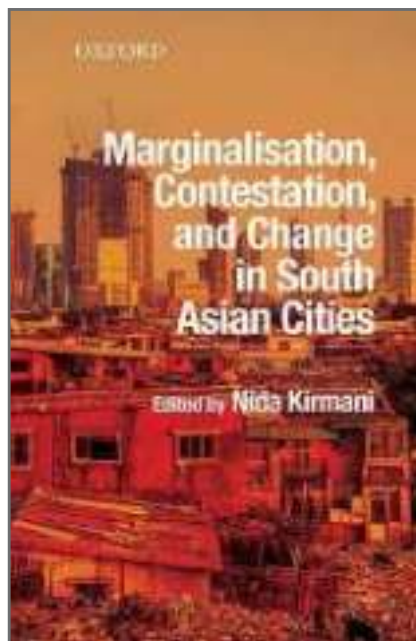
The second paper "The Case of LDA City: How a Public-Private Partnership Fractured Farmers' Resistance in Lahore" written by Hashim bin Rashid and Zainab Moulvi presents the case of LDA city scheme which is to be Pakistan's 'biggest housing scheme' in southwest Lahore spanning 64,000 kanals. The formation of such schemes involves plunder of rural land on the fringes of the city by acquiring it at cheap prices and converting it into high-value real estate—usually in the shape of elitist residential areas. The LDA is representative of a profiteering developer while also being regulator of housing schemes after entering this phase of extremely 'lucrative' game of housing schemes. The urban developing authorities have also taken away power from the local governments. There is fractured resistance as a response to dispossession posed by the development of the LDA city due to the infrastructure in place and not because of the state force only. With acceptability towards selling of agrarian land through the private-public partnership, the ones left resisting, feel helpless in the face of usurpation of their land. The sense of dispossession turns the urban citizen as primarily a 'market subject.'

The third paper titled "Looking at the City from Below: Contribution of 'Access' Approach and 'Cityscapes' in Amritsar" by Helena Cermenó while talking about urban development at a place Jhuggi

Mokhampura in Amritsar raises an important point that the development planning visions and policies are borrowed by neoliberal trends and the already marginalized residents face hindrances in accessing resources leading to further exclusion. This legal development venture and others of this sort aim to reproduce marginalization and unjust spaces in the city by resettlement of people residing in Jhuggi Mokhampura for the creation of 'low-income' housing where the residents can although take advantage by the services provided/power relations between residents and municipality officers, pardhans (local leaders), local politicians, these allotment plans don't ensure access to enough living space, basic facilities such as electricity, water, sewage, and drainage, and the city space at large.

The above three chapters and case studies talk about urban planning purposely congregate and segregate urban poor or dispossess them from their land to build elite enclaves. The former means non-access to employment opportunities and cut them off from the city, pushing them further into the fringes. These chapters are a significant intervention for explaining inequality due to neoliberal transformation but are repetitive at times and are unable to capture the texture of the cities under study leading to rendering case studies indistinguishable in form not in content, indeed though. However, the case studies of demolition of squatter settlements of Gujjar and Orangi Naala in Karachi and razing off katchi abadis in Islamabad in the name of 'world-class' urban transformation, perpetrating unequal actions by the state should have been added and addressed while talking about change in conception of cities' landscape.

"Bolstering Security by Erecting Barriers and Restricting Access: The Case of Karachi" by Noman Ahmed is the weakest of the lot and lost the opportunity to talk about the militarisation of Karachi over the years due to security threats; the only takeaway from the paper is that installation of containers and barriers, initially meant to be temporary, now seem to be permanent part of the city and restrict mobility of the commoners while providing elite with the 'golden' chance to create a city within a city. The author could have benefitted by illuminating the inequality depicted due to this phenomenon as well as the ranger-ridden land-



### **Marginalisation, Contestation, and Change in South Asian Cities**

Edited by: Nida Kirmani

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scape that instills a sense of fear amongst the Karachiites at large, and at times also leading to racial profiling of ethnic and religious minorities.

Asad Sayeed and Kabeer Dawani's "Mafia Domination or Victim of Neoliberalism? Contextualising the Woes of Karachi's Transport Sector" draw our attention to depleted transport system in Karachi with the existing public transport infrastructure falling excessively 'short of the demands of the city.' Karachi's population has doubled over last two decades, but the number of buses remain static. They claim Karachi is one of the few 'megacities' in the world without a planned system of mass transit. A pertinent reading in this paper about the reason for lack of effective governance in the city in general and specifically a lack in provision of public services such as the public transport is due to the 'partisan role of the state in violent conflict across ethno-political lines' implying that the local state or government has lost its legitimacy over monopoly on violence eroding the writ of the state. The authors recommend that an affordable and effective public transport system can only be made possible when the Pakistani state focuses on socio-economic equity in terms of urban development as opposed to the maintenance of law and order and aiming at gaining short-term profits.

The urban regions in South Asia are experiencing transformation that have significant environmental ramifications. Due to the drive towards unabated economic growth has become toxic for the region making the cities unlivable. This 'toxic urbanism' is explicated by Rohit Negi and Prerna Srigyan in their paper "In the Time of Toxic Air: Environmental Contestations, Collaborations, Justice in Delhi." Toxic urbanism is basically the linkage of urbanization and willful environmental change in South Asian cities and the case under study is Delhi over here. The authors shed light on the formation of new collectives around air which are beyond the already existent environmental advocates; these collectives and collaborations include diverse 'publics' producing expertise around air. Therefore, the environmental discourses across urbanisation are now being problematised. Environmental concerns have now entered the mainstream. Air itself has taken the shape of political agency

where governments are enforcing 'rationing of road space,' experts debating 'emission norms' and those who can afford are investing in air purifiers. The local government, judiciary and civil society organisations are now taking environmental justice positions as opposed to the dream of converting Delhi into a world-class city. However, the paper draws our attention towards the fact that public conception of the air is nevertheless making it an individual and household-scaled phenomenon majorly benefitting the elites as opposed to air being a shared entity.

*This book is an adequate response to the change occurring in the Global South, trying to mimic developed cities, most importantly when there is a dearth of scholarship around the phenomenon.*

"Electoral Politics in Delhi's Informal Settlements: Contestation, Negotiation, and Exclusion" by Shahana Sheikh, Sonal Sharma and Subhadra Banda shed light on the kind of contestation and negotiations take place during election period in Delhi, the centre of analysis being informal or squatter settlements. They elucidate that the informal settlements' residents are manipulated through promises of basic service delivery again and again with ad hoc measures, but no fulfillment of their electoral promises made during election campaign. The political parties, hence, use the insecurity created as a result, to their advantage, making unfulfilled promises in order to win votes but then keeping the people in the constituencies deliberately hungry until the next election arrives, and this is a repetitive phenomenon. This remains the most interesting chapter of the book because of the intelligent linkage of electoral politics with the unfulfilled developmental promises which is ubiquitous all-over South

Asia.

Chapter eight by Pinky Chandra and Kabir Arora talks about the transformation of waste into a resource with a focus on the informal waste economy in Bangalore and the players involved. Actors in the waste economy, although often neglected by the rest of the city and policymakers, are focal players in the 'infra-economy' where they provide necessary environmental services.

The last paper "Studying in the Mahol: Middle-class Spaces and Aspiring Middle-class Male Subjects in Urban Pakistan" is a promising interweaving of gender politics with environment as well as the class dynamics, presenting a new theoretical framework. This is written by Muntasir Sattar. The imagination of transforming Lahore into a Paris-like model leads to a deeper change that is beyond infrastructural and state-led development. One of the signs of it the formation of -single-sex hostels in Lahore's crowded transit hubs. They mainly cater to the migrants from far flung areas from all-over Pakistan aspiring to become educated, university-educated expanding middle class milieu. These hostels are reflective of the ways in which they link some of the larger socioeconomic processes in place in Lahore and an emerging class of men who are cultivated to be an urban and cosmopolitan subject through their acquisition of education, primarily in CSS qualification. It provides them with the chance to leave their village and form an experience of their own to be recognized as a 'student,' a respectable designation than being termed unemployed. Therefore hostels, the mohalla is a complex space of social formation which plays a large role in how young men aspire to become successful middle-class subjects within a precarious urbanizing future.

To conclude, the attempts to make 'cities of lights' into 'cities of darkness,' 'darkness' representing the negative impact of urbanism which is counter-productive for already neglected citizens as well as the anti-people or pro-neoliberal policies. This book is an adequate and much-needed response to the change occurring in the Global South, trying to mimic the developed cities, most importantly when there is a dearth of scholarship and debate around the phenomenon. Therefore, it's a big thumbs up for this piece of work, from my end! ■





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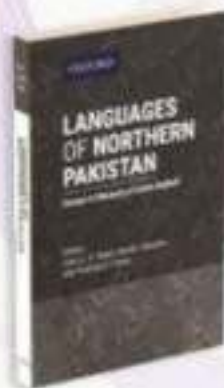


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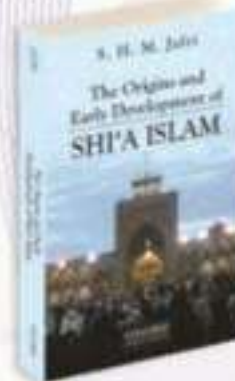
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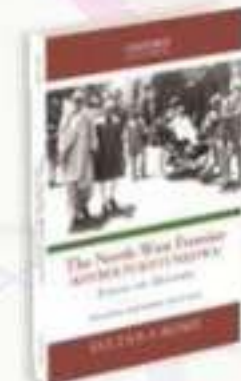
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# The Entertainment Menu

TV One is again offering a great mix of high-drama, suspense, wit and laughter, sensation, style and beauty and celebrity interviews this season...

## Morning Star

Monday to Friday from 9-11:30am

Morning Star with Azfar Rehman is making our mornings full of life, energy and laughter. A hugely popular, well-established actor who has proven his mettle in the entertainment industry, Azfar Rehman serves as the perfect host for this morning show. His gift of the gab, sense of humour, and cerebral edge is the primary reason to tune into the show every morning.

Airing daily from Monday to Friday, Morning Star with Azfar Rehman engages its audience by incorporating entertainment with information and advice meted out by professionals.

Azfar joins Chef Muneeza Adeel – the kitchen queen – every morning to create amazing recipes. Their daily friendly banter replete with gastronomical puns provides the much needed laughter therapy. With physical health being the need of the hour, the recorded and live segments hosted by top notch experts like Yogi Wajahat, Shoaib Khan and Hina Anis in the area of 'Fitness and Nutrition', showcase a slew of fitness routines and nutritious recipes twice a week. One of the biggest accomplishments of the show thus far has been to incorporate lawyers, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, dermatologists, pediatricians, herbalists, aestheticians, and cosmetologists in its segments – "Humaray Mehmaan" and "Chamakte Chehray".

The exclusive weekly segment "Husn Dou Bala" brings forth the latest hair and makeup trends with distinguished stylists like Akif Ilyas, Adnan Ansari and Shazia Marghoob, who put all their creative and aesthetic skills on display. 'Ghar Singhar' features interior designers who collaborate to revamp old furniture and create beautiful pieces for your homes. Every Friday features "Zaicha" with the tarot card reader Unsa Shah, combined with "Wazaif" suggested by the religious scholar Dr Imranul Haq Kilyanvi.



## Dil Bhatkey

A new serial all set to make waves this summer

"Dil Bhatkay" is a gripping story of six millennials – Ramis, Rama, Adnan, Tanya, Misha and Jasim – charting new paths for their future. These university class-fellows have dreams, ambitions and goals. But to realise them, they must stifle their desires and make huge sacrifices. Can they do it?

Produced by veteran artist and director Sangeeta, "Dil Bhatkay" has a powerful script beautifully enacted by a star cast with an OST by Shafqat Amanat Ali.

Starring: Babar Ali, Bilal Qureshi, Eeshal Fayyaz, Saba Faisal, Huma Nawab, Shabbir Jan





## Mor Moharan

The drama continues to win hearts.

As the story progresses, suppressed emotions are being revealed and conspiracies exposed. The beautiful, gutsy heroine Rohi is facing the hostility of the local landlords as she protests against their callous actions that damage the environment. And that too in a feudal society where women have no voice.

Sadly, one of them is her own father, Malook Shah, who partnering with his old friend Princess Almas is planning to set up a coal power plant. While Malook adores his only child, he would not like his business to be jeopardised. Meantime, Princess Almas's son Sikandar has fallen head over heels in love with Rohi. She too is attracted by his boyish charm. But will Almas surrender to the wish of her son?

The other roadblock to Rohi's dreams is the handsome feudal playboy Ahmed Gardezi. A sugar baron and avid hunter, Gardezi has no concern for the environment and also sees Rohi as an impediment to his plans. He and Rohi have some fierce encounters and the battle lines are drawn.

The most endearing character, however, is Gardezi's saintly grandmother. Her dialogues are a joy to hear and her simple language reflects the purity of her heart. The performances of all main characters are convincing and the actors seem to be living their roles. The stunning locales and the haunting music is the icing on the cake.



## Harjai

Loyal Viewership

Turkish drama "Harjai" with its roller coaster storyline has won loyal viewers. Just as one crisis is dealt with, another catastrophe occurs, leaving the families aghast. Bitter memories and vows of revenge stoke the fire.

The main leads – Reyhan and Miran – are in love and get married but the sword of vengeance hangs between them. Their families are sworn enemies. Apart from this, Miran's first wife and Reyhan's jilted suitor keep scheming against them. All the betrayals and conspiracies provide the spice to keep the pot simmering. The stunning scenery, costumes and charming actors provide a welcome relief from all the dark elements in the drama.



## Susralies

This entertaining sitcom is winning viewership.

With Hina Dilpazir and Saba Faisal as warring sisters-in-laws – Sultana and Shabana – their one-liners are brutal. Adding fuel to the fire is their domestic help, played by the inimitable Faisal Kazi. His running commentary is hilarious as he ducks the savage barbs coming his way.

The sweet romance between Aliyan and Sara faces ups and downs but their mutual chemistry seems okay. Now the question is whether the two sisters-in-law will allow this union? While the other characters come and go, it is basically Sultana and Shabana, who draw the most laughs.

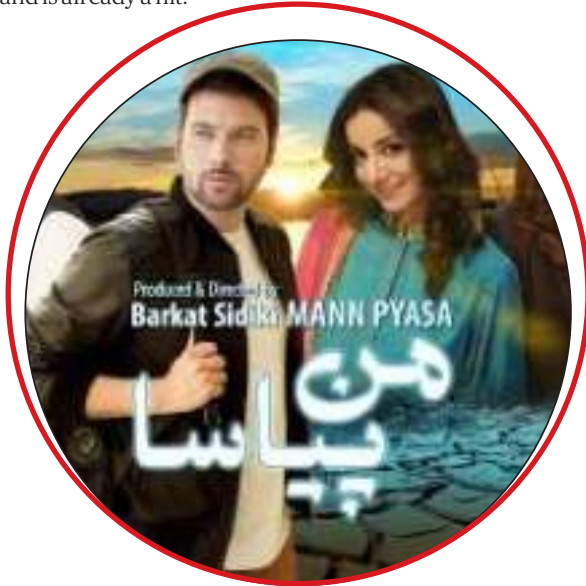
## Man Piyasa

A play highlighting social themes.

TVONE's "Mann Piyasa" – a powerful story that throws light on the water crisis and the criminal activities of the water mafia – is on air at a time when the whole country is facing the fallout of water scarcity. The issue is woven beautifully in a heart-moving story of passionate love and longing, shattered dreams and the urge for revenge.

Apart from "Mann Piyasa's" storyline, the dialogues by Shamim Bazil are forceful and engaging. Another plus point is the depiction of strong, independent career women, who are breaking barriers. Stars including Sarwat Gilani, Noman Ejaz, Mikail Zulfiqar and Zhalay Sarhadi have given this drama a very current, happening feel.

The theme song, sung by Asrar, is mesmerizing and is already a hit.



## The Mazeydar Show

The popular one.

When hosts Adi and Faizan are on the screen, there are bound to be bursts of humour, laughter and cheeky banter. The Mazeydar Show is actually all about giving their celebrity guests a space where they can speak their minds and bare their hearts.

While Faizan may ask a direct question, Adi lightens the mood with a pinch of humour. This way they are perfect foils for each other's audacity and disarm their guests completely. No matter how tough the question is, the guests always enjoy them.



## Khwaja Naveed ki Adalat

High drama in the courtroom!

For it is the "peoples" court & Khwaja Naveed is in the chair

Whether it is marital problems, property ownership, child custody or business disputes – Khwaja Naveed puts all wrongdoers in the dock and provides immediate relief to the innocent. The best part being his sympathetic manner towards those who are wronged and the way he deals with culprits. His vast legal experience offers knowledge of the law, while his volley of humorous darts provides much entertainment in the courtroom.



## The Big Pick

This show is BIG: big stars, big break ups and mega cover-ups.

Host Hasan Chaudhry has a very persuasive manner that compels guests to give candid answers to his audacious questions. He doesn't bully, but will not buy crap. Whether it is Mawra Husain, Dur-e-Fishan, Omair Rana, Sonia Husain, Wahaj or Imran Ashraf everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences with the host.

With a very successful season behind him, Hasan is ready with a new roster of 'A-category list guests.'





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