

November 2020

# NARRATIVES

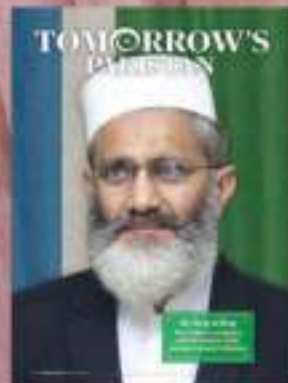
BIG NAMES, POWERFUL WORDS

[www.narratives.com.pk](http://www.narratives.com.pk)

THE  
**newsmaker**

Committed to Confrontation

**Economy  
of  
Wheat**







PRICE: Rs. 300/-

**Managing Editor**  
Amir Zia

**Editor**  
Ibrahim Sajid Malick

**Editorial Assistant**  
Sami Subhani

**Head, Computer Section**  
Khalid Ahmad

**Design & Creative**  
Aman Ahmed Khan

**Admin. Manager**  
Waqas Hasan

**Marketing**  
Lubna Naz  
Asif Musa

Monthly 'Narratives'  
Published by Amir Zia

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

Contact us:  
letters@narratives.com.pk

Website:  
www.narratives.com.pk

Follow us:  
Twitter - @NarrativesM  
Facebook - @NarrativesPakistan

From the Editor | 07

Your Say | 08

**ZERØING IN**

Walk the Talk 11  
America the Bemused 13  
In the Eye of the Storm 14



View Abroad 24

**The Other Home Country?** 25  
By Ather Kazmi

**FATF** **Unending Demands** 27  
By Khalid Hameed Farooqi

**TOMORROW'S PAKISTAN** 28

**Rejecting Dynastic Politics**  
By Siraj ul Haq

**FRONTIERS** 32

**Valley of Death** 33  
By Mushaal Hussain

**The Obstacle Race for Peace** 35  
By Asif Durrani

**HORIZONS** 38

**Tough Task Ahead**  
By Ibrahim Sajid

**DEFENCELINE** 42

**New-Age War**  
By Lt. Gen. (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi

**Viewpoint** 46

**Slide Into Anarchy?**  
By Ali Mahmood

**thinktank** 50

**Economy in Peril**  
By Dr. Hafiz A. Pasha

**perspective** 54

**Not Above the Law**  
By S. Shabbar Zaidi





**INFOCIS 60**



**The Great Price Spiral**

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

**BigQuestion 64**

**MOOD and MOMENT 68**



**The Cost of Protest**

**Pakistanicon 72**



**Champion of the Dispossessed**

By Zahra Chughtai

**ACADEME 76**



**Needed: A New Direction**

By Wasim Qazi

**Your Life & Health 80**



**Quacks Unlimited**

By Dr. Shershah Syed

**BOOKSTORE 84**



**A Fresh Start 85**

By Maheen Usmani

**In Quest of Truth 87**

By Maryam Iraj

**MEDIAMATTERS 90**



**Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil, Do No Evil**

By Omair Alavi

**CRYSTAL BALL 94**



**Short Run or Long Haul?**



42



50



54



60

# Redefining Democracy



Ibrahim Sajid Malick  
Editor, Narratives

**I**n the 1990s, the world of academia in the West hailed the post-cold war era as the beginning of the “third wave” of democratisation. Following the Soviet Union’s collapse, many had proclaimed the demise of “authoritarianism.” Back then, democracy appeared to be “the only game in town.” Much has changed in 30 years: Donald Trump in the United States, Modi in India, Eurocentric and anti-immigrant forces in Europe – it’s the rise of the populists. Is democracy around the world under threat?

The electoral cycle pushes elected democracies to find low-hanging fruits; short-term policy approaches. Elected officials, unsure of completing their tenure, are averse to making tough decisions because of their need to keep voters happy for the next election. And, the ‘itch’ doesn’t let the opposition sit on the bench for more than two years. The dictionary of politics in Pakistan should include the “*Dhai-saala*” (two-and-half-years) itch. In a country like Pakistan, where the people maintain their loyalty to a political party even if it violates essential democratic norms, political polarisation diminishes accountability.

A key question for democratisation and democratic erosion is how to manage such intense partisan polarisation. Many dissident voices in Pakistan tirelessly advocate “institutional reform,” by which they mean a “specific institution” – the GHQ. We believe in the importance of more profound social, economic and political reforms and the need to redefine and rebuild democratic norms.

Again and again, we find ourselves in the midst of an upsurge of populist movements, led by impatient demagogues, who cannot sit and wait for their turn. In the name of democracy, these populist movements exploit cultural, ethnic, class and even religious diversity to disrupt the government’s functioning, which actually diminishes the quality of democracy they claim to uphold. While we watch the PDM rallies and protests on the screen, the silent majority of Pakistanis are dissatisfied with the political leadership and sceptical about its social and economic progress doctrines.

The root of the word politics, ‘polis,’ or ‘civitas’ applied principally to citizens. Governance of this community was of importance for Plato as well as Aristotle. As we see it today, politics has lost its positive meaning, posing a significant challenge to democratic societies all over the world. The democratic promise, after all, is the promise of the good life, not for one or some but the people as a whole. Alas, the principle of equality that democracy upholds has been dramatically compromised. We see the result in rising income inequalities, poor health, and a dearth of quality education. The silent majority of Pakistan, primarily concerned with making ends meet, want a respectable work environment and a decent remuneration – a society where people matter, not money or lineage. Max Weber describes the political apparatus as the rule of the clique, and the role of the unprincipled political leaders he calls “a political capitalist entrepreneur.”

The Third Way or *Die Neue Mitte*, promoted by Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and Gerhard Schroeder, has run out of steam. With all its flaws, we neither reject democracy nor glorify it, glossing over its defects. We need to redefine democracy for our times and our country. It is not sufficient to say that democracy is better than the other forms of government we have had. Instead, we should reframe democracy to obtain better what is good. That starts at the local government level – towns, cities and district levels.

And, for the political parties, the process starts from within. Lineage and blood-line do not make a leader. Political groups that cannot produce new leaders will always lack fresh and innovative ideas. Unfortunately, we find ourselves surrounded by known “brands,” chasing their tails every two years or maybe two-and-a-half. ■





## Genuinely impressed

I am genuinely impressed with Narratives. Everything about it is above expectation. The articles are varied which means that the editorial vision is not lopsided and doesn't seem to promote a particular idea or philosophy. A really great effort worth appreciating and supporting. It is my sincere wish and desire that Narratives continues its long journey with the first step so bravely taken by those who have contributed in making it a wonderful and indispensable reality. Heartiest Congratulations!

**Mr Iqbal Saleh Muhammad**  
Managing Director  
Paramount Books



## A great addition

Narratives is a great addition to serious intellectual discourse on issues that matter and are of interest to both the public and policy makers. The authorship is impressive and diverse, making Narratives representative of Pakistan. In times when print media endeavours are difficult to take up and sustain, it's a breath of fresh air. The diverse topics covered and the in-depth analysis therein gets one hooked. We usually say you can't have your cake and eat it too; Narratives discounts that. It is both an intellectual and a visual treat. The layout is very captivating and artistic. To top that, it is very fairly priced, and is actually value for money. I congratulate the Editor and the team for putting together serious discourse in such an interesting fashion. I, for one, am addicted to it.

**Dr Huma Baqui**  
Associate Dean (Faculty of Business Administration) & Associate Professor, IBA, Karachi.



## A breath of fresh air

In the 21st century, proliferation of trivial news, unsubstantiated analysis and frivolous commentary has choked and saturated the information landscape. Electronic and print media are continuously vying for credibility and yet most media houses are failing to achieve even a half decent measure of authenticity. It would not be unfair to say that this frivolous competition to 'break' the news first has seriously impacted the quality of content and by extension damaged the repute of the once noble craft of journalism. The deficit of credibility is indeed monumental. In such a polluted information environment, Narratives clearly stands out for unerring reports and 'sharp as a scalpel' analytical input. The content of the magazine is indeed the reflection of its team's professional ethic and work philosophy: truthful, hard-hitting and creative. A breath of fresh air, Narratives meets all my expectations of calibre and authenticity. I wish the Narratives' team the best of luck. This venture is sure to create waves. God Speed.

**Ihtasham ul Haque**  
Senior journalist & analyst  
Former Director News SAMAA



## A professional effort

Narratives is a professional effort to assert the power of the print media in this crazy world of TV talkshows that leave everyone confused and angry.

**Shaheen Sehbal**  
Senior journalist & analyst  
Former Group Editor, The News



## Quality content

This publication is certainly a good edition with quality content and graphics. The articles are on diverse topics covering politics, diplomacy, media, economics, defence, capital markets, Kashmir and the post COVID-19 situation, with in-depth analysis by credible writers. I wish Narratives all the best.

**Dr. Mirza Ikhtiar Baig**  
Chairman Baig Group and former SVP FPCCI



## A good omen

At a time when both the print and electronic media are in crisis, the launch of Narratives is a good omen. We have seen both deterioration in the content, as well as the revenue stream for print, that has mostly gone to new media. But I feel that the power of the written word is greater than the spoken word. There is always room for good books and monthly magazines. Narratives is a good initiative and I wish the best of luck to its team.

**Mujahid Barelti**  
Senior journalist & author



## Ethical journalism needed

Having no political agenda and always speaking up for the truth is what real journalism is about. Narratives is impressive. I feel this is the right time for a publication of its nature to be launched. Clean and ethical journalism is what growing nations build their strength on. The value of freedom of speech can never be underestimated as if we lose our true voice, what would become of us as a nation? I wish the Narratives' team all the best in their efforts to seek and share the truth.

**Attija Odho**  
Senior actor, producer & director



## Filling the gap

I read Narratives' October issue, which looks like an international standard publication. From the content and design to paper - I found it all very impressive. Narratives has filled the gap of a couple of other monthly magazines, which have recently closed down. Most articles were worth reading, especially the ones on Kashmir policy, the curriculum controversy and the 'New Avatar.' I would like to congratulate Narratives' editor and his entire team for bringing out such a fine magazine.

**Dr. Jaipal Chhabria**  
President  
Pakistan Hindu Forum



## A different approach

It is so heartening to see a publication that gives you information in a holistic way. In the time of information overload, Narratives gives precise, crisp and in-depth analysis and comment. Narratives also gives a different approach in terms of getting perspectives from opinion leaders. Something that I would like to see is the issues that matter from a younger generation's vantage point. However, I am happy to see Narratives giving unbiased analysis on issues that matter both at personal and national levels.

**Amir Jahangir**  
CEO,  
Rinstra Technologies (Pvt.) Limited



## More coverage for the arts

Not just the content, but the look and feel of Narratives is impressive. A star-studded list of writers and big names make it a heavyweight publication from its very first issue. The good thing is that besides politics and economy, it has dedicated segments on education and health. However, the magazine should also give space to arts, film, drama and culture. I am certain that Narratives will make a difference on this front also. I wish Narratives and its team the best of luck.

**Dr. Nadeem Rizvi**  
Former Head of Department  
Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Center

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



# ZEROING IN



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

## Walk the Talk

*As India tightens its grip on Kashmir with a slew of repressive measures, Pakistan needs to move beyond conventional diplomacy...*

**R**ight or wrong, India has grabbed the initiative in the protracted Kashmir dispute and is dictating the pace of events in this occupied Muslim-majority Himalayan region. Islamabad was literally caught off-guard when, on August 5, 2019, New Delhi unilaterally scrapped the special status granted to Occupied Jammu & Kashmir in its constitution. Although Articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution were no more than a fig-leaf given to Kashmiris in the name of autonomy, they at least allowed the legislature of this occupied region a few separate set of laws, including those relating to citizenship and ownership of property. But in one sweep of constitutional terrorism, even this little concession was taken away.

On its part, the extremist Hindu government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has settled the Kashmir dispute in its favour by shredding the UN resolutions, all its bilateral agreements with Pakistan, and the few guarantees provided to the people of occupied Kashmir. Now it has to simply manage the fallout of its reckless decision, which New Delhi thinks it will be able to do in the coming months and years by brutally suppressing the Kashmiri freedom movement and bringing demographic changes to make Muslims a minority in their own land.

New Delhi went in for this decisive action in Kashmir calculating the risks, which according to its estimates, were nominal. The Indians expected a muted response to their brinkmanship from the world powers and even from Muslim countries because of their economic clout. And they were proved right on this count. New Delhi also anticipated Pakistan's reaction, which remained

restrained and failed to build any genuine pressure on India or draw the world powers' attention to this dispute. Whatever our diplomatic gurus and spin wizards in Islamabad may say, the hard fact is that India is literally getting away with murder and our leadership is merely offering lip service to the cause of Kashmir and making shallow, symbolic gestures of protest.

India has broken the status-quo and the long stalemate on the Kashmir issue. It applied unconventional measures to assimilate Kashmir within its boundaries. Unfortunately, it is only interested in the land of Kashmir and not its people. In response, Pakistan is still stuck in conventional diplomacy, which has not worked in the last 73 years. Words devoid of action or not backed by power are worthless. If we maintain that Kashmir is Pakistan's jugular vein, then we need to walk the talk.

This is a race against time, and we are already lagging behind as the Indians are implementing their agenda of forced assimilation of Kashmir with precision. Between August 5, 2019 and August 31, 2020, the Indian government has issued more than 430,000 domiciles to Indian nationals to settle them in Kashmir and change the demographics of Kashmir. In tandem, India is handing over large chunks of Kashmir's lands to various state authorities and private individuals from across India. While the doors of employment, trade and commerce are being shut on the indigenous Kashmiris, outsiders are being encouraged to take over the economy and key jobs in the



occupied land. If the process continues, within a couple of years Muslims will become a minority in Kashmir and the hold of the Indians in this region would become deeper and firmer. Pakistanis and Kashmiris cannot wait to take action another day. Whatever has to be done, has to be done now – and on a war-footing.

History shows that bilateralism between Pakistan and India has failed. Moreover, the United Nations and the world powers have failed to get the UN resolutions, which called for a plebiscite in the occupied region, implemented. So where do we go from here?

The Kashmiris have kept the torch of the freedom struggle burning by sacrificing their young and old. In just the first six months of 2020, more than 229 have been killed in occupied Kashmir, according to the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society. Out of these, at least 32 innocent civilians were summarily executed by the Indian forces, in continuation of the long trend of extra-judicial killings. Since 1989, there have been more than 75,000 killings in this region.

Disappearances of youngsters, arrest and torture of political workers and leaders, and rape of women remain the order of the day there. Kashmiris have stood firm and unyielding in the face of these gross human rights violations and systematic state terrorism.

But Kashmiris alone cannot fight the Indian might. They need the active support of the people of Azad Kashmir, the Kashmiri diaspora settled around the



world and, foremost, of Pakistan.

The only option before Pakistan and the Kashmiris is to get out of the mould of conventional diplomacy and match brinkmanship with brinkmanship, stone with stone and bullet with bullet.

Pakistan is a peace-loving country. Unlike India, Pakistan does not have any designs to establish its hegemony in the region. But, it cannot and should not allow India to usurp Kashmir.

There are several options, short of war, which can be taken to mount pressure on India. New Delhi, of course, could retaliate on both the disputed frontiers and the international borders. In this possible scenario, Pakistan needs to hold to its nerve and keep its defensive punch ready, as was the case in February 2019, when India attacked Balakot. Our preparedness for war remains the best guarantee of peace.

Pakistan needs to up the ante on Kashmir. Alongside continuing its efforts on the diplomatic front – albeit with more vigour and creativity – it must take bolder steps to surprise India. Our action and reaction must be in proportion to the Indian aggression in Kashmir.

Additionally, Pakistan needs to sever its diplomatic ties with India. Though Pakistan has no direct conflict with Israel, it refuses to have any diplomatic ties with the Jewish state until the Palestinians get a homeland.

So by the same logic, Pakistan can cut off ties with India until the Kashmiris win the right of self-determination. Severing of diplomatic ties in the nuclear armed region would send a strong message to India and the world that Pakistan is prepared to go to any lengths on the issue of Kashmir.

Pakistan must also close its airspace to Indian aircraft and sever whatever remaining trade and business ties it has with India. Islamabad must also consider helping to establish a broad-based Kashmir government, which includes the leadership from occupied Kashmir.



Young Kashmiris clash with Indian occupation forces.

*While the doors of employment, trade and commerce are being shut on the indigenous Kashmiris, outsiders are being encouraged to take over the economy and key jobs in the occupied land. If the process continues, within a couple of years Muslims will become a minority in Kashmir*

But most importantly, both the Pakistani and Kashmiri leadership need to stop being apologetic about Kashmir's armed freedom struggle. The people of Azad Kashmir have every right to lend

active support to the people of occupied Kashmir. The United Nations gives people the right to resist occupation forces.

After 9/11, India has been successful in equating the legitimate freedom struggle of the Kashmiris with terrorism. Pakistan and Kashmir's leadership must boldly fight and defend the Kashmiri freedom fighters. By attacking Balakot in February 2019, India had crossed a red-line and put the onus of maintaining peace in occupied Kashmir on Pakistan. The Indian aim is to pressurise the Pakistani leadership to back off from supporting the Kashmiri freedom movement. Pakistan should get out of this trap. It should be ready to counter any Indian aggressive design, while at the same time offering every possible moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri freedom fighters.

Prime Minister Imran Khan was wrong in advising the people of Azad Kashmir not to cross the disputed frontier to help their brethren in the occupied region. He must know that speeches alone cannot liberate Kashmir – no matter how passionate they sound. ■

## America the Bemused

*Biden takes the reins, but the Trump legacy lingers.*

**D**emocratic candidate Joe Biden may have won the toxic, divisive and nail-biting presidential race to the White House, but these elections have manifested that Donald Trump and his style of racist, chauvinistic and narrow-minded politics is not a mere aberration in US politics, but a deep-rooted reality that will remain a destabilising factor in the United States in the years and decades to come.

Trump was just a step away from winning his second presidential stint. He lost these elections only by a yard or two, securing 47.7 percent of the total vote cast as compared to the 50.6 percent bagged by Biden. Almost half the American people stood by him – many of them fanatically. And what do these Americans and their leader Trump stand for? What politics, ideology and values do they represent?

These are important questions as a deeply divided and polarised America struggles to find its feet in the post-election days under the leadership of 77-year-old Biden – the best 21st century America could offer in a rapidly changing world.

Many Americans and their well-wishers pretend that Donald Trump was an aberration, and the 2020 election will set the record straight – liberal democracy will triumph. As if America's most profound problems are amenable to a swift resolution just by a Democratic President taking the reins.

Americans thought separating children from their families at the border and losing 500 kids was an unparalleled offense against the values of American democracy. They thought that the constant insult of immigrants and Muslims, the vulgar tweets, xenophobia, the lying and tacit support for Caucasian extremists was merely the crazy talk of an angry old man.

But Trump's transgressions are not a novel assault on American democracy; instead, they are a stark recapitulation of past failures and catastrophes. It was not just Trump and Biden who were on the ballot. Weren't decency, honesty, truth,



trust and egalitarian and democratic principles also on the ballot?

Going by the number of people who voted for Trump, does it show that America is half-decent, half-truthful, half-trustworthy and half xenophobic?

How could this have happened again? How could Trump, the racist narrow-mind-

ed He encouraged the police to brutalise people, as they have since the invention of the slave patrol. He lied to Americans as if they were the indigenous people betrayed by pilgrims seeking simple religious freedom. Under President Obama, the Republican-Wall Street alliance allowed anti-tax zealots to fan the flames of racism, conspiracy, and violence and then elevated the least significant president just in time for the terrible, populace-declaring pandemic.

A better leader could have wielded power in the world's greatest, most complicated, expensive, corrupt, racist nation with an untrustworthy healthcare system. S/he could have normalised safety precautions and mask-wearing to a nation full of anti-vaxxers who think shots are full of microscopic 5G Jewish cell phones.

So how could the Republicans, the party of Lincoln, let Trump happen? It's as if they had suddenly become a party of aggrieved white people on a suicide mission for tax cuts and demographic supremacy for as long as their judicial appointees' careers lasted.

Why didn't elected Democrats fight Trump with the same relentlessness with which they sold out workers, built jails, abandoned public healthcare, and bailed out banks?

It remains to be seen what happens to the country now unable to ignore the fast-hardening varicose veins bulging from its aged institutions. One can hope that Joe Biden can more smoothly manage America's decline into a neo-feudalism cage-scape of trillionaire surveillance tycoons and their hired goon bots and legions of gig-juggling peasants living even further under the poverty line. ■

*Many Americans and their well-wishers pretend that Trump was an aberration. But his transgressions are not a novel assault on American democracy; instead, they are a stark recapitulation of past failures and catastrophes.*

ed billionaire, seize the world's mightiest country's imagination – or at least half of it – and lead it to a path which turned the United States away from multilateralism, and globalisation – its once-cherished goals.

The truth is, Trump is not a deviation from the norm, but a culmination. He banned Muslims as did 19th century American politicians who banned Italians, the Chinese, Jews, Greeks, Poles, and Irish.



## In the Eye of the Storm

*French President Macron's use of an individual act to stigmatise an entire community raises a storm in the Muslim world, and strengthens extremists on both sides of the divide.*

**T**he Islamophobic rhetoric of a rather middle-of-the-road Emmanuel Macron that would better suit his main rival – far-right's Marine Le Pen – has provoked and angered Muslims across the globe and once again exposed the systemic oppression of minorities in France.

Still licking the wounds of a painful defeat in France's local elections in the summer, Macron's party *La République en Marche* failed to take a reasonable and balanced approach to the murder of a school teacher by an 18-year-old Chechen Muslim refugee in France last month. The slain teacher reportedly showed students controversial depictions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Yes, a murder cannot be justified, but an individual act also should not be used to stigmatise an entire community and followers of a global faith like Islam. And that's exactly what the French President did.

Overnight, the cry for freedom of expression started to resonate in the streets of a country that had recently made it illegal for women to wear the hijab. Macron added fuel to the fire by defending the provocative caricatures and accusing Muslims and Islam of extremism, though a leader of his stature should have known the implications of his offensive remarks.

Freedom of speech is important and should be defended but as is rightly pointed out by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, that it is "not without limits" and should not be used as a justification to "arbitrarily and needlessly hurt" certain communities.

The western concept of political correctness needs to be broadened. It should now also stand up against Islamophobia, as it does against anti-Semitism, racism and sexism.

National leaders should not divide communities or incite hate and violence through their words or actions. Macron's handling of the teacher's murder and its

fallout remains inexcusable and shocking. His provocative and irresponsible remarks have only intensified polarisation and strengthened extremists on both sides of the divide.

Even before this latest crisis over caricatures, France has been witnessing a series of violent protests in which immigrants have taken the lead, underlining their feelings of alienation and deepening fissures within French society.

And this has a history. Ever since the guest worker recruitment from French African colonies was initiated after World War II, France witnessed the unanticipated development of African labourers' permanent communities, many of whom were Muslims.

*The western concept of political correctness needs to be broadened. It should now also stand up against Islamophobia, as it does against anti-Semitism, racism and sexism.*

Despite the consistent promotion of French monoculture and the assimilation model for integration, the Muslims' segregation remains a harsh reality. When the Black Lives Matter protests started in Paris this year, these disenfranchised African immigrants, majority of whom were Muslims, were the loudest.

Similarly, the riots of 2005 and 2020 served to visualise the unseen "other"



*'The Devil of Paris' Emmanuel Macron.*

within French society. Arguably, Muslims and, in particular, African Muslims are the most visible and problematic immigrant group in France today. The situation of Muslims in France is a crucial test case for the robustness of contemporary French democracy.

Racism also continues to plague French society in areas of housing, employment, education and everyday life. Negative racial stereotypes from the colonial or even earlier times make non-white citizens' daily lives challenging.

With less than two years to go to the next presidential election, *La République en Marche* failed to take any of France's large cities in this year's second-round vote, and allied incumbents elsewhere were swept from power.

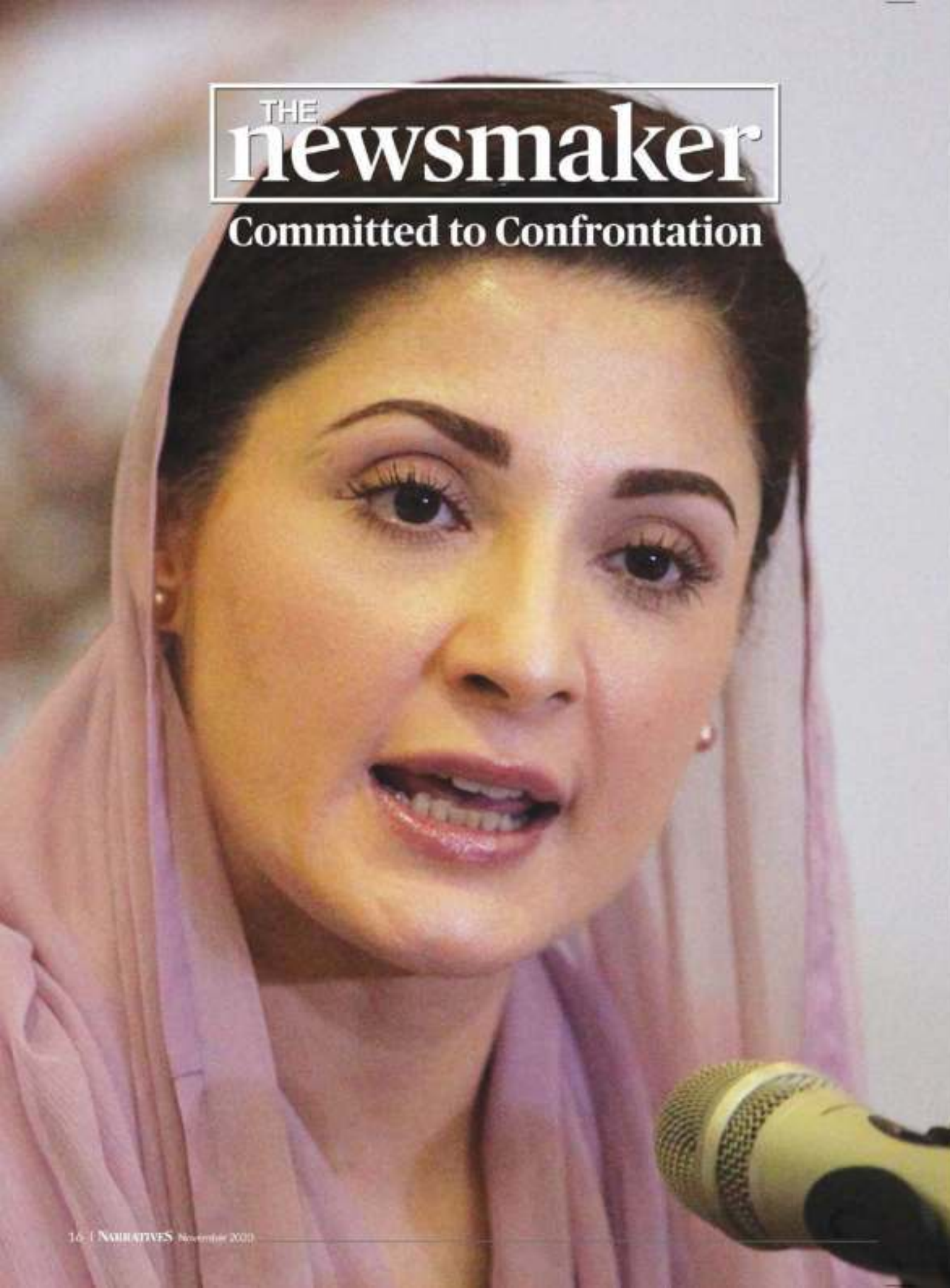
In Paris, its campaign was scampered by scandal and infighting. Its candidate for mayor of the capital failed even to win a seat on the council. The only success for the government was Prime Minister Édouard Philippe's comfortable victory in the port city of Le Havre. It says a lot about the handicaps of Macron's party, which is split between left and right-leaning factions and has few compelling senior figures, and of which Philippe is not even a member.

Macron has fallen in the camp of the right-leaning, anti-immigrant faction. His attempt to regain popularity in France has put him in the same box as other xenophobic, Islamophobic politicians like Donald Trump and Narendra Modi. ■



# THE newsmaker

## Committed to Confrontation



## The Daughter Also Rises

Aggressive, bitter, defiant – Maryam Nawaz pushes her party and the opposition into hitherto uncharted territory with her anti-establishment narrative.



By Amir Zia

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

**S**uddenly, Maryam Nawaz has catapulted herself onto the front pages of the national media as she takes centerstage in the rough and tumble of politics – and that too, apparently, on her own terms.

Aggressive, confident, defiant, she has emerged as the undisputed heir to her father's political legacy. And the brand new face of the opposition – an opposition that mostly played it safe, knew its limits and seldom crossed the red line.

Her uncle, middle-of-the-roader Shehbaz Sharif, stands sidelined; he watches the high-stakes political game being played and the brinkmanship of his party from behind bars. He does not want to apply for bail – at least, not now as the “hawks of resistance” take over the mantle of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), pushing it into uncharted territory. Perhaps, it makes more sense for Shehbaz to watch the show from prison and await his turn – when and if it ever comes.

Maryam has played a key role in pushing the PML-N in the direction of a single narrative. The talk of there being two narratives within the party has died down. The PML-N now boasts only one narrative – and that is being set by Nawaz Sharif from London and voiced by Maryam and her loyalists in Pakistan.

Yes, there is a certain measure of discomfort and unease within the ranks over the strong anti-army line taken at the *jalsas* in Gujranwala, Karachi and Quetta, especially the targeting, by name, of the Chief of Army Staff General, Qamar Javed Bajwa, and the Chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Lt. Gen Faiz Hameed. There have been some desertions as well, but the party has already factored them in and the loss has so far been manageable. More local leaders and lawmakers belonging to the party may distance themselves from the central leadership in the coming days and weeks, but according to the hawks, the



popular face and galvanising force of the party – Maryam and Nawaz respectively – will not let the party's graph go down in Punjab, the province which matters the most to them.

Maryam is also being credited by some for what they call the “fear” of standing her ground in pushing the anti-establishment agenda in the mainstream politics of Punjab for the first time ever. Since the September 20 hard-hitting speech by Nawaz Sharif at the multi-party conference, the pace and tone of PML-N's politics has totally transformed.

In her close-knit circle of party confidants, Maryam is affectionately called ‘M.’ She represents the populist face of the party, who sees offence as the best and the only strategy.

Some of those senior PML-N leaders, who usually remained





United on a one-point narrative? The PDM Jalsa in Karachi.

out of favour with Shehbaz Sharif – his outer circle, so to say – remain the closest to Maryam. Among them are Pervaiz Rashid, Muhammed Zubair, Talal Chaudhry, Musadiq Malik and Uzma Bukhari. Marriyam Aurengezeb, too, is very close to Maryam Nawaz, but she can be counted among those who would be acceptable to her uncle's camp as well.

"Maryam is bitter, angry and defiant," says a senior PML-N leader, in a background interview. "She is far more emotional and aggressive as compared to her father, who is calm and collected and does not show his bitterness despite being shown the door thrice by the powers-that-be. Maryam has stood beside her father like a rock and is deeply pained by what she believes is the unfair treatment meted out to him," he says.

Always impeccably turned out – her diamond jewellery and her Manolo Blahnik heels have been the subject of much social media titter – she may lack the warmth and political acumen of Benazir Bhutto, but she manages to hold her own in a crowd. Equally well versed in both English and Urdu, she strings her sentences together artfully. Unsurprisingly, she is seen as a better communicator and more articulate than her father.

Compared to the conventional Muslim Leaguers, she is considered open-minded, liberal and modern. Her husband Safdar Awan, however, is said to be conservative and narrow-minded. That could be one of the reasons why Maryam prefers to keep him out of decision-making. But according to PML-N sources, speculation of discord between the wife and husband are untrue and exaggerated. "They crack jokes with each other; however, it is also a fact that in this relationship, Maryam has the upper hand," remarks a PML-N insider.

Her life in seclusion in recent years has had considerable impact in shaping her personality, and especially in strengthening her defiant attitude. She tutors herself in economics, politics and history by asking probing questions from the seniors

around her. And she has memorised all the "buzzwords" of political, economic and social discourse, which helps her sail through her meetings with experts in their respective fields.

Recently, Maryam has also started taking an interest in constituency politics – the who's who of a biradari and the interplay of caste and clan loyalties in electoral politics etc. – which was seen as a forte of Hamza Shahbaz among the young generation of the Sharifs. And, according to insiders, Maryam is learning the ropes fast, as she prepares to wear the undisputed crown of her father's party.

Those who are close to Maryam describe her as a charmer. "She has charisma and leadership qualities, but often takes a back seat to allow other seniors party members, especially Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, to take centre stage during political and media interactions, though it is another matter that wherever she sits, the cameras and lights follow her," remarks another PMLN leader.

Her charm and charisma aside, the path that Maryam has taken is being seen as "dangerous," even by her loyalists. The anti-establishment rhetoric may win applause from the small, but influential segment of liberals in society, the sub-nationalist parties and PML-N followers at rallies, but she has to face the stark reality that the institution of the army is not only very powerful, but it is regarded as the most trustworthy and popular of those at the helm by a vast majority of Pakistanis. Any attempts to malign the army or divide its rank-and-file, which the Sharifs are trying to do, will not just lead to a strong institutional backlash, but it is also an unpopular line to take in the larger framework of politics.

One of the main and immediate aims of the father/daughter combine is to create political space for themselves, which stands blocked because of their disqualification from holding public office following convictions in corruption cases. While the

PML-N stalwarts describe these verdicts against their leaders as "weak" and "flawed," the sword of other cases also continues to hang over their heads. The Panama Papers, contradictory statements by the entire Sharif family, other scandals, including the infamous one relating to the Calibri font, are like millstones around the neck of the former ruling family.

Nawaz Sharif has paid a heavy price for his political defiance and stubbornness in the past, and he appears to be ready to pay it again.

"Both he and Maryam have calculated the risks of their policy. Maryam's name is already on the ECL (Exit Control List)... there is the possibility of her arrest, but she is not afraid," claims a PML-N leader.

But calculations can go wrong and political brinkmanship can have a

dependable ally. They think that the PPP can ditch the PML-N anytime, as it has a stake in the system and may not want to topple it. Also, it is speculated, it could be promised certain concessions to contain the Sharifs and their party.

Conversely, the PML-N's game could also backfire. Instead of creating a rift between the army and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, its anti-army rhetoric could bring them closer and create more hostility within the institution towards the Sharif family.

At the end of the day, this politics of brinkmanship has many ifs and buts attached to it. However, Maryam has managed to convince her father that the policy of cooperation has not helped them to get back into the game and that confrontation remains the only option.

*She has memorised all the "buzzwords" of political, economic and social discourse, which helps her sail through her meetings with experts in their respective fields.*



Ties that bind: Maryam Nawaz with her father and mother.

bigger price tag than imagined. This latest political gamble can be a make or break chance for the political ambitions of Maryam and of Nawaz Sharif, who wants to pass on the mantle of leadership to his daughter.

"We know that no mainstream politician has taken this kind of anti-army leadership stand in the Punjab... it is too early to say whether it is the right move or a wrong one," Maryam's confidant admits.

In the view of Sharif loyalists, the best strategy would be to build enough pressure on the military leadership so that it distances itself from Prime Minister Imran Khan's government and helps Nawaz and Maryam return to the arena of electoral politics. The platform of the 11-party alliance, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), is being used to serve this objective, provided all its members remain on the same page.

However, Sharifs' strong anti-army stance is creating and deepening fissures in some of the allied parties. Moreover, PML-N's top leaders do not see the Pakistan Peoples' Party as a

The big question is: will Maryam's confrontationalist strategy work?

Even the hawks on her side remain sceptical. But nothing is impossible in Pakistan's politics and its flawed democratic system. One cannot rule out the return of today's disgraced politicians as allies and preferred choices of the same powers that had booted them out.

Former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf had ruled out both Sharif and Benazir Bhutto from politics and had vowed never to allow them to return. But the same Musharraf later negotiated a deal with Benazir, though what followed was bitterness and acrimony between them and it eventually paved the way for Nawaz Sharif's return to power for the third time.

Compared to her father, Maryam is likely to prove a tough nut to crack for the establishment, now and in the years to come, if she continues on the same trajectory. Her latest gamble will define her political future, once and for all. The stakes for the Sharif family have never been higher. ■





# MUSINGS



By Humayun  
Gauhar

*The writer is an analyst, Editor-in-Chief of Blue Chip magazine and Senior Fellow of the NUST-Global Think Tank Network.*

## Destabilisation Movement?

By turning their guns on the army in their bid for NROs, the PDM is destabilising and endangering the very survival of Pakistan.



**T**he title says it all. This gaggle of 11 opposition parties, known as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), appears to be out to destabilise Pakistan and disenchant its people with their army. Salahuddin Ayubi once said, if you want to destroy a nation, make its people lose respect for their army. The opposition believes that if the army were not there, there would be no obstacles in the way of their ascent to power and loot and plunder of the nation.

This is item number one on PDM's agenda, which India more than any other enemy of Pakistan desires.

The PDM is squarely part of the fifth generation war that India is waging against Pakistan. It must have been music to India's ears when at the Quetta rally, Awais Noorani of the Jamiat Ulama-e-Pakistan (JUP) raised the slogan of an independent Balochistan. (Later, in a TV chat show Noorani apologised for what he said was a "slip of the tongue." What he wanted to say was an "independent Pakistan").

What are the real goals of the PDM? To get former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif off the hook, even though he is a

convict and a proven felon. He sits in London and delivers speeches against Pakistan and its army. But he has actually damaged himself by distancing himself from Pakistan's masses. Sadly what used to be our other national party has now turned into a sub-provincial party due to its vested interests. It has joined hands with Nawaz Sharif's daughter, to get its chief and PPP's Asif Zardari also off the hook. Asif Zardari is playing Nawaz Sharif's game by pretending to be unwell. He actually checked into a hospital.

Now Imran Khan is regretting the fact that he fell for the Nawaz camp's fabricated stories that his blood platelets were falling so rapidly that he could die.

The PDM's Quetta rally, in which slogans for an independent Balochistan were raised, was probably the breaking point for Khan. He says he will speak to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and even fly to London to get Nawaz Sharif to return to Pakistan. The question is, why would Britain extradite Nawaz Sharif when the stolen pounds of the Sharif family are parked in their country and the Sharifs' own properties galore in the UK? It would cause a dent in their economy and their real estate.





Partners in crime? Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif.

like the government to stop being civil and bare their fangs. That would not be a wise move. It would make heroes of people like Captain Safdar and provide grist to the mills of Pakistan's enemies. One should kill a fly with a swatter rather than a missile because one may end up destroying one's own country in the process. The centre needs to think things through. They must find ways to deflate the PDM balloon, which is getting excessive media coverage. The Prime Minister should invite the heads of all TV channels, newspapers and magazines and apprise them of the game that is afoot and request them to not fall for it. He must impress upon them that by destabilising Pakistan they are serving the cause of Pakistan's enemies. It is no coincidence that India's diatribe against Pakistan and the PDM's rant against Imran and his government sound very similar.

The PDM is led primarily by those politicians who are desperate to be let off

*Denuclearising Pakistan is an old agenda of the West, especially the US, and of course India and Israel. The Arabs used to support and celebrate the fact that we were the only Muslim country to have the bomb, but now that the Arabs are taking turns at recognising Israel, one cannot entirely depend on their support.*

The PDM is playing into the hands of those who wish to wrench away Balochistan from Pakistan which in effect means Pakistan would lose the much maligned Gwadar Port, along with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. However, this is something that China will not easily countenance. Moreover, India is also China's enemy and there is a possibility that the showdown between China and India could take place in Pakistan. Just after the Quetta rally, as if on cue, the Indian National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, gave a statement threatening both Pakistan and China and said that India's war against terrorism would be fought on Pakistani soil, thus raising the heat. That's rich considering that India is one of the world's biggest terrorist states. Ask the Kashmiris. Ask

the Christians. Ask the Sikhs. And yes, ask the Unpouchable Hindus. India wants to be the South Asian "cock of the walk." It needs to do a reality check. The soldiers stationed in Kashmir are so demoralised that some have committed suicide. What's more, China has already captured thousands of miles of territory in the disputed Ladakh region, which rightfully belongs to China. So Mr. Doval had better tune his instruments before he starts singing songs of victory against Pakistan and China.

As happens in such situations, the followers of these so-called leaders of the PDM are also pushing India's agenda to achieve their own selfish objectives. Pakistan must be given credit for allowing these rabble-rousers to operate so freely. Some Imran supporters would

the hook in the myriad corruption cases in progress against them. But Imran Khan and his government are unlikely to accede to their demands. Khan's election slogan was, "No to corruption." He will not let the corrupt walk away with their loot.

The PDM rally in Karachi and the episode with Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law, Captain Safdar, was played up to the hilt by the opposition. One heard conflicting reports: this was a game played jointly by Bilawal Zardari and Maryam Nawaz. Actually, Captain Safdar and Maryam Nawaz were staying in separate rooms in the hotel. It was Maryam Nawaz who broke down the hotel door. The Inspector General of Police was kidnapped in the wee hours of the morning and forced to sign Safdar's arrest warrant. The Sindh government knew nothing about the arrest.

Interestingly, everything was conveniently in place at that unearthly hour: there was someone to film the entire episode – the broken door, Safdar sauntering off to the police mobile, which took him into custody etc. There are stories galore – but only one thing is certain: Safdar did violate the sanctity of the Quaid-e-Azam's resting place with his thoughtless slogans. His slogan of, "Long Live the Mother of the Nation," was timed to coincide with Maryam Nawaz's entry into the room where the Quaid is buried, and intended to convey the impression that Maryam was the mother of the nation. The slogan soon changed to, "Long Live the Daughter of the Nation." Safdar probably nurtures dreams of being the 'First Lady' of Pakistan, like Asif Zardari did before him. Let me hasten to clarify that the spouse of the Prime Minister, who is the head of government, is never the First Lady; it is the President's spouse.

The PDM aims to force Imran Khan and his government out of office, and the earlier the better. Ostensibly, that will solve all their problems. But life is not all that simple. Some conscientious people will oppose the move. More importantly, the Supreme Court is unlikely to let this happen. Moreover, we still have a strong army that will stand in the way of any such move. However, at the end of the day, Prime Minister Imran Khan will need to get his act together.



All-weather friend: Pakistan's PM with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Khan's Achilles' heel is food inflation. His government is attempting to bring down the food prices and some progress has been made but unless they look at the entire supply chain, they will not be able to identify the weak areas. If by some miracle, the government does manage to curb inflation, the PDM will not have a leg to stand on.

PDM problems aside, the FATF issue still hangs fire. Pakistan has managed to stay out of the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF's) Black List so far but it will remain on the Grey List until we comply with six more conditions that the FATF demands. The next FATF meeting will be held in February 2021, and Pakistan has only three months to fulfil the FATF's wish list in order to come out of the Grey List.

There are other reasons why our enemies, who are many, would wish to destabilise Pakistan, the prime one being the age-old nuclear issue. Denuclearising Pakistan is an old agenda of the West, especially the West, especially the US, and of course India and Israel. The Arabs used to support and celebrate the fact that we were the only Muslim country to have the

bomb, but now that the Arabs are taking turns at recognising Israel, one cannot entirely depend on their support. Imran Khan's main concern in such a fast-changing world, ought to be to find a place for Pakistan in the new world order that is emerging. Fortunately the new world order is to be led by Pakistan's best, and perhaps only genuine friend, the People's Republic of China. Pakistan should strengthen its role as a corridor to China. It helped the US normalise relations with China way back in the Nixon era. But we cannot rest on our past laurels forever.

Our next mission should be to help not only the freedom fighters in Jammu and Kashmir, but also to provide moral and diplomatic support to the many freedom movements taking place in India, like those of the Sikhs and the Assamese. All said and done, you cannot bring down a behemoth like India, unless you have another behemoth in your yard, which we fortunately have in China. I remember reading an article in a Chinese defence journal some years ago that China could break India into 22 pieces. I am not a military analyst, but the Chinese expert must know what he was talking about. ■



## The Other Home Country?

Pakistan's thrice elected Prime Minister seems set to conduct his politics in Pakistan from the safety of Britain.



By Ather Kazmi

The writer is a multi-media journalist based in London.



**C** COVID-19 has changed the lifestyle of most people in Britain, but perhaps not of our convicted former premier, Nawaz Sharif, who is now seen regularly coming out of the controversy-marred Avenfield Apartments in London, surrounded by relatives, friends and followers.

He is rarely seen wearing a mask or maintaining the safe physical distance required in the current situation, as a band of his followers are always seen around him as he walks around in the upscale neighbourhood of his mansion, or gets in or out of his plush vehicle.

For a man, who came to London for what his family claimed was medical treatment for multiple life-threatening ailments, and whose health they contend is still in fragile condition, this irresponsible behaviour could, in the second wave of COVID, perhaps prove even more perilous for him than returning to Pakistan to face the courts.

I remember the chilly November morning in 2019 when I went to Sharif's

Avenfield apartment hoping to record some footage before he left for his "hospital appointment." Like other media persons, I also expected to see an ambulance outside his residence, but instead, a flashy Bentley was parked there. Sharif emerged from his apartment surrounded by family members and some of his London-based close associates – most of them either convicted or wanted by the law in Pakistan. He acknowledged us with a nod of his head, then left for his appointment in style – without speaking to the media.

In the earlier months after his arrival in the UK, Sharif made it a point not to engage with the media. But a lot has changed since then. Sharif finally broke his silence with an anti-army tirade and has regularly started engaging with media personnel and others standing outside his residence or elsewhere with individuals who approach him.

*Taking Sharif or his alleged partners in crime to Pakistan is easier said than done. London is seen as a safe haven for many corrupt political elite and money launderers from across the globe. Anti-corruption groups claim that successive UK governments have turned a blind eye towards the inward money laundering as it is seen as investment that benefits the country.*

View from Abroad



Clearly back in the pink of health, Sharif's attacks against the government and army are becoming more vicious, and are echoed by his daughter and party affiliates back home. In response, Prime Minister Imran Khan has vowed to bring him back to Pakistan – even if he has to personally travel to London for this purpose.

Sharif is not the only one wanted by the Pakistani authorities. Both his sons and a few other relatives and cronies, including Ishaq Dar, the former finance minister, are also wanted on corruption charges.

But taking Sharif or his alleged partners in crime to Pakistan is easier said than done. London is seen as a safe haven for many foreign white-collar criminals, corrupt political elite and money launderers from across the globe. Successive British governments have worked hard to make their country attractive to foreign investors – even those who became wealthy through dubious means. Billions of pounds are laundered through London's financial system every year. Critics, including anti-corruption groups, claim that successive UK governments have turned a blind eye towards the inward money laundering, as it is seen as investment that benefits the country. The world's leading anti-corruption organisation, Transparency International, for example, has been a vocal critic and has in the past called on the UK government to improve its checks and balances with regard to corrupt individuals who see the country as a "safe haven" to invest and hide their ill-gotten wealth.

Along with Pakistan, many other countries are also trying to get alleged financial fraudsters on the run from their respective countries extradited from the UK. One such country is India, seeking the extradition of many of its nationals, including Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Vijay Mallya, and Sanjay Bhandari. But so far, these efforts have borne little fruit.

Finally, prompted perhaps by years of criticism, the UK decided to move towards clamping down on financial crooks. After the passing of the Criminal Finances Act 2017, in January 2018 the government introduced Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWOs) to the UK legal system. UWOs shift the burden of proof to the assets' owner/s and can be used when there is a palpable gap between the income of a person and the value of assets they



Foreign politicians with convictions relating to #corruption should not enjoy impunity in Britain. Nor should their unexplained wealth, stashed in luxury London properties, fall out of the reach of law enforcement.



*Since arriving in the UK, Sharif has been living in the very same multi-million pound flats, the ownership of which was exposed in the Panama Papers and led to his downfall. His recent statements against the Pakistani army seem a strategic move by him to seek political asylum in the UK.*

own. This includes anyone, including foreign leaders and civil servants who own expensive assets in the UK – anything ranging from luxury apartments in London to flashy cars.

Some commentators describe the introduction of UWOs as "probably the most important piece of anti-corruption legislation" in recent British history.

And soon after these UWOs came into force, Transparency International, in a statement, demanded that the British government investigate the Sharif family's London properties.

Since arriving in the UK, Sharif has been living in the very same multi-million pound flats, the ownership of which was exposed in the Panama Papers and led to his downfall.

Situated not far from the Palace of Westminster, the home of British democracy, these flats serve as the headquarters of Sharif's own movement to restore "real democracy" in Pakistan. Political heir to Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime, Sharif's democratic credentials remain a moot point. But his fondness for Britain is quite obvious. During Gen. Pervez Musharraf's era when Sharif was let out of prison after a Saudi-sponsored deal, he gave it in writing he would distance from Pakistan and politics for at least 10 years. Sharif promised to stay in Saudi Arabia during his days in exile, but as soon as could, he made his way to the United Kingdom. His relationship with the UK can also be evidenced from the fact that during his third stint in power, he made more trips to London and spent more days there than he did to Pakistan's financial capital of Karachi.

Prime Minister Khan wants Nawaz Sharif to be repatriated to Pakistan so that he can serve his sentence in jail and also face the other corruption cases pending against him in various courts. The Pakistan government has also written letters to the British authorities in this regard, but as the two countries do not have extradition treaties, it is unlikely that London will facilitate the handing over of Sharif or his wealth to Pakistan. And Sharif has further strengthened his case for residence in Britain: his recent statements against the Pakistani army seem a strategic move by him – like many other third world politicians and businesspersons accused of corruption and money laundering – to seek political asylum in the UK. ■

## Unending Demands

A liaison between France and India prolongs Pakistan's sojourn on the FATF grey list with a long list of demands for compliance.



By Khalid Hameed Farooqi

*The writer is based in Brussels and has been covering the EU and international politics for nearly two decades.*

**T**here is just a very slim chance that Pakistan will be removed from the 'grey list' of the Eurocentric Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in February 2021, with France acting as the proxy for India. The FATF meeting in Paris from October 21 to 23 decided to keep Pakistan on the grey list for the next four months. However, from Pakistan's point of view, it has complied with the FATF Country Action Plan. Pakistan has satisfied 21 of the 27 conditions of the remaining requirements, which read a lot like India's wish list.

Over the last ten years, FATF has encouraged countries to design measures that "protect the integrity of the financial system while at the same time, support and facilitate financial inclusion." But even as the FATF is praised by the rich countries, it faces criticism that ineffective implementation of its standards makes it almost impossible for small banks and non-profit organisations to access financial services in the developing world.

Concerns about ineffective implementation of the FATF standards highlight the greater responsibility it places on national supervisors and financial institutions to adequately assess the Money Laundering/Terror Finance risks they face and respond appropriately. Doing this well is incredibly difficult in countries with limited technical capacity and expertise. Critics of FATF argue that wary of crossing a regulatory redline, FATF supervisors err on the side of caution by implementing laws and policies that are more stringent than those required by the FATF. They argue that the result is a culture of rigid, non-risk-based 'over-compliance' that makes it more challenging to provide poor countries financial services.

India virtually runs the FATF circus through its intermediary France and directly influences Asian PG – a FATF subsidy. France is a major supplier of military equipment to India. The armed services of both nations conduct joint exercises on an annual basis. France and India also maintain a discreet 'strategic dialogue' that covers joint cooperation against terrorism. France's 72 percent growth in weapons exports in the 2015-2019 period from five years prior is mostly thanks to Dassault Aviation and Naval Group. The first of those companies sold Rafale fighters to India while the second exports submarines to India.

Journalists associated with the French publication *Le Figaro* have told this scribe that anti-India stories and columns are blocked from publication. It makes sense because the Dassault group owns the paper.

Pakistan has taken several critical measures to combat terror financing and money laundering, which helped convince the FATF member states not to put Islamabad on the blacklist. The measures include banning currency transactions without a national tax number, disallowing open market conversion of more than \$500 without



submitting a copy of the national identity card, proscribing groups like the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JUD), and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and seizing their assets. But the measures only earned a temporary hiatus for Pakistan.

The European Union has included Pakistan in its own blacklist. The European diplomats also raise questions on democratic values in Pakistan and appear unsatisfied on its human rights and freedom of the press record. But their double standards are obvious when they ignore Indian atrocities in occupied Kashmir, gagging of the press and majoritarian politics of India.

Pakistan is being excessively targeted in the name of FATF. Pakistani leadership must reconsider their policy of appeasement and bending before the unending EU conditions and demands, which are tantamount to interfering in our domestic politics and internal affairs. The state must assert its sovereignty. Pakistan must also be more active on the diplomatic front and present and fight its case better. ■



## Rejecting Dynastic Politics

"Most political parties in Pakistan are family dynasties and personality cults."

Pakistan has been passing through a crucial and perhaps decisive phase of its history on both internal and external fronts. Internally, its economy is on the verge of collapse, with rampant inflation and unemployment making the life of people miserable. A fresh wave of terrorism and sectarianism is gripping its major cities; there is a critical lack of coordination visible between the centre and provinces, and if major opposition parties have launched a full-fledged anti-government movement through the united platform of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

The challenges facing the PTI government and the country are even more serious on the external front, with the heightening of the Kashmir crisis and the unending Afghanistan imbroglio, both directly linked to the internal stability and existence of the state.

The Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan cannot stand neutral and alien to this situation; rather its role becomes ever more important, even critical in the multiple evolving scenarios in the country.

Despite these concerns, however, the JI believes the future of the homeland is bright, and that it could emerge as a powerful state in the shifting geopolitical sands of South Asia.

When it took power, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-led coalition government was the fourth democratically elected government in Pakistan since 2002. The general elections of 2002, 2008, 2013 and 2018 are still considered questionable, with accusations that they were not transparent, that they were engineered and rigged. However, despite severe reservations, the JI accepted the polls in the larger interest of the people of Pakistan, who had lived in the shadow of long decades of direct military rule and sham democracies since 1947.

The PTI assumed power in July 2018



on the slogan of "*tabdeeli*," i.e. change, making tall claims it would transform the country into a model Muslim state – "a Madinah." But it has proved even worse than its predecessors, the PPP and the PML-N who each ruled the country for five years between 2008-13 and 2013-18.

As of June 2020, Pakistan's total external debt and liabilities stood at \$12.8 billion, \$17.6 billion or 18.5 percent higher than the level recorded two years ago. The PTI blames the previous governments for the debt-trap, but in all fairness, almost three years into its tenure, it cannot entirely pass the buck – i.e. the blame – to its predecessors. Its own ill-planning is visible from the soaring inflation rate, the enhanced tax net and the introduction of institutional reforms to take measures for enhancing the growth rate. In its manifesto, the PTI claimed it would provide jobs to millions of people, but after coming to power, it made millions jobless. The country's unemployment rate is hovering at around five percent, indicating a rapid increase in the previous two years. The rampant rise in terror and sectarian-related incidents in the past two years also

expose the rulers' incapability and lack of vision. They seem unable to gauge the challenges facing the nation, or to prepare a coherent and effective strategy to cope with them. A series of terrorist attacks in Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta – from the assault on the Pakistan Stock Exchange to the latest October 27 attack on a religious seminary in the heart of Peshawar, and assaults on Pakistani troops patrolling the areas bordering Iran and in Balochistan and KP-Fata regions – mark a new wave of terrorism in Pakistan. These incidents are proof of the sheer negligence of this government and the security agencies working under it.

The PTI has also failed to develop any coordination with the PPP-led Sindh government, and news of clashes between the two parties are daily aired on the national media. Karachi's teeming millions are the biggest victims of this brawl between the centre and province.

Furthermore, the current regime has been unable to introduce a powerful and across-the-board accountability drive. It has tried to control and muzzle media freedom, and it has, in its two years in power, paid no attention to strengthening

By Siraj ul Haq  
The writer is a Senator  
and the Ameer of the  
Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan.



the local bodies system.

In the prevailing situation, some 11 small and big political parties have launched an anti-government movement from the platform of the PDM. The PTI government is not their only target; the PDM claims it seeks to build an anti-establishment narrative, demanding "real democracy" in the country.

The Jamaat-e-Islami sincerely believes that the country's powerful military establishment has always tried to control the power centre directly or indirectly, damaging the spirit of democracy and controlling state affairs through a hybrid regime. But we do not concur with the PDM's narrative. The reason is obvious and facts speak louder than words. The two mainstream parties which are part of the opposition alliance enjoyed power for years, but they failed miserably

in putting the country on the path of development and real democracy. Their governments in 2008 and 2013 and also those before the decade-long tenure of General (r) Pervez Musharraf were no different than the PTI's current regime. Additionally, when these political parties talk about democracy, it would be funny if it weren't so tragic – considering they have never even tried to introduce democracy in their own parties' ranks. The fact is that almost all political parties in Pakistan, and particularly those who have enjoyed power, are family dynasties and personality cults that have nothing to do with democratic norms.

Corruption was also rampant in the tenures of the PML-N and the PPP. Governance was abysmal and they took no steps for the welfare of the public and introduced no institutional reforms during their terms in office. The PTI government is just a continuation of the Pervez Musharraf regime, and those of the PPP and the PML-N. There is no real difference between them as far as political, economic and foreign policies are concerned. Increasingly a surge in

undemocratic and anti-people steps of the PTI government are becoming more apparent. Parliament, the bureaucracy, and state policies and machinery have been overshadowed by the overt interference of the military establishment. Corruption at all levels can be seen everywhere. The sugar, wheat, oil and gas and electricity crises vividly manifest the involvement of PTI heavyweights. And in



Parting is such sweet sorrow: Straj ul Haq with PDM stalwarts.

parliament, a nexus of the PPP, PML-N and PTI overtly and covertly support the pro-US, anti-people agenda of the IMF and FATF by supporting each other in the passage of assorted pieces of legislation. The PPP and PTI even jointly contested the elections for the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan. Similarly, the PPP and the PML-N supported the PTI in its pro-establishment legislation regarding the extension of the tenure of the COAS for a further three years.

The JI believes that agents of the imperialistic powers, feudal lords and mafias all form part of the three parties and their politics revolve around the service of self-interest.

Therefore, the JI decided to stay away from the PDM and to take on the government through a separate movement, warning the latter to either address the plethora of problems facing the country, or go home. We have called for a decrease in the prices of essential food items, medicines, petrol, gas and electricity. The JI demands an interest-free economy by bringing rapid

and consecutive changes in the current financial regime. We also ask for measures to transform Pakistan according to the vision of its founders, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, and as per the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The Kashmir issue has become a major challenge for Pakistan, particularly after the decision of the fascist Modi government to unilaterally abrogate the special status of Indian-held Kashmir on August 5, 2019, in violation of internationally and mutually agreed agreements between the two countries. The BJP-RSS-led government of India is bent upon changing the demography of Indian-occupied Kashmir, turning the Kashmiri Muslim majority into a minority with the illegal settlement of Indian Hindus in the occupied

area. It has arrested the entire political leadership of the occupied valley, ploughed down, blinded and jailed thousands of Kashmiri youths and turned the area into the world's largest prison. Prime Minister Imran Khan made a good speech on Kashmir at the UN General Assembly last year, but he has since then failed to pursue Pakistan's demands regarding the Kashmir cause.

The JI has repeatedly warned Islamabad against India's hegemonic designs, but apart from lip-service, the rulers have paid no heed to the issue. The JI believes Pakistan's existence is directly linked to Kashmir's freedom from the Indian yoke and Jammu and Kashmir cannot be left to India's sinister plans. To this end, the JI is constantly mobilising the people of Pakistan by holding Kashmir rallies in different cities, and it has established contacts with the Azad Kashmir leadership and the Pakistani and Kashmiri diaspora all over the world to raise a unified voice against Indian occupation and brutalities in the held area.

We recognise, however, that will not

be enough. The liberation of Kashmir from India demands a comprehensive strategy through united national efforts and effective diplomatic and political moves. The JI calls for the formation of a National Action Plan and a clear road map to be put before the nation for the liberation of Kashmir, with a consensus among all the political forces.

Peace in Afghanistan is not only vital for the region, but it also has key importance for Pakistan. The JI has great regard for the struggle of the Afghan people against foreign occupiers, and it is our firm belief that the future of Afghanistan should only rest in the hands of the native Afghans. It is the need of the hour that different Afghan groups engage in mutual dialogue for a peaceful Afghanistan as soon as possible by setting aside their respective differences.

Though formally founded on August 25, 1941, the JI is the continuation of the movement which the Prophet Muham-

*"The two mainstream parties which are part of the opposition alliance enjoyed power for years, but they failed miserably in putting the country on the path of development and real democracy. Their governments were no different than the PTI's current regime. These political parties have never even tried to introduce democracy in their own parties' ranks."*

mad (PBUH) had launched 1450 years ago in Makkah. The JI is the only political-religious party of Pakistan which stands above sectarian, ethnic, cultural and lingual biases. Opening its doors for every believer, the JI believes in the Islamic democratic system of consultation. JI members participate in electing

its leaders, take part in the decision-making process, and can raise questions about its leadership's conduct regarding any matter whatsoever. The JI's decades-long struggle to reform society according to the brilliant principles of Islam and its efforts for the protection of individuals' rights are even recognised by its political opponents. Unlike other mainstream political and religious parties of Pakistan which are basically family concerns, the JI has no concept of dynastic and family politics. The sons and grandsons of former JI chiefs, Syed Abul Aala Maududi, Mian Tufail Muhammad, Qazi Hussain Ahmad and Syed Munawwar Hassan would not even imagine becoming the

Ameer (president) of the JI. The JI has been struggling for the establishment of a society based on justice, equality and human values. Its objective is to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state, which could play a leading role in the community of nations, and especially in the Muslim world. ■

## Monthly NARRATIVES

Get the Big Picture  
Get the Perspective  
Be a subscriber

or

Give Narratives as the gift that  
keeps on delivering

Annual Subscription for just Rs.3,600  
anywhere in Pakistan

Convenient Home Delivery

Cheque or  Bank Draft

In the name of 'Monthly Narratives'

Return form to Narratives office with  
your Cheque or Bank Draft.

Delivery to begin from: \_\_\_\_\_

The magazine should be delivered to:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Narratives Subscription Department  
D-160/7, Aamra Cottages, Clifton Block-5, Karachi - 75600  
Email: [subscription@narratives.com.pk](mailto:subscription@narratives.com.pk)  
Tel: 021-37257676





## Valley of Death

When will the UN wake up to the Indian genocide in Kashmir and resolve the dispute in accordance with its own resolutions?

By Mushaal Hussain Mallick

*The writer is the wife of Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik, and chairperson of the Peace and Culture Organisation. She campaigns for global peace and highlights Indian human rights violations in occupied Kashmir.*



**I** last met my husband, Yasin Malik, on September 1, 2014 in Delhi. We have not met since. My last conversation with him was over the phone on February 22, 2019, our 10th wedding anniversary. That was the day he was arrested yet again, by Indian occupation forces. I have had no contact with him since his arrest.

When Yasin was not in prison, he was not allowed to travel abroad. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had confiscated his passport. The Indians were afraid that once Yasin Malik was out of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been transformed into one large open-air prison, he would continue to use his voice to amplify the festering problems of his land and his people. The Indians also denied me and our daughter visas to visit Indian-occupied Kashmir (IOK). Yasin has not met his daughter, Raziyah Sultana, for more than six years now as he languishes in the infamous Tihar Jail.

It is too painful for me to explain to Raziyah why she cannot meet her brave father, who serves as a beacon of hope for Kashmir's freedom fighters and inspires members of his Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) to continue their struggle, even from behind bars.

We receive scraps of information on him mostly through the media, and we learn that he is not in good health. His condition is deteriorating in the absence of medical treatment. He has been confined to a death cell, where he is being tortured. On several occasions, I have requested UN bodies and human rights organisations to secure his release on medical grounds. He should be allowed to travel abroad to get treatment. But all my appeals seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Yasin is still battling for his life. The Indians are using cruel tactics to silence his powerful voice, which has been articulating the aspirations of the people of occupied Kashmir to throw off the yoke of Indian rule.

But Indian brutalities cannot silence Kashmiris. The more the oppression, the more the resistance – Indian oppression is fanning the fires of freedom further.

Yasin Malik is not the only Kashmiri who is being subjected to torture. There are countless other Kashmiris who are being meted similar treatment – and often, worse. They include well known Kashmiri leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, and all those men and young boys who are little known. The sufferings of both are equally traumatic, equally tragic.

In its bid to build pressure on the resistance leaders, India's National Investigation Agency filed a supplementary charge-sheet in fake cases against my husband, Dukhtaran-e-Millat chief Aasiya Andrabi and senior APHC leader, Masarrat Aalam Butt. The Tihar Jail authorities refused to present my illegally detained husband before a Jammu court in a fake case registered against him by the Indian authorities nearly three decades ago.

Such atrocities are not new to the Kashmiris. They have been living under the shadow of the gun since the illegal and unlawful accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to India by Maharaja Hari Singh – the then ruler of the valley – on October 26, 1947. Kashmiris resisted this illegitimate move with all the force they could muster.

India flooded Kashmir with soldiers, making it one of the most militarised regions in the entire world. A generation of Kashmiris has grown up witnessing soldiers in every street, nook and corner of their land. The Indians violated the privacy and sanctity of homes, and even barged into their living quarters. The naked aggression and barbarism unleashed by successive Indian governments made life a veritable hell for the



inhabitants of what was once described as "paradise on earth."

But the inhuman and ruthless tactics to crush the freedom struggle are strengthening the resolve and intensifying the indigenous movement for the right of self-determination, as promised by the United Nations resolutions.

Ever since the Hindu extremist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come to power, the oppression has been taken to a whole new level. On August 5, 2019, the Modi government unilaterally and unlawfully stripped Kashmir of its special status. The revocation of Articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution, which provided just symbolic autonomy to IOK, is alarmingly geared towards changing the demographic profile, as well as the political, economic, social and cultural character of this Muslim-majority region.

In due course, this would irreversibly thwart any meaningful exercise of the Kashmiris' right to self-determination in flagrant contravention of international law. After Modi's unilateral step, the Indian occupation forces have literally turned the Kashmir valley into the world's biggest torture cell. The Kashmiris are reeling under a crippling military lockdown, internet blackout and denial of fundamental human rights.

Mobile phones continue to remain blocked, and shops, schools and offices are closed. Even public transport has been forced off the roads. All sections of society have been affected by the lockdown and business is down to zero. The Indians have cut off the Valley from the rest of the world to hide their continuing atrocities. Indian soldiers enjoy complete immunity and cannot be questioned even for their criminal acts. This immunity has emboldened them to use a woman's rape as a weapon of war to deter freedom-fighters.

Rights groups are continuously raising the red flag over the denial of basic rights to the region's eight million people, while thousands, including senior politicians and activists, have been arrested and put in jails within, and outside, Kashmir. Earlier Indian authorities had carried out a major crackdown against political leaders in Occupied Kashmir and arrested high-profile figures, including three former chief ministers of the



With husband Yasin Malik and daughter Raziyah Sultana. (above)

*Yasin Malik has been confined to a death cell, where he is being tortured. On several occasions, I have requested the UN bodies and human rights organisations to secure his release on medical grounds. But all my appeals seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Yasin is still battling for his life.*

Muslim-majority state.

Unfortunately, the Indian state's terrorism has failed to shake the conscience of the world powers. A former judge of the Indian Supreme Court, Justice Markandey Katju, rightly remarked that India has sown the seeds of a large-scale guerrilla war in Occupied Kashmir by stripping the territory of its special status.

In an article in the international magazine, *The Week*, Justice Katju wrote that Kashmir would soon become what Vietnam was for the French and the Americans, Afghanistan for the Russians, and Spain for Napoleon. Referring to the Kashmiris' desire for freedom, he

pointed out that an army can fight another army, but it cannot fight the masses. He further said that a tiger can kill an antelope, but it cannot kill a swarm of mosquitoes.

Some rights groups claim that 100,000 Kashmiris have died since 1989. Since the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, a "full-fledged organised genocide" is underway in Occupied Kashmir. People are being picked up, murdered and buried in unmarked graves. Women are being humiliated and dishonoured; almost 6,000 people have been jailed and they will be detained for up to two years, without being assigned any reason. No other region, in recent history, has faced the kind of brutalities and oppression that the Kashmiris have, yet their spirit remains unbroken.

Stories of the unparalleled sacrifices of brave Kashmiris are finally beginning to find their way into the Western media. *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Guardian*, among many others, have done scathing reports, on the repression and atrocities of Narendra Modi's government in the valley. Despite facing international opprobrium, the Modi government remains undeterred.

During his week-long trip to the United States, Prime Minister Imran Khan delivered a historic speech at the UN General Assembly session that somewhat helped internationalise the burning Kashmir dispute. Pakistan has succeeded in garnering the support of Turkey and Malaysia for the Kashmir cause.

But it's time the UN took cognisance of this long-standing dispute and played its due role in finding a solution to the Kashmir dispute, according to its own resolutions that promised to grant the right of self-determination to the Kashmiris.

This is the only workable solution to a protracted conflict. The time for diplomacy is running out fast. If the world is serious about preventing a major conflagration between the two nuclear armed countries – India and Pakistan – then the implementation of the UN resolutions is the only way forward. ■

## The Obstacle Race for Peace

Despite the multiple odds, will the intra-Afghan dialogue finally deliver peace to conflict-ridden Afghanistan?



**By Asif Durrani**  
The writer is a former ambassador and a Senior Research Fellow at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI).

Where is the Afghan peace process headed? The euphoria generated at the signing of the peace agreement between the US and the Taliban on February 29, is now giving way to the stark reality that the path to peace in Afghanistan is full of pitfalls. From the very beginning, there have been hurdles along the way. One of the major agreements concerning the prisoners' swap was mired in controversy because of Ashraf Ghani's reluctance to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners. It took more than seven months and a considerable amount of nudging from the US and Pakistan before Ashraf Ghani's government and the Taliban finally agreed to the prisoner swap and resumption of intra-Afghan dialogue. The dialogue resumed on September 12 but this time it got stuck on modalities. Unfortunately, there is no agreed agenda for the talks; moreover, there is no ceasefire in place, as a consequence of which there is unnecessary death and destruction on both sides. The country remains hostage to the

warlords, rent-seeking government officials and external spoilers who want to keep the pot simmering.

The peace process is pitted against many odds which hamper a smooth transition from the present war-like conditions to peace, as the nightmare of a civil war looms in the not-too distant future. This is all linked to the timing of the American withdrawal. President Donald Trump wishes to see the Ameri-

*As a first step, the Taliban should announce a ceasefire, while the government side should be prepared for a national government to give peace a chance.*



can troops return home before Christmas. However, his National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien maintains that the United States intends to reduce its troop levels in Afghanistan from 5,000 to 2,500 by early 2021. The Pentagon and CIA may have different axes to grind, which was echoed by Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when he said that the agreement reached with Afghan and Taliban officials to leave Afghanistan was "condition-based," and that the United States would "responsibly" end the war.

From the international perspective, American-led military engagements have started giving diminishing returns. The operations that have been carried out in Afghanistan since 2015 do not enjoy international backing. A Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between the Afghan government and the US was signed in 2014 that allowed American and NATO troops in Afghanistan to stay on in an advisory role to oversee the Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF's) training and operations. The BSA exempted American and NATO troops from prosecution in the International Criminal Court (ICC). This was also the period when then President, Barack Obama, began bulk withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan after an unprecedented surge in 2010. Consequently by the end of the Obama presidency in 2016, the US troop level came down from 100,000 to 16,000. Being a businessman, what President Trump is doing is simple economics – but with substantive political gains. He has assured his voters that he would save \$ 50 billion per annum from the wasteful war and bring the soldiers back home. He has also proven his point that after the signing of the agreement with the Taliban in February this year, no American soldier has died in Afghanistan.

It is now becoming clear to the overwhelming majority in Afghanistan that the Americans are finally leaving. This could be disturbing for the Ashraf Ghani government, as the American troops' withdrawal may change the status quo for him and the Taliban may emerge as a dominant force, either through a smooth process of intra-Afghan dialogue or through military means – a fact acknowledged by the Americans and



Negotiating tough... Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

*If the dialogue process is successful it would most likely culminate in an interim government, leaving President Ghani's political future in limbo, which would probably be unacceptable to him and his associates.*

European observers, even if grudgingly. In a way, by announcing withdrawal, the US has started losing ground among various Afghan factions, although they would continue to owe allegiance to the Americans till the time their pockets are lined and they enjoy a walk in the corridors of power. But at the same time, they would weigh their options to stay

relevant.

As for the intra-Afghan dialogue, again, there is a big gap in the goals and objectives of the stakeholders. Disagreements over the agenda of the dialogue is keeping the whole process in a state of paralysis, despite friendly counselling by the US and Pakistan. Prima facie, the Dr. Abdullah Abdullah-led government delegation comprises various ethnic and religious factions, who approximately represent the entire political spectrum of Afghanistan, even though some of the ethnic and religious groups may not see eye to eye with each other. On the Taliban side, it is almost a monolith with disciplined cadres owing allegiance to the leadership of Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. If the dialogue process is successful it would most likely culminate in an interim government, leaving President Ghani's political future in limbo, which would probably be unacceptable to him and his associates.

Parallel to the snail-paced intra-Afghan dialogue, there are reports that the Taliban are reaching out to various ethnic and religious groups, which means that

as a second option they will individually strike deals with the prospective stakeholders and try to marginalise the existing power-brokers linked to the government. This was further corroborated by the former prime minister and leader of the Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan, Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, while addressing the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in Islamabad on October 21. He said that his party had separately initiated talks with the Taliban to chalk out a future course of action.

The Taliban have also reached out to the regional countries to put across their point of view, especially Iran, China, Russia and the neighbouring Central Asian States (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), to assure them that they are not pursuing an outward-looking agenda and that they are not in cahoots with Al-Qaeda or Daesh. In fact, the Taliban's fierce fight and successes against Daesh/ISIS have been acknowledged by the American administration

*Parallel to the snail-paced intra-Afghan dialogue, there are reports that the Taliban are reaching out to various ethnic and religious groups, which means that as a second option they will individually strike deals with the prospective stakeholders and try to marginalise the existing power-brokers linked to the government.*

and international observers, which strengthens their credentials as an effective bulwark against the Al-Qaeda/-Daesh threat and lessens the likelihood of Afghan soil being used by these extremist Islamic groups.

The current scenario may not offer

much optimism but there is a glimmer of hope. War fatigue among Afghan's warring factions and international partners may force the stakeholders to opt for peace. As a first step, the Taliban should announce a ceasefire, while the government side should be prepared for a national government to give peace a chance. Secondly, external actors should stop using Afghanistan as a competing ground to settle scores or use Afghan territory to destabilise other countries. Thirdly, the UN should step forward to ensure that rehabilitation and reconstruction activities are carried out in a comprehensive manner so as to rid the country of the narco-business, and create conducive conditions for

the return of Afghan refugees to their homes. A peaceful Afghanistan can truly serve as a bridge between Central and South Asia, with unprecedented prospects of progress and prosperity for the entire region. However, the onus for peace lies on the Afghans. ■



Time to go home.





## Tough Task Ahead

Biden promises a change of course, but the Trump legacy will continue to pose a challenge.

By Ibrahim Sajid

*The writer is a senior journalist and the Editor of Narratives.*

**I**n January 2021, Joe Biden will be sworn-in as the 46th president of the United States of America, a country where almost half of the voters are committed to defending white supremacy. A country where 47% of voters believe in QAnon conspiracy theories and take Donald Trump's misinformation as gospel. A country where police commit extrajudicial murders with impunity. A country ravaged by a pandemic. A country where chasms between the poor and wealthy have grown substantially wider, a nation desperately divided and flawed.

Paul Krugman, a noble laureate economist, writes in the *New York Times*: "If we were looking at a foreign country with America's level of political dysfunction, we would probably consider it on the edge of becoming a failed state – that is, a state whose government is no longer able to exert effective control."

Will President-elect Biden repudiate the "America First" platform on which Donald Trump won the White House in 2016? Most likely, he will. Trump's foreign policy was a striking departure in many ways from his predecessors, and while many outside observers expected this 2020 election to reverse that, the deeply divided American electorate has not made that clear cut choice. Can Biden change the hyper-nationalist and unilateralist mindset that undergirds it?

The U.S. may return to multilateralism and the global fold to combat climate change, pandemics, and other transnational threats. The Biden administration can potentially re-orient America's foreign policy. After four years of non-conventional



and disruptive rule, America may return to its historical role on the world stage. Joe Biden's administration may reassure foreign leaders that there is light at the end of the tunnel. To do that, his administration will have to drop the America first mantra, rhetoric that resonates with rural America. An uphill task, indeed! Sceptical of America's willingness to provide security, open markets, and other global public goods, capitals worldwide have already begun hedging their bets and pursuing strategic autonomy. They may second guess a country that has proven so capricious. After all, Trumpism is likely to remain a potent political force, shaping Republican attitudes around an isolationist and hyper-nationalist foreign policy for a generation.

From the inadequacy of the health care system to the cruelty of immigration policies, from entrenched racial inequities to citizens' economic vulnerabilities, Donald Trump leaves behind a big mess.

Biden has pledged himself to big thinking and bold action in tackling these challenges. He has committed to take immediate steps to renew democracy and alliances, protect the economic future, and once more place America at the head of the table, leading

the world to address the most urgent global challenges.

In the first 90 days, the Biden administration will focus on two major issues: firstly the pandemic and its economic fallout, and secondly racial inequality and reforming the criminal justice system to eliminate inequitable disparities.

In several campaign speeches, Biden said he would immediately end the horrific practice of separating families at the border and holding immigrant children in for-profit prisons. Instead, he has promised to improve screening procedures at legal ports of entry and make smart investments in border technology, in cooperation with Canada and Mexico.

He will offer Temporary Protected Status to vulnerable populations who cannot find safety in countries ripped apart by violence or disaster, including Venezuelans and Haitians, terminate the travel ban against people from Muslim-majority countries, reverse Trump's cruel asylum policies and raise targets for refugee admissions to a level commensurate with America's responsibility and unprecedented global need.

During his first year in office, President-elect Biden will bring together





the world's democracies to honestly confront the challenge of backsliding and forge a common agenda to address threats to shared values. He has committed to organising and hosting a Global Summit for Democracy to renew the nation's spirit and shared purpose worldwide.

The Biden administration, we are assured, will rejoin the Paris Climate Accord on day one and lead a major diplomatic push to raise countries' climate targets. Biden will convene a climate world summit to directly engage the leaders of the world's major carbon-emitting nations to persuade them to join the United States in making more ambitious national pledges, above and beyond the commitments they have already made and lock in enforceable obligations that will reduce emissions in global shipping and aviation.

If Iran returns to compliance with the historic nuclear deal, the Biden administration will gladly re-enter the agreement and work closely with China to denuclearise North Korea.

Biden has also committed to pursuing an extension of the New START treaty, an anchor of strategic stability between the United States and Russia, and to use that as a foundation for new arms control arrangements.

His record tells us that he is not a hawk.

*The commitments he has made on the campaign trail will not be easy to implement. Trumpism will not magically disappear. If anything, its adherents will very likely find renewed energy and purpose in marshalling a new resistance movement committed to undermining and delegitimising the incoming administration.*

Biden will try to end wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East. As he has long argued, Biden will bring the vast majority of troops

home from Afghanistan and narrowly focus on Al-Qaeda and ISIS. And on the campaign trail, he also committed to ending support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Staying entrenched in unwinnable conflicts only drains the capacity to lead on issues that require attention, and hinders the rebuilding of other instruments of American power.

The Biden administration may return to drone attacks and continue to pander to New Delhi to counter China's influence. Since the George W. Bush administration, the United States has recognised India's potential as a natural balancer to China. It's been a proponent of the U.S.-India relationship due to India's strategic location and potential as a market.

But the commitments he has made on the campaign trail will not be easy to implement. Trump's message of fear and resentment resonated with tens of millions of Americans. Trumpism will not magically disappear. If anything, its adherents will very likely find renewed energy and purpose in marshalling a new resistance movement committed to undermining and delegitimising the incoming administration.

The Biden administration's ability to execute depends on two Senate seats with run-off elections in Georgia, in January 2021. We remain cautiously optimistic. ■



## DEFENCELINE

## New-Age War

Hydra-headed responses are required to combat the 21st Century's Hybrid Wars.



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.*

**T**he nature and character of 'Hybrid War' waged against a country need to be thoroughly understood before it can fight back. Wars are actually strategies directed to break or dilute the will of opposing entities, unlike the limited definition of war dictionaries still offer – i.e. 'armed conflict.' Sun Tzu in ancient times recognised the impact of the mere threat of defeat on the minds of opposing forces when he said that the 'acme of strategy is to win a battle without fighting.'

We talk a lot about the "nature and character of war." Aristotle cautioned us about "defining the terms" before embarking on any discussion on the subject, so war scholars agreed to keep the nature of war fixed, even as the character of war was variable. But these are semantics, terms coined to help ease the understanding of conflict. We have even divided the character of war generationally, i.e. according to the evolution in weaponry, resulting in transformations in tactics, operations and strategies. Starting from 'First Generation' warfare, we now discuss 'Fifth Generation' warfare. The details of generational definitions aside, in my view the most flexible and all-encompassing new term is 'Hybrid War.' This entails the use of the entire spectrum of the science and art of warfare, along with the application of all the modern resources available to mankind. This concept of war comprehensively includes all known kinetic and non-kinetic means to prevail over opposing forces.

And so, starting from conventional operations, Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), the employment of proxies, surgical strikes, drone attacks, psychological operations, media (mainstream and social media) operations, information operations, false flag operations, economic undermining, political and diplomatic pressures... the list of strategies is long and increasing with the passage of time. The phenomenon of employing psychological and economic pressure, along with kinetic methods, is as old as mankind itself. However, modern wherewithal and knowledge have equipped man with such a variety of tools to impact on material and non-material (cognitive) areas, that war has acquired an entirely new avatar – that of Hybrid War.

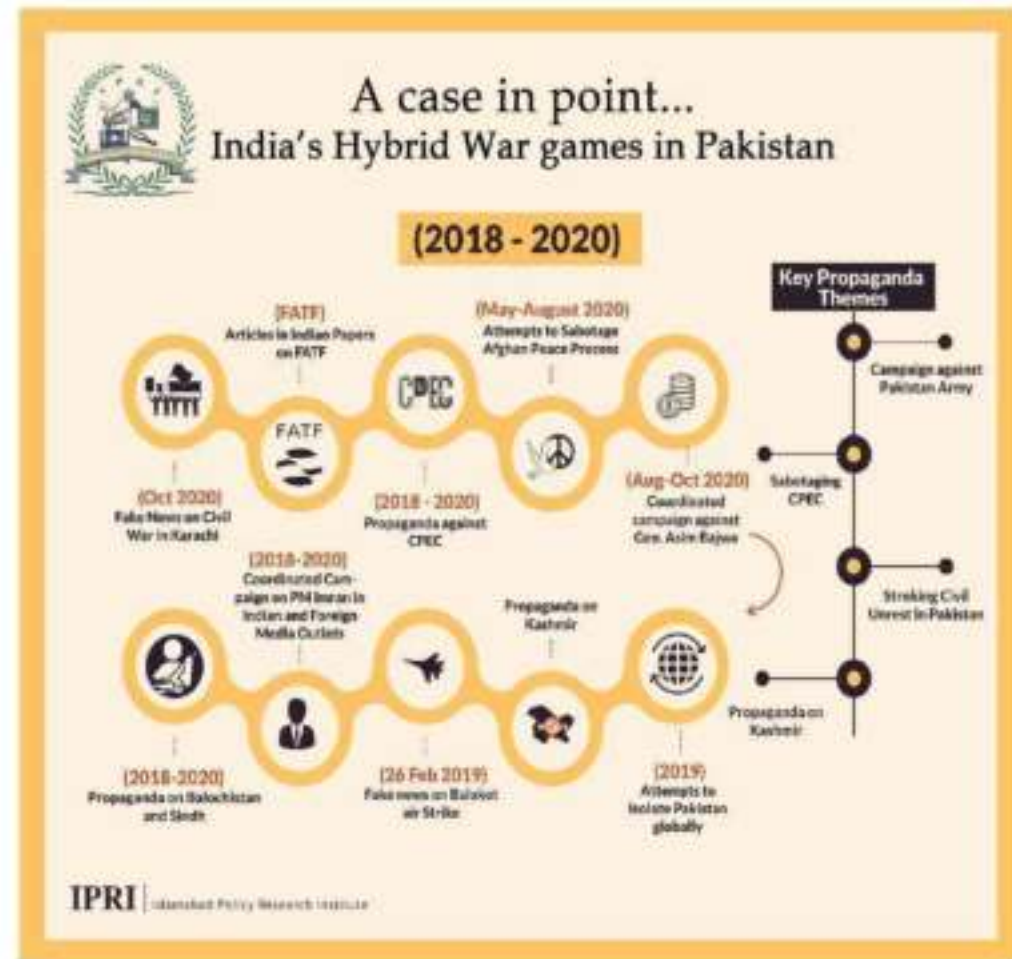
To master the strategy of Hybrid Warfare, it is not enough to understand the 'ways' and 'means' available, but also the location of the objective that ultimately is the 'end' we wish to attain. Ultimately, the final target is the 'will' and the 'resistive mindset' of the opponent.

A well-orchestrated onslaught is needed to be unleashed against the minds and willpower of adversaries, impacting on their world views, self-views, relationships with other entities, attitudes, faith, bonding forces, cultural pride etc.

Clearly then, Hybrid Warfare straddles a larger presence in the cognitive space than in the merely physical domain.

However, before we think of evolving a strategy to counter any Hybrid Threat, we need to ask ourselves a few questions:





the political, economic and social structure of that society. In a good democratic set-up, it is likely to be well distributed across the polity, depending on how power and responsibilities are distributed within that dispensation. In an autocratic environment, the probability is high that it will be embedded in certain personalities. In tribal societies it may lie in their strong traditions, that would be extremely difficult to defeat. Because of their newly found energy and formative minds, the youth are particularly vulnerable to such onslaughts. Thus this 'will to resist' any external pressure is a complex phenomenon and needs to be studied in detail for its level of robustness and its locations, so that the defensive mechanisms and offensive pressures are applied against the right spots.

The imperceptible impact of this specialised warfare on our society, in my opinion, is now profound and effective, and we are struggling to repair some divisive trends, and trying to ascertain strands of Hybrid War that are being applied by shattering forces. But our efforts are not yet harmonised and integrated.

Economic disparities, the neglected vast lands of Balochistan, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan, and the failure to control religious and sectarian hatred, are all our own doings. Add to it the general levels of illiteracy, poverty and injustice, and

the task of enemies is made much easier. They just need to apply further pressure on all the existing fissures and cause further pain to our society, polity and faith.

Many people across Pakistan must leave at one time or

another heard openly and commonly used negative narratives like: religion has proved divisive rather than being a bonding factor; we would have been better off in undivided India; our forces have waged war against our own people (Bangladesh, Balochistan); it is a conspiracy theory that some powers are targeting Muslim countries, etc.

There is a need to check the intensity and effects of these narratives that many in our country believe, which resultantly weaken us. A quintessential component of Hybrid War is to find already existing weaknesses, to use the media (mainstream and social) to aggravate such perceptions, to employ paid operatives and inadvertent agents to lead such thinking groups, carry out physical false flag operations to increase stand-offs between various groups, employ economic and political hit-men to aggravate the existing disparities, create a civil strife situation aimed to culminate in civil war, ensure total destruction by fuelling one or both sides to perpetuate the conflict, and finally, to gain control by either making a side win, or give all-out support to the winning side.

To assess whether we, the Pakistani nation, are a victim of Hybrid War or not, and if so, to gauge its impact, we should consider the following:

- The intensity of political rivalry;
- Mistrust created regarding all important institutions;
- The sinking of colossal resources into erroneous priorities;
- The intensified sense of deprivation of areas that have been kept backward;
- The maligning of the CPEC;
- Keeping security forces under intense pressure from outside and inside;
- Aggravating Shia-Sunni, Punjabi-non Punjabi, civil-military tensions through propaganda;
- Spoiling relations with all neighbouring countries employing information operations and 'false flag operations.'

We have long been speculating whether the issues plaguing our country are home-grown, urgently requiring us to put our house in order, or is the ongoing morass we find ourselves in the handiwork of our enemies? The truth lies between the two. It is an amalgam of both, a grey zone, thus hybrid in nature.

Understanding the phenomenon is not enough, it has to be fought back in all aspects.

To begin with, some important decisions have to be taken: Do we want to absorb this pain passively by taking only precautionary and defensive measures, or do we wish to fight back actively and aggressively? And we need to realistically assess what elements of power we possess vis a vis the opponent, and whether we have the mechanisms to fight back

hybrid threats.

Passivity and defensive actions can only be effective to cover or remove vulnerabilities, such as educating the public, specially the youth about enemy intentions and their methods, removing social discrepancies to reduce reactionary attitudes that could get exploited, and controlling fake news and negative propaganda with finesse, guarding against blowbacks.

If we are really serious about fighting back the Hybrid threat, then the first step would be an acceptance, especially by the

Armed Forces, that the planning and execution of any counter plan would have to be hybrid in nature, and only a small portion of the campaign would fall in the purview of kinetics. It would require a transformation in the idea of warfare, and thus a total change in the organisation, equipment and training of the group that would undertake these operations. Also needed would be the support of non-kinetic forms like politics, diplomacy, lawfare, media wars, psy operations, and economic undermining, and the multiplying of small kinetic ops, false flag actions, surgical strikes, etc. to create disproportionate and at times strategic effects. Also all

*'Hybrid War' entails the use of the entire spectrum of the science and art of warfare, along with the application of all the modern resources available to mankind. This concept of war comprehensively includes all known kinetic and non-kinetic means to prevail over opposing forces.*

grand plans must be kept below perceptible thresholds, so that the target's reactions are mortally delayed due to continuous guessing if they are actually under attack.

We ask ourselves who would recognise and respond to hybrid threats being posed against Pakistan. The only solace might be found in assuming that the ISI, being a versatile organisation, must be doing it. But this could be false optimism, as the special techniques, knowledge and expertise required for both, defensive and aggressive actions, along with the coordination with assorted ministries, is a tough call.

An elaborate organisation under the National Security Advisor or the Ministry of Defence may perform as Headquarters (HQ) to deal with Hybrid War. But in my opinion there is already an existing framework that is lightly loaded and materially well-provisioned to undertake the task. It is proposed that the joint services HQ be directly placed under the Prime Minister, armed with the civil and specialised resources needed to defend against and fight Hybrid threats. The Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee should be made directly responsible to plan, organise and execute this specialised warfare.

While the fine details can be discussed at other forums and at a later date, the presence of a specialised hybrid threat, the absence of any appropriate mechanism to deal with it, and the urgent requirement of a response should be immediately debated at the National Security Council and other strategic forums, so that there is no delay in dealing with such an important national issue that could make or break us. ■

- Are we really facing a Hybrid threat or is it just an exaggerated perception of the reality on the ground?
- Who is likely to be attacking, and for what purpose?
- What means are being employed to wage this war?
- Who or what are the targets?

If the 'will' of a group of a people, a nation or a country is to be the actual target, then it is of utmost importance to know where such an important target is located.

The question arises, how, in a large mass of people and an elaborate maze of systems and institutions, does one pinpoint this resistive will? Does it lie in a concentrated form or is it well distributed across a large space? Is it a physical or a metaphysical entity, related to bodies, hearts or minds? In my humble opinion, this all-important 'will' of a people is the centre of gravity of any nation; it is dependent on

*We have long been speculating whether the issues plaguing our country are home-grown, urgently requiring us to put our house in order, or is the ongoing morass we find ourselves in the handiwork of our enemies? The truth lies between the two. It is an amalgam of both, a grey zone, thus hybrid in nature.*



## Viewpoint

## Slide Into Anarchy?

In the 1960s' Pakistan was a success story. Today, it presents a sorry spectacle. So what went wrong?



By Ali Mahmood

*The writer is a businessman and the author of three books – Muslims: The Real History, Saints and Sinners and the forthcoming, Enter the Dragon.*

**O**n Wednesday, October 21, *The News* headlines screamed: "Ridiculed, mishandled, demoralised, shocked. Unprecedented protest by Sindh Police, ask for leave."

According to news reports, the Sindh IG Police was allegedly picked up late night from his house and taken to an undisclosed location. PPP Senator Sherry Rehman remarked, "Making the IG Police hostage to sign on orders of one's choice is intolerable."

The Sindh police force threatened to shut shop. The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) intervened to restore peace. The Prime Minister remained silent.

This new development in the polarisation between the government and the opposition aggravates further the issues that have plagued Pakistan's politics since the country's inception, in different forms.

The period from 1947 to 1958 was supposedly a democracy. But weak

institutions and strong men resulted in a system that was not democracy. When Ayub Khan took over in 1958, he was welcomed. People were fed up with the conspiracies and manoeuvres that culminated in the murder of the Speaker of the National Assembly. People had had enough of democracy; they now wanted a benevolent dictator. At first, it seemed to work in West Pakistan. The situation improved, economic growth increased, the administration functioned better, law and order gave people more security. Stability replaced anarchy, and corruption was brought under control. But by the mid-1960s, people started to wonder – had they made a mistake?

In East Pakistan, resentment grew against the discriminatory treatment of their province. The East Pakistanis felt they had been reduced to second-class citizens, a colony of Islamabad. An uprising had started in Balochistan, and the smaller provinces were not happy with the One-Unit. Industrial labour was bitter that industrial expansion had been at their expense – their salaries stagnated while profits grew. Democrats found an opportunity to oppose Ayub in the 1965 elections, as they rallied behind Fatima Jinnah. People compared the harsh but fair standards of the Nawab of Kalabagh, the then Governor of West Pakistan, who would not even let his own son sit in the official car of the governor, with those of President Ayub, whose son Gohar had become an industrial tycoon in only a few years. The 1965 war with India was a major setback: some blamed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, but most blamed Ayub. By the time Ayub was removed from power, people had had enough of army rule and benevolent dictators. They wanted democracy.

The new president, General Yahya Khan was determined to give the people what they wanted, provided it ensured him the presidency. He fulfilled some important demands before the election: The One-Unit was disbanded, a fair balance between the voting power of the

provinces was put into place, and Pakistan was given a free and fair election based on adult franchise. Everyone should have been satisfied. They were – but only until the results were announced. East Pakistan had won a majority in the National Assembly. The only options before Yahya were either to hand over power to Mujibur Rahman, or to resist the result of the elections. Manipulated by Bhutto, Yahya decided to resist. Pakistan was destroyed in the process and Bangladesh was born. Yahya was blamed, army rule was rejected after a lost war in which 90,000 people were taken prisoners of war. Bhutto was installed as Chief Martial Law Administrator.

He called his government a democracy, but soon enough many started calling his rule a mixture of fascism and distorted socialism, based on outdated policies that had already been discarded in China. Economy, law and order, administration and education were destroyed. If democracy meant a Bhutto style of government, people decided they could do without it. When Zia arrested Bhutto and took over, many were ready to accept military rule once again, even if it was led by the unpopular Zia.

To consolidate his position, Zia hanged Bhutto, offered Pakistan to the Americans to fight the Russians in Afghanistan, and enforced his own version of Islam. The result was a culture of drugs and arms, terrorism, refugees, and sectarian war that destabilised Pakistan and made life unliveable. When the general died in a plane crash in 1988, few tears were shed, and the youth who had never experienced Bhutto's rule, wanted Bhutto's daughter to take them back to the imagined golden period of Bhutto.

In the decade of democracy that defined the 1990s, the government changed hands four times as two governments of Nawaz Sharif alternated with two of Benazir Bhutto's. Democracy was in a shambles; corruption, insecurity





Memories of another day: (From above) General Ayub Khan; Z.A. Bhutto; General Zia-ul-Haq; Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

and maladministration grew to their worst levels. The decade of democracy was a total disaster. When Musharraf finally took over, people heaved a sigh of relief.

Businessmen, bureaucrats, technocrats, and the urban middle classes preferred army rule, provided it was not a Zia-ul-Haq type of government. However, major political parties, lawyers, and the southern provinces of Sindh and Balochistan rooted for democracy. The army was restrained by the constitution. So compliant judges were needed in the Supreme Court to legitimise the army's takeover with their Doctrine of Necessity and other clever arguments. Till Zia's tenure, judges could be controlled, but General Musharraf, towards the end of his rule, was to discover that times had changed and judges were no longer prepared to accept a docile and subordinate role.

Ayub had justified his tenure by ensuring economic growth. Bhutto claimed liberation of the masses from quasi-slavery. Zia pointed to the higher growth rate in his tenure, which his opponents argued was misleading since it represented the price for selling Pakistan to the US in their war against Russia. Zia also used Islam to legitimise his rule.

Benazir and Nawaz made tall promises and claimed to represent the masses. But the disastrous decade resulted in a collapsing economy, a terrible rise in corruption, breakdown of law and order, and insecurity of life and property. The frequent elections, as governments were dissolved prematurely, required more and more money. Politics ceased to be a public service and became a deadly business – mafia style – with corruption, cruelty, and killing to secure personal interests.

There was no administration to speak of, as patwaris, police, tax officers and bureaucrats, totally stopped providing services to the public, and became a mafia, extorting money for protection. Without access to power it was impossible to survive in Pakistan. Law had become irrelevant, it was all about access, *rishwat* and *sifarish*.

Initially, Martial Law justified its intervention as the only way to stop corruption and ensure good governance. But Zia's government had proved that military governments were no better. After Musharraf's takeover, his former CGS, Lt. Gen (r) Muhammad Aziz Khan issued a press

statement saying that the entire anti-corruption process had been sacrificed at the altar of expediency as pressure from the presidency ensured that cases did not proceed against the big names. He cited his Chief, Musharraf's support to the Chaudhrys, Malik Riaz, and many others.

Since even military rulers had to continue with the process of elections, corruption had to be condoned, even supported, to ensure victory for the preferred candidates. The people of Pakistan had lost confidence in both democratic and military rule. After experiencing military rule under Yahya and Zia, military rule had lost its credibility in the eyes of the masses, similarly after the four governments of Nawaz and Benazir, democracy too had lost credibility. Musharraf's takeover was greeted with a sigh of relief, at least life and property would find some level of protection. Perhaps the rapacious corruption would be checked.

To prolong his rule, Musharraf entered into a secret deal brokered by the US, to bring Benazir back to become prime minister, with himself as president. To facilitate this deal, he enacted the National Reconciliation Order (NRO) condoning all previous corruption. But the best laid plans are often overturned by unexpected events. Benazir was assassinated and Zardari, elected on a wave of sympathy, replaced Musharraf as president. The latter's handling of the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Chaudhry, proved disastrous. He was forced to doff his uniform, allow elections with the PPP and the PMLN as contenders, and finally to resign as president.

The PPP government that followed is recognised as the most corrupt in Pakistan's history. Key institutions were subverted. General Kayani, the army chief, was given a three-year extension by Zardari, for which the former remained eternally grateful. The army watched Zardari complete his term.

In the 2013 elections, Nawaz received a massive mandate. But his third term as prime minister was again cut short after the Panama Papers scandal, which led to his disqualification for life by the Supreme Court. He selected Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to replace him, but continued to remain the moving force behind the party.

The 2018 elections brought Imran Khan into power. Khan attacked the corruption of Nawaz and Zardari; he promised to usher in a *Naya Pakistan*. But within two years, it became clear that the new government was failing to deliver due to its indecisive economic policies, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The opposition parties united and began a

*Ayub had justified his tenure by ensuring economic growth. Bhutto claimed liberation of the masses from quasi-slavery. Zia pointed to the higher growth rate in his tenure, which his opponents argued was misleading since it represented the price for selling Pakistan to the US in their war against Russia.*

movement against Imran, whom they called the 'elected Prime Minister'. Nawaz, now in exile, attacked the army high command for interfering in politics.

Political observers talk of settlement of the present conflict between the opposition and Imran Khan plus the military establishment in terms of victory and defeat.

They see the Sharif family spending the coming decade in jail or exile. Nawaz is being condemned not just for corruption, but he is also being seen as a traitor to Pakistan. Nawaz says he has been elected three times as Prime Minister, and exploded six test bombs in response to the five Indian blasts. But how relevant are those bombs and blasts in the present context?

In the 1960s, Pakistan was a success

story. Today it is not. The deterioration of Pakistan is a result of wars and internal conflict, corruption, bad governance, weak leadership, and the game of musical chairs between civilian and military rulers. These factors have held back education and family planning; have deterred both foreign investors and domestic businessmen from making long-term plans; have led to the flight of both capital and skilled professionals; have resulted in extremely low savings and revenue collection and have made the Pakistan of today a highly indebted state, unable to meet its expenditures for debt servicing and defence, let alone for running the federal government. The rupee has lost value dramatically, both internationally against the dollar and domestically in terms of spending power. In 1970, a dollar cost Rs 5, by 2020 it cost Rs 160, an increase by 30 times. In 1970, the salary of a servant was Rs 60, which grew to Rs 18,000 by 2020, an increase of 300 times. The country is broke.

The most vivid illustration of what is wrong with Pakistan is the Reko Diq project. Reko Diq has 41 million ounces of gold and 50 million tons of copper awaiting extraction, but litigation and accusations of corruption have stalemated the project and the World Bank International Tribunal has imposed a penalty of \$ 6 billion, an amount equal to our recent IMF loan.

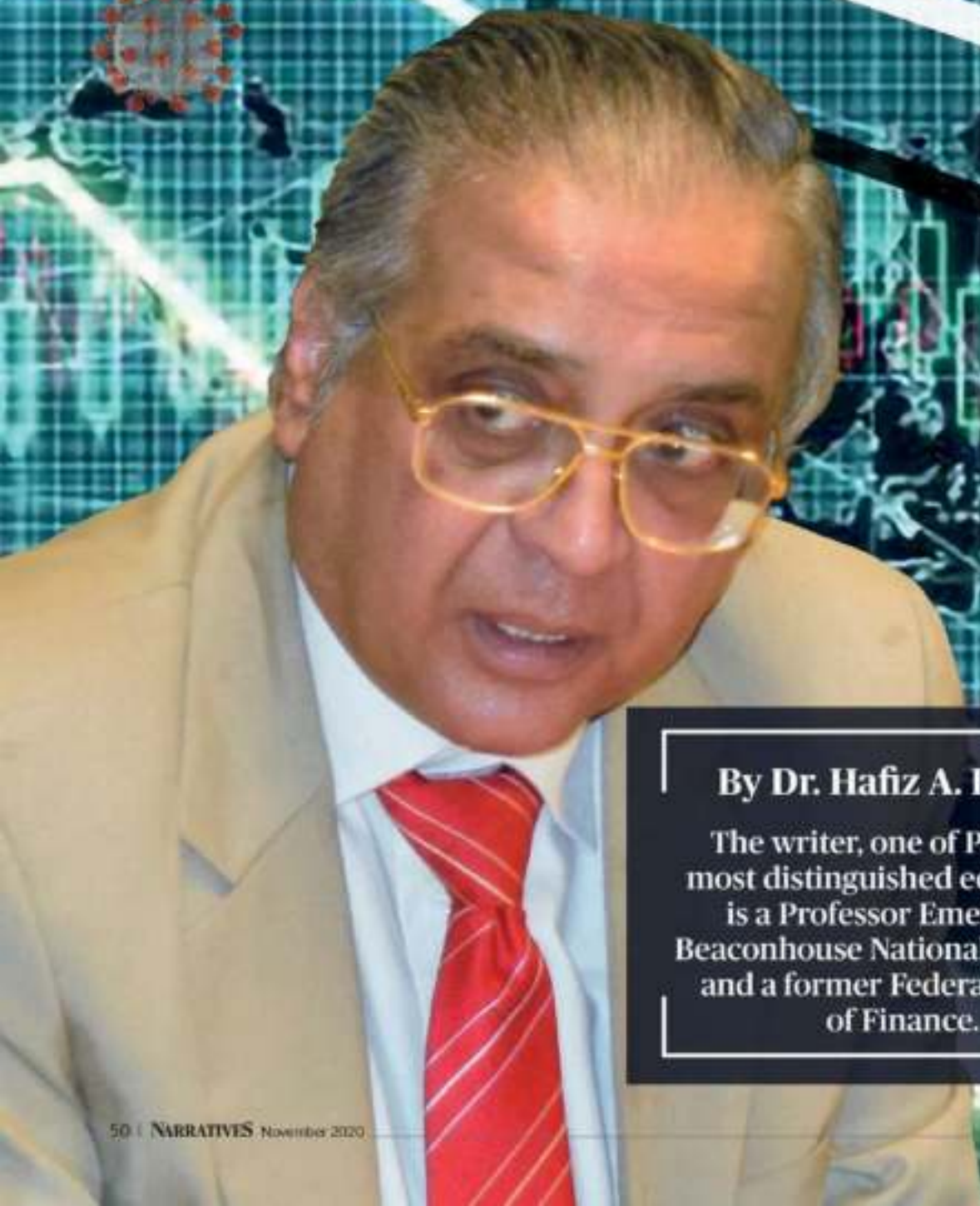
But negatives aside, Pakistan has also had its share of achievements. It boasts two Nobel laureates, Dr Abdus Salam and Malala Yousafzai; the world's best squash player, Jahangir Khan; the world's best bridge player, Zia Mahmood; and the two-time Oscar winner, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. Also, it is home to Arfa Randhawa, who at the age of 9 became the world's youngest Microsoft professional. Additionally, Pakistan is recognised as a nuclear power with the sixth largest army in the world.

The critical question now is, what does Pakistan's political future look like? How can we build a strong, just and prosperous nation? Is democracy the answer, or is it military rule - or is it neither? China and other successful Asian countries are showing us a new and different way to run our country. Will we rise to the occasion or will we continue to tread the same beaten track? ■



# thinktank

## Stabilising Pakistan



**By Dr. Hafiz A. Pasha**

The writer, one of Pakistan's most distinguished economists, is a Professor Emeritus at Beaconhouse National University and a former Federal Minister of Finance.

## Economy in Peril

Will political instability push Pakistan's precarious finances to the edge of the precipice?

**T**he year 2020-21 started with the negative impact of the widespread COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of the people of Pakistan. The year 2019-20 had ended with a negative GDP growth rate of close to 1.5 percent, a bigger fall than initially estimated by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics of negative 0.4 percent. Estimates are that by now over 5 million workers have been laid off and almost 20 million people have, unfortunately, fallen below the poverty line.

Various projections have been made about the prospects for the ongoing year, 2020-21. It is indeed fortunate that the incidence of COVID-19 has flattened out, although there is the risk that there may be a second wave of the pandemic.

Projections of the GDP growth rate in 2020-21 range from a low of only 0.5 percent by the World Bank and 1 percent by the IMF to a high of 2 percent by the Asian Development Bank and the Annual Plan prepared by the Planning Commission. The negative impact of low growth on the people of Pakistan will be further augmented by the continuation of a high rate of inflation. In effect, the economy will be in the grips of 'stagflation.' The inflation rate was double-digit in 2019-20. Projections of the inflation rate in 2020-21 range from 6.5 percent by the government to 9 percent by the World Bank and the IMF. The inflation rate of the Consumer Price Index had already exceeded 9 percent in the month of September. Food inflation has reached a peak rate of 15 percent and severely affected the cost of living of the lower income groups.

Consequently, even with a growth rate of 2 percent, unemployment will continue to increase by over 1 million. Per capita income will fall and even more people will be rendered poor. If, however, the GDP growth rate remains even lower at close to 0.5 percent, then the economy



With the economy already in perilous waters due to Covid, the PDM threatens to sink the ship.

*The immediate impact of the formation of the PDM and its charter of demands is greater economic uncertainty. In the first week after the announcement of the formation of the PDM there was a decline of 900 points in the KSE-100 Share Price Index.*

will remain severely depressed, another 2.5 million workers could lose jobs and 5 million more people could fall below the poverty line.

Given these dire prospects, there is

now the likelihood of additional negative economic impact due to political turmoil. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) was formed on September 20 this year. It is an alliance of eleven opposition political parties. The PDM has a 26-point charter of demands. These include the end of the military establishment's role in politics; production of missing persons; end of media restrictions; resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan and so on. Joint rallies will be held in all four provinces, followed by larger protests in December and a Long March to Islamabad in January 2021. Already, two rallies have been held, one in Gujranwala and

the other in Karachi. Protests by the PDM have been fuelled by the prevailing high levels of unemployment, inflation and poverty.

The immediate impact of the forma-



tion of the PDM and its charter of demands is greater uncertainty about the operations of the economy over the next few months. This was first registered in the stock market. In the first week after the announcement of the formation of the PDM there was a decline of 900 points in the KSE-100 Share Price Index. This process continued and by October 6 the market was down by over 3000 points or 6 percent. Currently the index is 2010 points below its level on September 18. This has implied a loss in market capitalisation of Rs 377 billion.

Therefore, the stock market has been the first casualty. Earlier, there had been a recovery after the catastrophic fall in the index in March 2020 of 8752 points or 23 percent, due to the COVID-19 attack. From April to August the market gained 11880 points, due particularly to the successful effort by the government to control the spread of the pandemic.

The likely poor performance of the economy in 2020-21 has already led to a big withdrawal by potential investors, both domestic and foreign. Imports of machinery for setting up projects in the country are down by 17 percent in the first quarter of 2020-21. Foreign direct investment has fallen by more than 24 percent. External investors in Pakistani equity have withdrawn over \$100 million. Overall, foreign investment in Pakistan has fallen by over 56 percent. The danger is that if risk perceptions of Pakistan's economy increase due to the ongoing political tussle between the opposition and the government, then private investment could plummet even more and substantially more equity funds may exit from Pakistan.

Turning to the inflow of externally borrowed funds into the government account, these have also fallen sharply by over \$1.3 billion in the first two months of 2020-21. Therefore, the financial account of the balance of payments has turned negative by \$408 billion as compared to a surplus of over \$1.7 billion in the first two months of 2019-20. Fortunately, the current account has turned positive at \$805 million due to the big jump in home remittances of \$1.2 billion. However, with many workers returning it is not clear

*The danger is that if risk perceptions of Pakistan's economy increase due to the ongoing political tussle, then private investment could plummet even more and substantially more equity funds may exit from Pakistan.*

how long the increase in remittances will persist.

The foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan have followed a variable path since February 2020. Immediately after the COVID-19 attack, they fell in the month of March by almost \$2 billion. This was primarily due to the hurried exit of 'hot money' worth \$3 billion. Fortunately, Pakistan was able to access the Rapid Financing Facility of the IMF for \$1.4 billion on an emergency basis. Also, quietly, the SBP has engaged in short-term borrowing from commercial banks from the balance in the foreign currency accounts. This borrowing was \$2.8 billion in February 2020. By April the level of borrowing was raised to \$5.3 billion and it now stands at \$5.8 billion. There is a need to recognise that while the foreign exchange reserves of the SBP are \$11.8 billion as of October 6, 2020, in net terms, excluding the short-term borrowing, they stand at only \$6 billion. This is already a critically low level of foreign exchange reserves.

The added problem is that the IMF programme with Pakistan under the Extended Fund Facility has effectively been inoperative since the beginning of 2020. Even the second review has not yet been completed. The primary reason is the inability of the federal government to implement the reforms agreed with the Fund. These relate primarily to the enhancement of the power tariffs to stop the accumulation of the circular debt and tax reforms, through a 'mini budget,' to achieve the target growth in FBR revenues of 24 percent in 2020-21. The environment is hardly conducive for

implementing these reforms in the face of public protests against high prices and bigger electricity bills. The risk is that if the programme remains non-functional this will lead to further reduction in funds from bilateral and multilateral donors and international commercial banks to Pakistan. Also, any flotation of Euro or Sukuk bonds will have to offer an extremely high interest rate in the nature of a risk premium.

This brings us to the unfortunate bottom line. The expected poor performance of the economy and the political risks associated with the PDM's efforts at dislodging the

present government could lead to a big decline in external inflows and exit of equity funds and profits of multinational companies, such that Pakistan may come perilously close to default on its external payments in the foreseeable future.

Already, the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit in its Global Outlook Report of September 18 has identified countries who are at risk of sovereign default. Argentina, Ecuador and Lebanon are already in a state of default.

The EIU has singled out three Asian countries that are at risk of default. These are Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Mongolia. Pakistan was identified even before the breakdown of the political process in the country. Regarding Pakistan, the EIU says that the country can only avoid default through IMF support and deferment of the relatively large repayment of loans to international commercial banks, especially of China.

If Pakistan were to approach default the economic situation would worsen manifold. Essential imports will be in short supply. The value of the rupee could plummet to a multiple of the present exchange rate. The inflation rate may even approach triple digit.

Pakistan must avoid this unprecedented crisis. We can only make a humble plea that better sense must prevail both in the opposition parties and the government. The National Assembly should be used as the institution for resolving differences and hopefully arriving at a consensus on the minimum agenda of reforms. The move towards a sovereign default situation must be avoided at all cost. ■



## Not Above the Law

The distinction between Asset Declaration Laws and Amnesty Schemes must be kept in mind in order to retain investor confidence.

**T**his article describes my understanding on matters relating to the Asset Declaration Laws introduced in Pakistan in 2018 and 2019. These laws were introduced in special circumstances and contain special procedures.

### Policy and Procedures

It would be advantageous to describe my personal involvement in the development of the aforesaid two statutes. Since there is no precedence on such enactments in Pakistan and elsewhere, therefore it is extremely important to appreciate the policy and procedures under which these special statutes were introduced.

There had been a constant struggle after 9/11 to counter the subject of 'Terror Financing.' In subsequent years, there has been an international policy direction that funding to terrorist organisations be stopped. In order to achieve that goal the first action is to identify the assets that may be prone to such abuse. It is to be clearly appreciated that the objective of the whole exercise locally and internationally is not to collect taxes. The only rationale and objective of that exercise is to identify the beneficial ownership of assets. It is reiterated that the objective is to identify the beneficial ownership as the abuse can only be done by a beneficial owner, not the legal owner. The distinction between legal and beneficial ownership is extremely important to combat terror financing as in the past, on the international level, there had been recognition of identifying legal ownership without disclosing the beneficial ownership. That curtain must now be lifted.

In order to achieve this objective, the OECD issued a detailed guideline on voluntary asset disclosure. These guidelines provided the basic features that should be contained in such statutes or regulations. It is reiterated that such



statutes or regulations do not form part of the general scheme of income taxation law, as such laws are there to collect taxes, which is not the objective in this case. Furthermore, the whole structure is designed on a voluntary basis, as the primary objective is to identify the beneficial ownership and not to levy tax on income from which such assets have been created. For this reason, in almost all the cases, the rate of tax paid under these statutes is nominal in nature. These actions are not similar to the generic tax amnesty schemes of the past.

In 2016 there was 'Panama Leaks,' under which a list was issued of substantial foreign assets of Pakistani citizens. After that disclosure, a malicious campaign was started against the persons whose names appeared in the 'Panama Leaks.' There were all kinds of assets under that disclosure, including those disclosed in the tax records or otherwise. There were those where funds were transferred through regularised procedures of remittance or otherwise. Furthermore, there were assets in the name of people who had

held public offices in the past. In the wake of this chaos, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took a suo-moto notice of the case. Along with Mr Mahmood Mandviwala, I was appointed 'amicus curie' in that case. I provided a written reply to the Court and resultantly the Supreme Court of Pakistan through its order closed that suo-moto case with an observation about the asset declaration law that had been issued in the meantime.

After the Supreme Court decision, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of the then Governor, State Bank of Pakistan, Mr Tariq Bajwa, to decide the next strategy. The Committee inter alia included me, Mr Khalid Anwar, Mr Mahmood Mandviwala, Mr Atif Bokhari and Mr Atif Bajwa. It is to be noted that there was no member from the Federal Board of Revenue for the primary reason that identification of assets outside Pakistan represented a foreign exchange regulation issue, and tax incidence was consequential. The committee recommended that the national and international environment

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



earnestly required the introduction of an 'Asset Declaration Law'. It is strongly reiterated that the need for an asset declaration was identified, not being a 'tax amnesty' under the income tax law.

After detailed deliberation, including representation before the Prime Minister of Pakistan, it was decided that an Asset Declaration Law would be introduced. Subsequently in 2018, during the premiership of Mr Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the first Asset Declaration Law in Pakistan was introduced. This was the first such law in Pakistan as all the amnesty schemes introduced in the past were the by-products of and derived from the income tax laws. Then in early 2019, the second Asset Declaration Law was introduced, which was essentially a continuation of the earlier law.

#### Asset Declaration Laws and Tax Amnesty Schemes

These regulations are completely different in nature, status and process of implementation. The state of Pakistan has issued more than five tax amnesty schemes in the past and the same was done in India. Tax amnesty schemes are the provisions in taxation laws that provide amnesty and immunity from tax under the tax laws from income tax on income that was chargeable to tax but had not been taxed. Under these laws there is no amnesty or immunity under any other law including the Companies Act, Foreign Exchange Law etc. The authority to introduce such schemes is 'derived' from a specific provision laid down in the tax statute. This provision was contained in Section 59D of the Income Tax Ordinance, 1979. In addition to amnesty from tax, such schemes also provide regulations for any manner, if required, under which information or enquiry can be made under those schemes. All such proceedings are, therefore, governed by the income tax laws.

As against that, an asset declaration law is not a tax amnesty. An asset declaration law is a specific piece of legislation that provides a charge of tax under that statute on assets that are voluntarily declared. This is not an income tax or wealth tax. It is a 'special tax' on undisclosed assets or income. The most important feature of such statutes is that

they override the provisions of income tax laws in toto. As a result of that overriding effect, the provisions relating to undisclosed income, assets or expenditure as contained in the income tax statute become inapplicable. In other words the assets (and the income from which such assets have been created) are only taxable under that specific statute with a consideration that other laws, including income tax laws become applicable on that undisclosed income/asset. The primary consideration

*It is reiterated that such statutes or regulations do not form part of the general scheme of income taxation law, as such laws are there to collect taxes, which is not the objective in this case.*

for incorporating these statutes is to bring the asset in the record without any probe into the manner in which such assets have been created and the manner in which foreign exchange regulations were required to be complied. This clearly means that with respect to such assets/income the provisions of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 are totally inapplicable. For example a notice cannot be issued about such assets under the income tax ordinance.

In this connection it is to be noted that in the case of all the tax amnesty schemes introduced in the past there were specific provisions that there will be no enquiry about the source of income from which such assets have been created. In that Asset Declaration Law there is no such statement. This does not mean that in this case an enquiry can be made. The statement as above, is not contained for the reason that any such statement is not required, this is a tax under a specific statute which has been placed overriding the income tax

proceedings and chargeability of tax. Therefore, there is no significance, need or relevance for making such a statement in this case.

With respect to this subject it is primarily necessary to keep in mind the distinction between an asset declaration law and a tax amnesty scheme. In this connection it is also very important to appreciate that a conservative country like India, had a very successful Voluntary Disclosure Scheme under the Income Tax Act, 1961, introducing a 'Black Money Law' as a separate statute in 2015. The Indian Asset Declaration Law is an excellent example for explaining the concepts that are being discussed in this article.

#### Income Tax Officers and Asset Declaration Law

It has been reported that tax officers are making enquiries with respect to asset or income disclosed under the asset declaration law. In this connection it is very strongly stated that no income tax officer has any authority or jurisdiction to seek any information or make any enquiry that relates to the Asset Declaration Law. This is not a contention. It is the heart and soul of the Asset Declaration Law. This matter can be properly appreciated when we examine the Indian Asset Declaration Law.

Under the Indian statute there are specific sections in the Asset Declaration Law to provide the jurisdiction to certain officers to seek certain information with regard to the asset declaration made. Furthermore there is a specific section identifying the provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1961 that are to be applicable under the Asset Declaration Law. This is more than sufficient to identify that the Income Tax Act, 1961 is altogether not applicable to the Asset Declaration Law and wherever the legislature desired, the respective provisions were 'adopted' not 'assumed' under the Law.

In Pakistan there is no provision in the Asset Declaration Law about the manner in which any enquiry by the state (income tax officer is not relevant) can be made with respect to the Asset Declaration Law. This is not an omission. The Asset Declaration Law provided that the federal government will make rules with respect to the Act. The rules, if any are

introduced by the federal government, will decide the manner in which the federal government, not the FBR, will decide about the course of action to be adopted for any information or enquiry. Unless and until those rules are there, no authority in Pakistan is empowered to even touch any information as contained in the Asset Declaration Law. It is not a legal contention. This subject is the soul of asset declaration law based on international guidelines and there is no doubt or confusion on the matter.

It is strongly stated that no officer of the federal government including the FBR has any jurisdiction or authority to touch any matter relating to an asset declaration made by a person under the Asset Declaration Law.

#### Asset Declaration and Information Received from CRS

Pakistan, under the multilateral arrangement, receives information under the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) for foreign assets held by Pakistani citizens. This is an excellent step. This information is under ownership of the FBR, and it is fully entitled to use that information for identifying the income that was required to be taxed but had not been taxed. All the actions undertaken by the FBR on that basis are correct and valid.

When a person is confronted about a domestic or foreign asset in his name that has been created out of the income chargeable to tax but that had not been taxed, then one of the answers of that person could be that such and such asset has been declared under the Asset Declaration Law by that person or any other person being the beneficial owner of that asset, then no further proceedings/enquiry or action against that person can be made by the taxation officer. However, if on the basis of any other information, not being the information provided by the CRS it can be established by the tax officer that the asset identified is not the same as declared in the Asset Declaration Law, then there can be an enquiry about that other asset, provided the assessing officer has identified the source from which such asset has been created. Lastly, it is very important to understand and implement the concept that identifica-

tion of an asset under the CRS and its location in an asset declaration is the end of the matter. The provisions of income tax laws are effective up to this border. There is no permission to cross that border. Anything beyond that is a territory ruled by a different law. To summarise the matter, it is stated that tax officers' enquiries are compulsorily required to be stopped as soon as it is identified by a statement by any declarant that such and such asset has been

#### Trail and Source of Assets Declared Under the Asset Declaration Law

These statements may appear to be an attempt to safeguard untaxed wealth. This may be a true observation. However, once the legislature has adopted an approach, the same cannot be later weighed on the balance of moral and social grounds.

The primary purpose of an asset declaration is to identify the legal/benefi-



*The Asset Declaration Law was introduced under the premiership of Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.*

cial ownership of assets and not the collection of tax. This principle is applicable for all cases, including those where there is no chance of identifying the trail of earning any income and its destination to an offshore entity. If such trail would be considered to be available or can be considered to be placed by the declarant, then there will be no rationale for introducing the Asset Declaration Laws. When the state of Pakistan, on the basis of events as referred to in earlier paragraphs clearly understood that there is no possibility of identifying the assets and the trail of income from which such assets have been created and the manner in which a local income landed in a foreign asset or vice versa then it introduced a special law to tax such assets/income. That law is not related to the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. That law will itself decide the manner in which the federal government will act for implementation if so required. The government of Pakistan has decided not

declared under the Asset Declaration Law. There is no authority to proceed further for the reason that tax under a specific statute has already been paid. This is so for the reason that such asset declaration laws remove such assets from the ambit of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001 and any enquiry or information about the Asset Declaration Law can only be made under that statute. The authorities created by the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 are not relevant in this case.

To summarise this aspect it is stated that if any asset identified in the CRS is located in any asset declaration then there cannot be any action against that asset under any law for the time being in force. This is a clear legal status and any encroachment and trespassing would be detrimental to the very spirit of the asset declaration. If there is any such case, then the taxpayer is fully entitled not to respond to such question to a limited extent.



to make any such provision as yet. Accordingly, once it is established that an asset identified in the CRS has been declared anywhere in the asset declaration by any person, the wheel of enquiry, trail, link, identification or any other action under the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 is halted without any recourse. This matter can be further explained by the following illustration.

Mr A earned a commission income of \$100,000 in the UK in the years 2005 to 2007. This income was chargeable to tax for Mr A in Pakistan. In the year 2007, Mr A transferred such amount to Pakistan through *hawala* and placed the same in a bank account. The bank account in Pakistani rupee was never declared in his tax return. In the year 2014, Mr A transferred the amount held in a Pakistani bank account to Canada through *hawala* and from that sum bought a flat in Canada for a sum of \$120,000. In 2018, Mr A declares the sum of rupees equivalent to \$120,000 as undisclosed income under the domestic asset/income declaration law. In 2019, the tax officer receives the information about (a) the commission income in the UK, (b) interest income equivalent to \$20,000 when the funds were placed in a Pakistan bank and (c), through the CRS, about the ownership of a flat in Canada with a purchase price of \$120,000.

The question is identification of actions that the taxation officer can take in this respect. On the availability of this information, the maximum amount that the assessing officer can tax under section III of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 is the rupee equivalent of \$120,000. An enquiry can be made from Mr A about the same. As soon as Mr A provides a document to the effect that a sum of rupees equivalent to \$120,000 has been declared under the Asset Declaration Law 2018, the authority of the taxation officer freezes. The tax officer cannot disqualify the right under the Asset Declaration Law on the apparent grounds that the trail from the UK to Pakistan and from Pakistan to Canada is not available. As is apparent from the case, in these circumstances and in such cases the question of any trail is not conceivable and does not arise 'ab-initio.' Even if, for argument's

sake, it is agreed that the question of enquiry after the identification of the assets and income in the declaration is made available, the primary question that will always remain unanswered will be the link between income earned in dollars then converted into Pakistani rupees and then again converted into dollars. There is no conceivable manner or scientific assertion to join the broken links. The one option is to ignore the

Declaration Law of 2018 or 2019, the hands of the taxation officer are tied up. All the rights under the ordinance become abrogated. This may look strange if the matter is examined in the light of the Income Tax Ordinance. However, the spirit and rationale of the matter would become clear once a distinction is made between an asset declaration law and an amnesty scheme under the tax ordinance.

*The primary consideration for incorporating these statutes is to bring the asset in the record without any probe into the manner in which such assets have been created and the manner in which foreign exchange regulations were required to be complied. This clearly means that with respect to such assets/income the provisions of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 are totally inapplicable.*

declaration and tax rupee equivalent of \$120,000 under section III of the Ordinance. If that option is adopted, then the first unanswered question will be whether there is a sum of dollars or otherwise. Any other assertion means that there is one sum of \$120,000 for which an asset has been identified. Unless the other asset of the same value is identified, the right of the declarant cannot be touched if the income undisclosed is equal to \$120,000. This matter can be further simplified by adding another angle. If, for argument's sake, the fact is that the flat has been acquired from a source outside Pakistan that was not chargeable to tax and there is another income of \$120,000 under the aforesaid trail, then until and unless the other \$120,000 source is identified, the first assertion of the declarant is gospel.

Even if it is accepted that any such asset/income other than \$120,000 is there, no enquiry from the declarant can be made as long as the declaration of income is equal to \$120,000. Just at the moment the declarant equalises the value of assets identified in the CRS with the amount declared under the Asset

To conclude this subject it is stated that identification of trail is 'ab-initio' excluded under the law. The value of asset identified if taxed under the Asset Declaration Law provides exemption from tax under the Ordinance for income to that extent. As long as the facts are over and above the same, there is no role of the FBR in that matter.

The law, whether being equitable or not, provided a right to the declarant and the same cannot be touched/disturbed on any ground. It is further stated that international institutions, monitoring fiscal policies of Pakistan, were duly appraised on the subject of the effects and repercussions arising on account of the enactment of the Asset Declaration Law.

The aforesaid technical matter has been discussed at this forum in order to highlight the undesired steps undertaken by government functionaries when the intent or purpose of a regulation is not fully disseminated. It is therefore considered that no amateur action will be undertaken which will erode the confidence of the sovereign in financial regulatory matters. ■



# INF•CUS

## Economy of Wheat

## The Great Price Spiral

Can the government's Minimum Support Price play an effective role in stabilising wheat prices?



By Dr Abid  
Qaiyum Suleri

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



**I**n many parts of the world, COVID-19 caused not just an economic downturn, but a severe food crisis, due to disruption in food supply chains. Pakistan's economy, too, was hit by the pandemic. However, food supply chains remained intact and food availability, even during the peak phase of the pandemic, was not a matter of concern.

Having said that, sky rocketing food prices – especially the price of wheat – are irking both the government and the people of Pakistan. The masses find purchasing this staple item beyond their means while the government struggles to fend off criticism that it has been unable to control food prices.

With its 37 percent contribution to total food energy, wheat is not only the staple food crop for Pakistan, but it is an important pillar of food security. Reduced availability or increased price are important triggers for food inflation in Pakistan. During the '80s and '90s, Pakistan remained a net importer of wheat. However, since the year 2000, with a production of 24-26 million tons, it gradually turned self-sufficient.

Increase in wheat production in Pakistan is incentivised through a minimum support price (MSP). This is a pre-announced price at which provincial food departments and Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation (PASSCO, a federal agency) procure 25-30 percent of total wheat produce, in order to maintain strategic reserves and ensure smooth supply of wheat flour at a stable price. The MSP for wheat crop 2021 was announced at Rs 1600/40 kg, which is 200 rupees higher than last year's MSP. This is the sixth increase in MSP since 2008-09 when the PPP government fixed it at Rs 950/40 kg.

Fixing MSP is a Catch 22 decision for any government. An MSP less than cost of production would erode the profitability of wheat farmers. On the other hand, an MSP on the higher side can trigger food inflation and erode the purchasing capacity of urban consumers. Thus successive governments have tried to watch the interests of both producers and consumers while fixing the MSP.

Whether the government should engage in the wheat procurement business at all and whether the MSP is

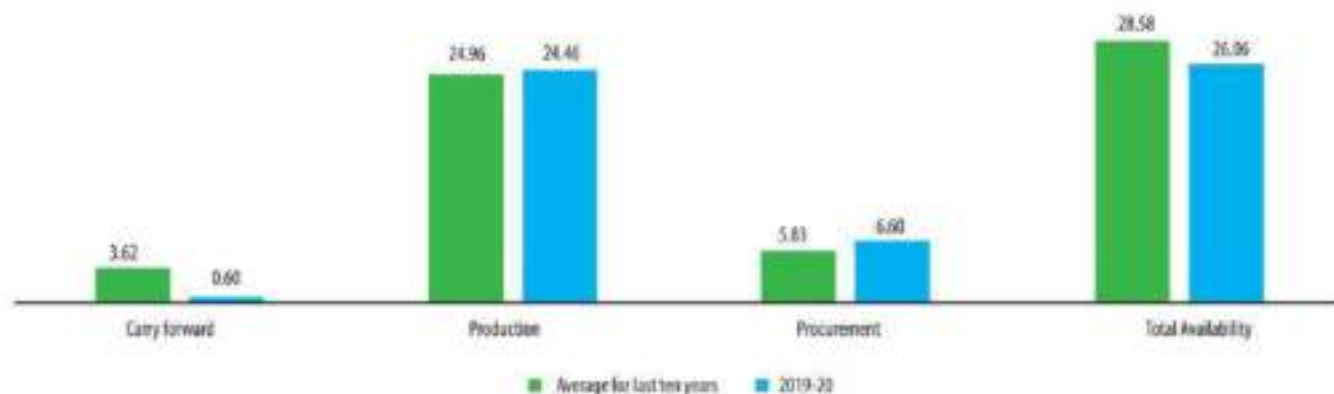
the most efficient way of subsidising farmers is a moot point. In this regard, one should note a historical fact about the wheat MSP in Pakistan. The MSP has often been above international prices. The MSP of wheat in dollar terms plays an important role in determining how much wheat is likely to get smuggled out from Pakistan. From 2013 to 2017, the MSP was Rs 1300 per 40 Kg (US\$315 per ton), reasonably higher than international prices. In theory this should have helped the government to restrict wheat smuggling to Afghanistan and beyond. On the other hand, the higher price compelled the government to provide a subsidy of US\$90-120/ton (shared equally by the federal and provincial governments) to export surplus wheat.

Last year, despite the ban on wheat exports imposed in July 2019, the government exported 48000 tons of 'surplus' wheat. However, the exports were followed by an increase in domestic wheat prices. Here it is pertinent to mention that domestic wheat prices are controlled by the government through an 'issue price,' which is often a subsidised price at which food departments supply



Figure 1

### Wheat Availability: Last Year Vs Last 10 years



Year	Carry forward MMT	Production MMT	Procurement MMT	Total Availability MMT
Average for last ten years	3.6196	24.9556	5.8319	28.5752
2019-20	0.602	25.457	6.596*	26.059

wheat to flour mills. Millers, in turn are bound to produce flour at a pre-agreed grinding ratio (of flour, bran and other by-products) and sell at a government-controlled price.

Coming to the abnormal increase in the price of wheat last year, an FIA enquiry report (April 2020) highlighted low carry forward stocks as a major reason for this price escalation. Last year's carry forward stocks of 0.602 million tons (Figure-1) were 3.0 million tons lower than the ten year average of carry forward stocks (3.619 million tons). The Sindh food department did not procure any wheat last year, while the Punjab food department and PASSCO were unable to meet their respective procurement targets.

One was expecting the situation to improve with the arrival of a new wheat crop in April-May 2020. However, like the last few years, windstorms and rains during the harvesting season affected the standing wheat crop in Punjab. Low yield on the back of reduced wheat cultivation area (an expected 9.2 million hectares ended up at 8.5 million hectares) meant a shortage of wheat. It was officially announced that Pakistan missed its wheat production target by 1.6 to 1.8 million tons. This news alerted international wheat suppliers that Pakistan

*Sky rocketing food prices - especially the price of wheat - are irking both the government and the people of Pakistan. The masses find purchasing this staple item beyond their means while the government struggles to fend off criticism that it has been unable to control food prices.*

would be a captive buyer, resulting in an increase in international wheat prices.

Back home, to achieve its procurement target, the Punjab government did not allow traders and millers to purchase wheat from farmers at purchase points. They were allowed to enter the market only after the Punjab government had procured 4 million tons of wheat. However, by that time, the market had already dried up. The marketable surplus not purchased by the government had already been stocked by speculators hoping to make a windfall profit. Wheat prices in the open market had gone way

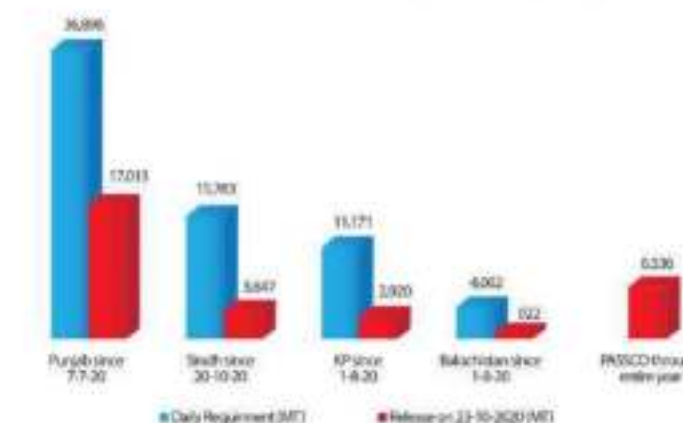
higher than the MSP.

The millers went on strike and pressurised the Punjab food department to start releases from official storages in July 2020, a couple of months earlier than it would do normally. They also negotiated a lower grinding ratio. Earlier they were bound to produce 80 percent wheat flour and 20 percent by-products from the wheat they were getting from official storage. This year they are allowed to produce 65 percent flour and 35 percent by-products (15 percent reduced quantity of flour from subsidised wheat). The Punjab Food Department started releases at the rate of Rs 36.80 per kg and fixed the official sale price of flour at Rs 43 per kg. KP and Balochistan food departments started releases in August, while Sindh started its release from October 20 (Figure 2).

As figure 2 reveals, Pakistan's daily requirement of wheat is around 73,333 tons. Punjab's daily requirement is around 36,000 tons. The Punjab Food department is releasing around 16000 to 17000 tons of wheat per day to flour mills, but these releases are not enough to meet daily requirements. To meet the shortfall, millers have to buy an additional 20,000 tons of wheat per day in the open market, at a price much higher than the government issue price of wheat. It is not rocket science to infer that more than

Figure 2

### Wheat Releases in 2020-21 Against Daily Requirements



half of the flour produced per day in Punjab is bound to be sold at a price much higher than the controlled price, and there is an incentive for the millers of Punjab to sell the subsidised wheat in Sindh where the prices are much higher.

Depreciation of the rupee is another contributory factor to the wheat shortage in Pakistan. 2020's MSP (1400 per 40 kg) equals US\$ 223 per ton, whereas international prices have shot up to US\$ 280 per ton. The price of wheat in Afghanistan is the PKR equivalent of 2550/40 Kg and wheat flour is PKR 3660/40 Kg. This price differential creates a huge incentive for hoarders to smuggle wheat to Afghanistan and beyond, resulting in shortage of domestic supplies. As told to the Senate Standing Committee, "Six million tons of wheat vanished during the harvest."

To meet the wheat shortfall, the government plans to import 1.5 million tons of wheat, while the private sector would import another 1.2 million tons. This would improve the supply situation. Improved supply may force the hoarders to bring out their wheat stocks, those that have not already been smuggled to Afghanistan. However, one should not expect that imported wheat would lead to a substantial reduction in the retail price of wheat flour (Rs 75 per kg against a control price of Rs 43 per kg).

The federal government has waived off all duties and taxes from import of wheat. Imported wheat would cost around Rs 50-52 per kg, add grinding, packing cost

etc., and the price of one kg flour will exceed Rs 55. The government can subsidise to match the issue price, but the private sector cannot, and that will keep on distorting the market prices.

An unpopular way of reducing market distortion would have been to increase the government issue price (increasing subsidised flour prices) to bridge the gap between the government price and the open market wheat price. However, this would give a rallying point to the united opposition to criticise the government.

A truly out-of-the-box approach would be to abolish the wheat MSP that has created a wheat circular debt of Rs 757 billion against total stocks of Rs 320 billion, till December 2019. Abolishing MSP would also save the Rs 38 billion annual cost of buying, storing, and

releasing 4 million tons of wheat in Punjab alone. The 450 billion to 500 billion rupees thus saved may be diverted to targeted subsidies for food security under BSP/EHSAAS, and/or to rigorously monitored distribution through utility stores. However, adopting this approach would be difficult for the government, as it would result in political backlash and erosion of PTI's popularity in the rural constituencies of Punjab.

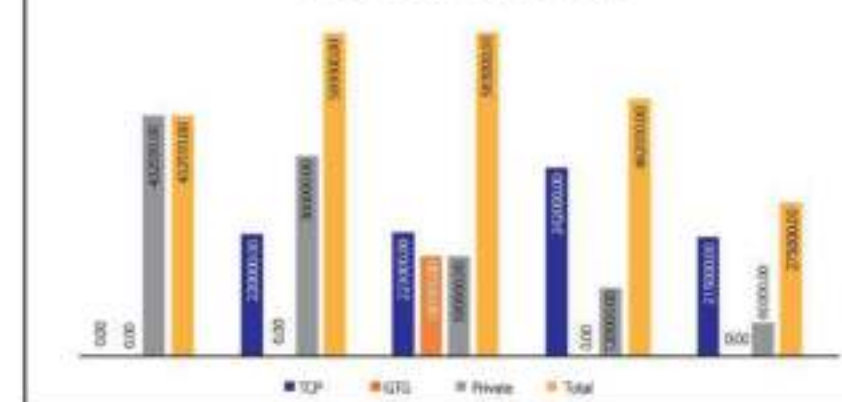
In the medium term, the federal and provincial governments should build their capacity for correct estimation of cultivated area and expected production in the country, to take evidence-based decisions.

In the long run, provincial and federal governments should either develop a foolproof system for tracing, tracking, and implementation of grinding ratio of subsidised wheat all over the country, or relax their control on wheat marketing and restrict themselves to maintaining strategic reserves.

All of these solutions require lowering of the political temperature and functional working relations between opposition parties and treasury benches. For this to happen, the government would have to invite its opponents to the negotiation table, which seems unlikely in the current polarised scenario. One needs to learn to live with the status quo, which is not only confined to COVID-19 and the resultant health and fiscal crisis, but also the food crisis that we have to face due to lack of political consensus on commodity market reforms. ■

Figure 3

### PLANNED IMPORT THROUGH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS





# The Big Question

The continuing high food inflation poses the biggest challenge for Prime Minister Imran Khan's embattled government. High wheat and flour prices have had a snowball effect on the prices of other food items as well. In a developing country like Pakistan, many see the price hike as a deliberate attempt to make the government unpopular and eventually unstable.

Why is food inflation running high in Pakistan?

**Narratives** asked Miftah Ismail, former finance minister and senior leader of the PML-N, Ashfaq H. Khan, principal and dean of the Nust School of Social Sciences and former adviser to the Ministry of Finance and D.G of its Debt Office, and Shandana Gulzar Khan, convener, Special Sub-Committee on Agriculture and SDG, 5, to share their point of view.

## Miftah Ismail

Former finance minister and senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

**I**n both politics and economy, it is not necessary that only big mistakes lead to one's downfall. If a government keeps committing small mistakes, these can also have a huge snowball effect. In the PTI government's case, it is a combination of mistakes and other factors that has aggravated the situation and resulted in substantially pushing up food prices.

Firstly, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) increased the money supply in the system. Monetary expansion always triggers inflation. The SBP increased the money supply in the system by at least 17 percent or roughly 1200 billion rupees through its open market operations over the last fiscal year, the effect of which is now being realised. The SBP bought different-period maturity bonds from commercial banks. This has had an inflationary impact of at least 10 percent.

Secondly, the increased prices of wheat and sugar have also contributed to about a third of the rise in food inflation. This is the result of both incompetence and corruption. For instance, in Punjab, wheat was given for grinding to select millers, and a lot of flour was smuggled into Afghanistan and Central Asia. The decision to give preferential treatment to some millers, denying the market the right to purchase wheat played a major role in jacking up the price of flour. Also, last year around 800,000 tonnes of wheat was used for animal feed, both cattle and poultry.

Then, the Sindh provincial government didn't purchase any wheat itself, presumably because of the NAB cases against them for past purchases of wheat. Perhaps for similar reasons, the federal government decided not to import wheat in a timely manner in spite of the pleadings of the flour mills.

The Punjab government's rationing of wheat supplies to flour mills of its choice has meant that the margin of profit for those mills has increased, as demand for flour continues to outstrip the supply of wheat. An increased supply of wheat would have curtailed the rise in the price of flour. Right now, being a miller is one of the most profitable trades.

*In Punjab, wheat was given for grinding to select millers, and a lot of flour was smuggled into Afghanistan and Central Asia. The decision to give preferential treatment to some millers, denying the market the right to purchase wheat played a major role in jacking up the flour price. Also, last year around 800,000 tonnes of wheat was used for animal feed, both cattle and poultry.*

Another important factor is that the rates of electricity, gas and fertiliser have all been raised. When the input cost goes up, it is natural that the commodity price will

also shoot up. To offset the pressure of increased input costs, the government did not introduce any scheme to help farmers, for instance, by subsidising the addition of gypsum in soil or providing solar tube-wells.

Finally, some of those small farmers, who live on the edge of poverty, also could not cultivate vegetables because of the increased input costs. This resulted in a decline in vegetable production by four to five percent which is not huge, but when it comes to food supply it can have a big impact on prices. All these factors played their part in fuelling food inflation. The government could have managed this by making timely decisions and importing wheat on time. But here again, because wheat prices are up in the international market, the cost of imported wheat will be higher than local wheat when it lands in Pakistan. ■



## Dr. Ashfaq H. Khan

Former advisor to the Ministry of Finance, Principal & Dean of the NUST School of Social Sciences.

**F**ood inflation has remained in the range of 15-16 percent per annum since August 2019. Such a prolonged period of high food inflation has seldom been observed in Pakistan. Higher food prices have substantially eroded the purchasing power of the poor and fixed income groups. Consequently we see a hue and cry in the print and electronic media, which has brought the PTI-led government under tremendous pressure. Moreover, it has given enough ammunition to the opposition to keep the government constantly in the line of fire.

Why have food prices surged and remained at a double-digit level for the last 14 months? There are several factors. Firstly, wheat production has remained constant in the range of 24-25 million tonnes for the last one decade. With the rise in the country's population, the average per capita wheat availability has significantly declined from 145kg per year to 120kg per year during this period. Although, the government reported production of almost 25 million tonnes of wheat in 2019-20, there are indications that untimely rain (March/April 2020) and an outbreak of yellow rust damaged the wheat crop, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where production was 40 percent less than the previous year. The wheat crop was also damaged to some extent in Punjab due to untimely rain and thunderstorms. So the year started with a wheat shortage.

Secondly, the government kept the private sector out of the procurement drive and the provincial food departments tried to procure wheat on their own. The government could procure only 5 million tonnes of wheat i.e. 50-70 percent of the target, while the private sector (millers) could procure only 60,000 to 70,000 tonnes or 66 percent lower than last year. Hence, wheat production was less on the one hand and the procurement of wheat by various government agencies was also substantially less than the target, on the other. Furthermore, flour millers were also not allowed to secure sufficient quantities of wheat. This information was in the knowledge of various stakeholders. Further, the Punjab government started raiding various godowns with a view to bringing wheat into the market. The middlemen, who bought wheat from the farmers as is their normal practice, started hiding the wheat. Consequently there was a shortage in the market. The flour mills did not have enough wheat in stock as the various provincial governments did not release the wheat from their stocks to flour mills, which they usually do from October onwards. Hence, the price of flour continued to rise.

Thirdly, the government imposed a ban on the movement of wheat from a surplus province to a deficit province. This continued to build up pressure on flour prices. For example, wheat production was 40 percent less in KP and they could meet only 20 percent of their target. Thus, wheat and flour prices kept on rising in KP, as well as in the rest of Pakistan.

Fourthly, the international price of wheat also jumped from \$235 per metric tonne to \$275-280 per metric tonne. The domestic price of wheat followed the international prices under the Law of One Price, and hence the domestic price of wheat and flour kept spiralling upwards. In September 2020, it rose by 42-45 percent as compared to its price in September 2019.

What is the relationship between the price of wheat/flour and food inflation? Wheat is the staple diet of the people of Pakistan. The price of wheat serves as a benchmark for other food prices, because they rise in sympathy with wheat prices. When the price of wheat increases, the milkman will raise the price of milk. Empirical evidence in Pakistan suggests that with a 10 percent rise in the support price of wheat, overall inflation shoots up by 3 percent in one year. Wheat prices have a strong bearing on food inflation and hence, on overall inflation.

The rise in wheat/flour prices has led to an increase in the prices of other food items as well, resulting in the persistence of high food inflation with serious consequences for the poor. ■



## Shandana Gulzar Khan

Convener, Special (Sub) Committee on Agriculture and SDG 5.

**S**everal factors are responsible for the persistent food inflation globally. According to the World Bank, "As the coronavirus crisis unfolds, disruptions in domestic food supply chains, other shocks affecting food production, and loss of incomes and remittances are creating food security risks in many countries. Food producers also face huge losses on perishable and nutritious food as buyers have become limited and consumption patterns shift. Though food insecurity is, by and large, not driven by food shortages, disruptions to the supply of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seeds or labour shortages could diminish next season's crop."

Records show that spending growth has stalled since the latter part of June 2020 with one exception: household groceries. Spending on food is up globally and so are prices, which is squeezing families' disposable incomes and access to nutritious food.

For Pakistan, the growth in food inflation is due to similar and massive hits to the farmers. In addition, certain key factors are specific to this region. Firstly, wheat smuggled out of the country to countries with higher demand and prices is driving both scarcity and the rise in domestic wheat prices. Witnesses report that trucks loaded with wheat from Punjab are being smuggled out of the country due to the low MSP (Minimum Support Price) offered to the farmers. Wheat is being sold at Rs 2400 per kg in Pakistani markets, while the MSP received by the farmer is only Rs 1400, which is extremely unfair. If this wheat crosses borders, it fetches even higher returns but unfortunately, this does not benefit the farmer. It is the middlemen, cartels and mafias, who walk away with the profits.

The second major reason is seasonal and annual hoarding. Year after year, Pakistan has witnessed a rise in prices every Ramadan, regardless of which political party is in power. Pakistan's food and commodity markets have been hijacked by well-established mafias, who regulate the market. In 1993, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) faced acute flour shortages. Flour vanished even from the state-run Utility Stores and the public was ransacking government-held stores. There were reports that key political and business figures were involved in massive hoarding of wheat and were not allowing its supply to the millers. Interestingly, now that the current government has expressed its resolve to address the situation, these forces are getting so desperate that they have ganged up with their partners across the country, including some corrupt elements in the bureaucracy.

The third possible factor for the rise in wheat prices could be attributed to the Sindh Government, as it did not release its wheat stocks to the flour mills on time; KP and Punjab started

rolling out wheat stocks well ahead of schedule and in a larger quantity to ensure a lower price of the commodity. Probably they took this decision because of fears of early smuggling, but, this delay encouraged the increase in prices nonetheless. Some view the Economic Coordination Committee's recent decision to fix the wheat support price at Rs 1600 per 40 kg as not being commensurate with market conditions; the Ministry of National Food, Security and Research had recommended that it be fixed at Rs 1750. Sindh meanwhile, has set the price at Rs 2000 per 40 kg, which has generated fears of wheat smuggling from other parts of the country to Sindh. Once again, it is the middleman and the cartels that will benefit. One view emerging from ECC members hailing from the urban areas was that a higher wheat support price would result in inflationary pressure. However, those representing the rural areas argued that the interest of the farmers should be protected and the commodity price must reflect the market level.

Incidentally, the 18th Amendment has also introduced unplanned and unforeseen distortions in the food and agriculture sector. Food security and exports are the responsibility of the federal government, but labour, extension services, plantation, food etc. are the responsibility of the provinces, which unfortunately have done very little by way of loans, food quality upgradation, provision of bio-pesticides or bio-fertilisers, and modernisation of the agriculture sector. Moreover, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent attack on farms by swarms of locusts emanating from East Africa and Saudi Arabia has added to the woes of farmers and threatened Pakistan's food security. ■





# MOOD OF THE MOMENT

## The Cost of Protest

*The PDM's anti-government campaign and its impact on the economy.*



### Shariq Vohra

President Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI).

*"Let us be clear, even though we are on the road to recovery, the economy is still in deep crisis."*

**T**he opposition's anti-government campaign under the banner of the PDM is not a threat to the economy. I am sure that with the passage of time, a stable and sustainable democratic system will evolve. Such opposition movements, staging peaceful public meetings, are part of parliamentary and democratic politics. As the PDM's public meetings are not creating any law and order situation, they remain insignificant when it comes to dampening the economic sentiment.

We know that it has become a norm in our politics for the last 12, 13 years that whenever a government is almost half-way through its term, the opposition starts mounting pressure. There is nothing unusual in it. We get concerned only when the opposition protests trigger violence, or disrupt the inter-city or inter-provincial movements or hurt exports.

While the opposition movement has not dampened business sentiment, the building up of pressure may affect the government's decision-making. But our system has become mature. We expect the government to sustain this pressure.

Coming to foreign investors, they react just like the domestic ones. If there is no violence, they too, have no problem. And this fits for the CPEC projects as well. Here, I need to stress upon the fact that there is an impression that the CPEC projects have slowed down. CPEC played a key role in stimulating our economy. The government should not allow this. CPEC should remain the government's top priority. Prime Minister Imran Khan must keep CPEC high on his agenda and keep in touch with the top Chinese leadership – from its ambassador here to his Chinese counterpart and president.

In the current context, our economic indicators are better than the last year. The sentiment looks good, but if one compares today's numbers with the past, then we are lagging behind in economic growth. The process of mend seems to have started and we expect marginally positive growth of 0.5 to 1 percent this financial year. But let us be clear, even though we are on the road to recovery, the economy is still in deep crisis. The subdued growth prospects this financial year cannot minimise the severe impact COVID has had on the living standards of the people. The government itself has pegged job losses in the economy due to COVID-19 at a whopping 14 million, and poverty is expected to increase for the first time in two decades. These factors are fuelling political opposition.

Our biggest challenge is the energy sector's circular debt. This is a graver challenge and threat not just for the government but for Pakistan compared to any opposition movement.

Our circular debt has surged from what it was in 2016, 17 or 18.



The situation has worsened. The PTI government does not seem to have a plan to address this issue. Our blue-chip energy companies including the PSO, OGDCL, PPL, SNGPL, SSGC – all have been hit by this issue. It is not enough to say that the problem of circular debt is the result of the wrong policies of the past governments. The question now is what the government has done to address this problem.

The government's recent decision to cut electricity rates for small and big industries is a step in the right direction. It will help spur growth and mitigate some of the issues of the power sector.

To improve the country's economic outlook, the government must take the initiative and enter into serious and purposeful dialogue with the opposition parties. Pakistan belongs to everyone and we should never stop talking to one another.

The government should also ensure that businesspeople and industrialists are not being targeted by the NAB (National Accountability Bureau). The NAB should only concentrate on big fish, the present and past public office holders and bureaucrats. For businesses, we have the FBR and the SECP. They are effective institutions and detect and take measures against business people if they indulge in any wrongdoings. The Prime Minister had already declared that businesses stand exempted from accountability by NAB. There is a need to implement this decision. ■



## Ahsan Mehanti

Managing Director and CEO, Arif Habib Commodities.

*"Apart from eroding the confidence of both local and foreign investors, political instability could also offset the economic gains recently witnessed."*

**T**he ongoing political din has already impacted the stock market adversely. The political uncertainty is affecting the economy on a day-to-day basis. A second wave of coronavirus, which now looms overhead, will further aggravate the economic situation. All this uncertainty creates panic among investors and they shy away from making any decisions, as we have seen during the past few weeks of trading at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX).

[Those concerns notwithstanding], the economy has made good progress in the post-lockdown period, and given the economic indicators, the first quarter has been clearly impressive. The balance of payment has shown a surplus in the current account, which is a sign of economic recovery. Local currency is appreciating against the US dollar, which indicates significant foreign inflows, and the appreciation of the rupee has resulted in easing of the domestic debt burden. Inflows of workers' remittances particularly have so far been impressive in the current fiscal year. The inflow of more than \$2 billion for the fourth consecutive month in September 2020 is a positive sign for the country.

The recent significant increase in foreign exchange reserves will help in increasing the capacity of the country to repay its external debt. The improved earnings of corporate entities have resulted in the growth of tax revenue, with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) announcing it had received a record Rs 1 million as tax collection in the first quarter of the current fiscal year. All in all then, the quarter ending on September 30, 2020 has seen a significant improvement in many sectors of the economy.

Key decisions related to the construction industry through the announcement of incentives may also help grow many allied industries. These incentives could yield a number of low-cost housing units and improve the living standard of a broad segment of lower-income

*The economy has made good progress in the post-lockdown period, and given the economic indicators, the first quarter has been clearly impressive. The balance of payment has shown a surplus in the current account, which is a sign of economic recovery. Political instability could also offset the economic gains recently witnessed.*



people. However, challenges remain, not least due to the resurgence of COVID. Inflation is creeping up and food inflation was at 15.8 percent in September 2020. Furthermore, although the trade balance is under control right now, the rise in import payments may increase the demand for US dollars, exerting pressure on the local currency.

The rescheduling of the loan to Pakistan by G20 countries was a good development, and if the IMF also follows suit it would be undeniably beneficial for the economy of the country. But apart from eroding the confidence of both local and foreign investors, political instability could also offset the economic gains recently witnessed. ■

## Mian Anjum Nisar

President, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

*"The prudent policies of the government have started yielding positive results despite difficult economic challenges."*

**T**he country needs stability. Whenever it goes on the path of recovery, we see challenges emerge from the political front, and political instability hurts the economy. The coalition of the opposition parties should take care that their protests and rallies do not affect economic activities, and for its part, the government should negotiate with the opposition to resolve the issues they have raised and avoid conflicts.

The prudent policies of the government have started yielding positive results despite difficult economic challenges, especially those owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and business confidence has been restored. Despite internal and external challenges, the government's strategy has helped put the economy back on the growth trajectory. Recent economic indicators are self-explanatory. The current account has remained in surplus for the last three months, standing at \$792 million in July-September 2020/2021, which is a significant improvement from the deficit of \$1,492 million in the same period last year.

It is now a favourable time for the government to take measures for the promotion of industrial activities. The government's priority should be employment generation, which is Prime Minister Imran Khan's slogan anyway.

So far the government policies have been aimed at increasing exports, and to some extent the policymakers have been successful. The export of textile commodities witnessed an increase of 2.92 percent during the first quarter (July - September) 2020/2021 compared to the same period last year. And exports grew 11.3 percent during September 2020 compared to the same month last year.

The balance of payments showing a current account surplus coincides with signs of an uptick in economic growth, evidenced by an upsurge in the automobile, cement, steel, and fertiliser sectors, at a time when non-oil imports are also picking up – another clear indicator of economic recovery.

The prime reason for the better balance of payment situation is a surprising growth in home remittances. The World Bank had estimated that remittances would decline in countries like Pakistan, but the reverse happened, as the 31 percent growth in the first quarter is the highest since April-June 2011.

Moreover, the current account surplus has also reduced the pressure on the rupee which was earlier depreciating. Local currency has appreciated by around 5 percent in the past couple of weeks to a five-month high, which is good news for the economy.

Apart from a better current account, the US dollar deprecia-



tion against the currencies of other trading partners of Pakistan also explains the rupee's strength against the dollar.

The official reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) soared to the highest point under this government on September 11, 2020, amounting to \$12.8 billion, before coming down to \$11.8 billion by October 9, 2020 owing to commercial external loan repayments.

The inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the country also witnessed an increase of 38.9 percent during the first two months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year. During July-August 2020/2021 the FDI recorded a sum of \$226.7 million in direct investment, compared to \$162 million in direct investment during the same period last year, showing growth of 38.9 percent.

The tax revenue collected by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is also remarkable: the tax agency collected a record Rs 1 trillion during the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

However, to facilitate businesses, the FBR should simplify the mechanism introduced for the payment of refunds, so that the small and medium industry do not have any difficulty in receiving the outstanding amounts.

To accelerate the economic process even further and safeguard economic stability, the provision of job opportunities to the youth should be one of the top priorities of the government. Continuous progress on development projects would be one way of achieving stability, alongside providing employment opportunities for the country's youth. ■





## Champion of the Dispossessed

Throughout his distinguished career in architecture and urban planning, Arif Hasan has searched for low-cost, eco-friendly solutions and championed the rights of the dispossessed.



By Zahra Chughtai

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

**A**rchitect and urban planner, teacher and activist, Arif Hasan has seen Karachi evolve from a well laid-out urban centre to the sprawling, unwieldy megapolis it is today. His work with the Orangi Pilot Project and Urban Resource Centre, just to name a few projects, placed him in a unique position to acquire a deep knowledge and understanding of urban settlements and their related problems.

Arif Hasan occupies the home he moved into in the seventies. And while the city has morphed around it, this low-lying residence, sheltered by venerable old trees, suggests a stillness and steadiness. There is probably less activity in the adjoining office but it still hums with the collective consciousness and ideals of years of work and research.

I was ushered into his small office, filled with books and papers and Arif Hasan greeted me in his low-timbered voice. "Nowadays, I am collecting the *kachra* (scraps) of my life's work," laughed the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Hilal-e-Imtiaz.

Arif Hasan no longer occupies any official post but devotes himself to reading and writing. In fact, several books are in the offing.

His parents migrated to Karachi from Delhi when he was about four years old. "We caught the last train which ran from Delhi to Karachi after Partition," recalls Arif. "I remember arriving at Cantt Station and then going to a refugee camp. But we only stayed there for some hours and my father came and told us that a house had been arranged." The family moved into what used to be an Intelligence school and this is the home where Arif Hasan and his sister grew up.

His father was the secretary of the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, and political ideology, social issues were often the topic of debate and discussion at home. Perhaps that's where the young boy absorbed the spirit of inquiry and a strong sense of justice.

Arif Hasan later went to England to study architecture and subsequently worked in Europe for a few years. "I was very lucky to have gotten the opportunities I did. But I never thought of staying on."

He returned to Karachi and started designing private residences. "Again I was very fortunate. I designed one home and then others just followed. If you name some affluent person of that time, it's likely I designed his home," he says with his characteristic wry smile. He also designed the landmark Hasan Square building. "But we didn't see eye to eye and I stopped working with developers

as a matter of policy after that."

Arif's reputation, however, is built on his ground-breaking work in the development sector. How did that shift come about? He explains that near the home where his family had been settled, many refugees were also settled in *katchi abadis*. Growing up Arif developed close friendships with them.

"When I returned from England I went to meet them and learnt that they were being re-located," recalls Arif. "So they asked me to help them organise the new settlement. But suddenly, they were served eviction notices in violation of the earlier promise."

"I was working on designing the home of a very senior police official at the time and I spoke to him about the issue. He told me, 'You are too young to understand. These people are thieves. Their woman have bad characters. It's better if they are moved far away.' I couldn't work for him anymore. I didn't complete his home."

This was in 1973, and what followed left a deep impact on the young architect. "It was the first time I saw a settlement being demolished. Women screaming and cursing, small children cowering in fear, the older children scrambling to save what they could. I was devastated," says Arif. "Not anymore," he says self-deprecatingly. "I can calmly go and watch an *abadi* being razed now." But a newspaper photo in a corner is lingering proof of how this event shaped his life. "The protesting girl in the newspaper photo looks just like a young girl in that demolition all those years ago," Arif tells me.

This incident made the young architect start to look into land issues. "I continued to design houses. But I also started travelling across Pakistan. I went to far-flung places where there were no roads. I also made many trips by boat in



Sindh and Punjab and I got to know the Mohana community."

Back in Karachi, one day he got a telegram from his Mohana friends asking for help. "Under the new Sukkur Master Plan, the Mohanas were being asked to move from the area where they had been settled for centuries. Even the British had allowed them to stay here." Arif Hasan prepared a proposal and presented it to Ali Hasan Mangi, who was an MNA at the time. "He called me and after speaking to me, he said, 'Leave the plan with me. It's done.' And they were not shifted." Unfortunately, the Mohanas were eventually moved under the PPP government about four years ago.

Working with these disadvantaged communities made Arif Hasan realise how complicated land issues were. "It made me aware that there is a whole other world out there."

Arif began researching and writing on these matters and his writing came to the attention of Ghulam Kibria. "He offered me the job of consultant to the government's Appropriate Technology Development Organisation, of which Kibria sahib was the chairman or 'chorman' as he jokingly called himself."

This experience proved invaluable for Arif Hasan, who got the opportunity to work and experiment with low-cost technology, hydroelectricity, land systems and much more.

"The education I got here prepared me for the Orangi Pilot Project, where I questioned the traditional engineering standards," recalls Arif. But for this he was roundly criticised by the engineering establishment at home and abroad. "Akhtar Hameed Khan was told 'who is this quack? He will sink all your money.' But Akhtar Hameed Khan had faith in Arif Hasan's unusual ideas and told him to carry on. 'We will either swim together or sink,' he said.

Fortunately, Arif Hasan was vindicated and even his harshest critics acknowledged his success. John Pickford, who was the guru of sanitation at the time, actually sent his students here to study our systems."

The OPP's successful sanitation programme and its low-cost housing schemes were both lauded widely and even replicated. But why didn't the government adopt the model on a wider



The old make-shift markets of Saddar lie in ruins.

*The OPP's successful sanitation programme and its low-cost housing schemes were both lauded widely and even replicated. "John Pickford, who was the guru of sanitation at the time, actually sent his students here to study our systems," says Arif.*

scale to solve the problems of its home city? "They were adopted as policies," says Arif. "But there are very deeply entrenched interests in continuing things as they are."

"Another reason is that international donor agencies don't like this model," he explains further. "Their mode of operation is to inflate costs and never take into consideration existing infrastructure. This raises loans manifold."

Arif Hasan also became closely involved in the uplift of the Thari people while working with Ghulam Kibria. "After

the drought in 1987, I wrote an article arguing that the disaster was the result of social change and not lack of rainfall, which was a recurring feature." UNICEF invited him to present his findings and consult on the project which led to the formation of the Thar Rural Development Project, managed by locals of the area.

Another defining moment for Arif Hasan came in 1983 when the then commissioner of Karachi approached him and Ghulam Kibria to do a socio-economic survey of the Lines Area in preparation for a re-modelling proposal. "We were promised a handsome fee and the results were to be presented to some big international agency." But Arif Hasan once again encountered desperate people who were being evicted from their homes. "We could not be party to it and we left the project."

At the time, Arif Hasan was teaching at Dawood College and along with a colleague, Professor Javed Haider, started sending students out into the field to talk to people and investigate facts on the ground. "We would assign students to problem areas and we learnt a lot." This in turn became the basis for the Urban Resource Centre.

With all this first-hand data, the URC became a valuable source of information and advice to government bodies. "Gradually, governments began to listen and we altered a number of projects for the better, like the Mass Transit plan, the

Northern Bypass and others. But the government was more receptive in those days, even under martial law. And the first Benazir Bhutto regime was very receptive."

As a champion of the dispossessed, Arif Hasan has been a vocal critic of the recent anti-encroachment drive in Karachi that aims to gentrify the Saddar area. "I am totally opposed to it," he says. "We gave an alternate proposal, presented a study on street economy but times have changed. People are afraid to take a stand for themselves now."

Threats by disgruntled elements are nothing new for Arif Hasan, who has earned the ire of many during the course of his career. "Of course, I have received threatening calls, had my offices raided by the intelligence. The police and intelligence have helped me as well. But it's different now," he says.

In the absence of state support, it is inevitable that illegal settlements and the informal sector will flourish. "The *dalal* who sets up *katchi abadis* has settled more families than KDA or KMC has," asserts Arif. But do these residents have any security? "They have security but it is not exercised by the courts. There are laws and precedents to protect these *abadis* but they are not honoured."

"There is a very strong anti-poor bias among our middle classes, intellectuals and it is now seen in the judiciary. As in the case of the drive in Saddar, the law was implemented but justice was not given."

The recent rains in Karachi laid bare the weakness of the city as urban flooding destroyed homes and livelihoods. The most affluent areas of the city were among the most hard-hit, focusing attention on a long-brewing crisis. The federal government has also announced a generously funded relief initiative for Karachi.

"They should first focus on what can be done easily. That is to remove blockages for water to enter the sea at points like Gizri Creek, Mai Kolachi etc." explains Arif. "Then we need to stop reclaiming land. But none of this is being done. All the focus is on clearing the drains. Even for that, one just has to identify the choking points. We don't



Though he started out in the private sector, Arif Hasan has become Karachi's most eminent voice on urban development.



*As a champion of the dispossessed, Arif Hasan has been a vocal critic of the recent anti-encroachment drive in Karachi that aims to gentrify the Saddar area. "I am totally opposed to it," he says. "We gave an alternate proposal, presented a study on street economy but times have changed."*

have to bother with the rest for now. This is not a permanent solution but will help enormously in the next rainy season."

He also stresses the need to prepare for a post Covid world. "The ongoing pandemic has made it clear that we cannot manage relief or development without a system of government at the union council level," asserts Arif Hasan. The good news is that the structure is already in place. Backed by data from NADRA, the Union Council has inroads to the entire community. Growing internet usage will make this task easier.

Arif's predictions for the future of Karachi remain rather grim. "The most serious growing issue of Karachi is the widening gap between the rich and poor, economic, spatial and social."

This can be seen clearly with regard to land access. Today affordable land is available only on the outskirts of the city so the poor are being further marginalised.

"Land use in Karachi is determined almost entirely by land value and potential land value. This is not how a city is governed," says Arif. "There is a serious need for urban land reform. And we need to stop using land for speculative purposes." ■







learn at one's convenience and pace of choice. Coupling online learning with physical learning would further enhance the learning experience as it would maintain some connection among students and teachers, as well as provide the liberty to learn whenever, wherever. Therefore, a blended learning model is a more feasible option for the learner of the 21st century.

We are living in the Anthropocene era where humans are affecting the earth's environment, climate, and geology. Humankind and their activities in the last two centuries have endangered the entire ecosystem. Our ecological life support system has been colonised by humans and this has changed the world dramatically.

We need to adopt new ways and make immense efforts for the harmonisation of human civilisation and the biosphere. The old economic model needs to change. We need a fair economic model to decrease uneven wealth distribution and to create a sustainable and humane world. The type of new world we are seeking is in our hands, and we can collectively decide on our course of action. "The future we want" is not just a caption, but we can participate together to initiate and engage in negotiating a global viewpoint for shaping the future.

The world is taking leverage from the digital epoch of singularity and powerful modern technologies. Pakistan, as the sixth most populous country, with a high percentage of youth, still lacks the strongest instrument of education for establishing stability, peace, gender equality, wealth distribution, and health facilities.

For more than 70 years, we have been struggling to achieve any significant milestone in the educational development of our people. Pakistan being one of the underdeveloped countries, especially in terms of its state of education, has no choice but to invest in the education of its people to develop the nation.

*Pakistan was suddenly pushed into a far greater measure of digital dependency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a country where power outages are more than frequent, internet access to the population also gets compromised.*



*Of the 55.64 million Pakistanis aged 15 to 29, only 20.9 million are enrolled in higher education.*

The impact of highly volatile technologies will be highly disruptive. Two billion jobs are at the stake of automation across the globe. This permeating impact will soon be affecting developing countries like Pakistan, where illiteracy and low-level skills are deeply rooted. Regrettably, we are still malfunctioning in making the critical investment in education that can pay back smartly with developed human capital ultimately driving the nation towards a prosperous society

and spurring sustainable economic growth.

The London School of Economics studied 15,000 universities in 78 countries and concluded that increasing the number of universities twice in any region will raise the GDP by 4.7 percent per capita within five years.

Higher education is the backbone for building a stronger nation. Higher education leaves a deeper impact not only on the individual, but also on societies and communities. University graduates are more health-conscious, environmentally aware, and have a keen sense of civic participation. Higher education not only grooms the

individual, but also enables her/him to be an active member of society. Stronger nations are dependent on revenues from tax implementation on higher incomes, small family size, and healthier children.

The sustainable development goals in most of the developing and low-income countries are achieved by capacity-building through a tertiary education system for creating and disseminating knowledge to reduce economic, social, political, and

ecological imbalances.

In 2019, the International Association of Universities (IAU) published a study on higher education in the digital era. 'The current state of transformation around the world.' This concluded that the main drivers of digital transformation are students, faculty, staff, administration, leadership, national authorities, technological companies, governing boards, and international agendas.

The key challenges faced by many higher education institutions are 'financial investments,' the largest obstacle of finances constituting a 70 percent ratio. Secondly, the organisational culture, the change, and the adoption of digital transformation at a slow pace constitute about 47 percent. The third major hindrance is the unreliable internet and infrastructure by about 35 percent. The lack of interest or the reluctance of staff to adapt comprises 29 percent. In 2017, the enrolment ratio in tertiary education accelerated from 19 percent to 38 percent. The female enrolment ratio has increased to 4 percent as compared to the male ratio globally. A rapid surge in enrolment has been noted since 2000, and in Pakistan in 2018, the enrolment ratio of males was 9.55 percent, while the female enrolment ratio was 8.32 percent.

In Pakistan, there is a substantial youth population between the ages of 15 to 29, constituting approximately 26.78 percent of the total population, i.e., 55,641,877 (55.64 million) as per the 2017-18 census. However, currently only 20.9 million Pakistani students are enrolled in higher education.

The percentage of enrolment in tertiary education in low-income countries is 9 percent in comparison to 77 percent in high-income countries.



*Digitising young minds: new-age education.*

*Two billion jobs are at the stake of automation across the globe. This permeating impact will soon be affecting developing countries like Pakistan, where illiteracy and low-level skills are deeply rooted.*

There was a projection of a 52 percent increase in enrolment ratios in tertiary education in middle-income countries from 2000 to 2017.

A powerful education system opens the gate of opportunities, upgrades existing health facilities and supports communities, all contributing to enhancing economic growth. A viable education system provides opportunities and new ideas to refine health facilities and to support communities' interconnectivity. Increased higher education enrolment reinforces the economic growth pattern and accelerates the growth rate. Access to education provides the necessary skills for surviving in a sustainable world.

Education helps communities tap new fields, such as exploring smart agriculture, renewable energy, innovative designs for resource-efficient cities, and discovering ways and means to preserve ecosystems.

Education can bring the most fundamental shift in our thinking in terms of being responsible for each other and our planet's sustainability. The increase in enrolment will result in a more sustainable economy.

The purpose of education expands as humanity progresses and transforms the world. The education of the future would not be just about the fundamentals of science and humanities, it would be about

understanding the whole circle of life. Future education would be about understanding human relationships, with each other, with the ecosystem, and with technology. Future education would not be provided within the confines of a certain space or a temporal boundary. Modern learning would have to be a continual learning process utilising the availability of information anywhere, anytime.

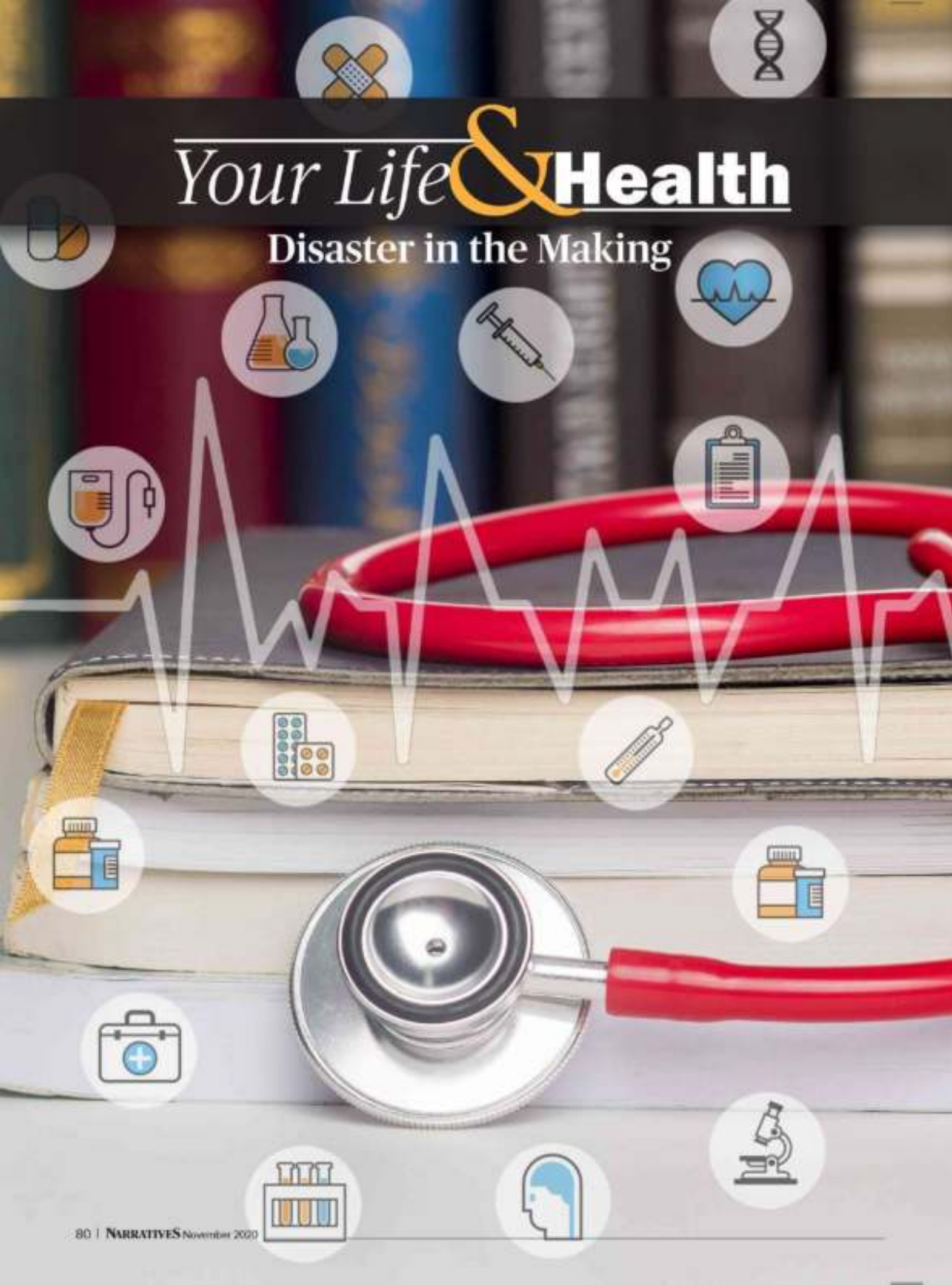
*"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow."*

John Dewey  
– American philosopher and educational reformer ■



# Your Life & Health

## Disaster in the Making



# Quacks Unlimited

A health care crisis looms over the country as standards are compromised in medical education.



By Shershah Syed

*The writer, a leading doctor, is former Secretary-General of the Pakistan Medical Association.*

**M**edical education has faced a serious crisis over the last three decades in Pakistan. In this period of time, no democratic government has taken note of mismanagement in the field. Members of political parties have not shown any interest in facing the challenges and trying to solve problems on a lasting basis. Political rulers of all shades had no desire to develop a solid health policy and prepare the nation to face the challenges of the future.

Addressing deterioration in medical education was not a priority for military governments either. On their part, professional bodies of doctors failed to compel the government to take action. In fact, prominent doctors have been complicit in the decline of medical education and training in the country.

Over the years unregulated growth of teaching institutes mushroomed and we ended up with more than 160 medical and dental colleges in the public and private sector in different parts of the country. None of these medical colleges fulfil the criteria of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), now known as Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC).

Public sector medical colleges were opened in areas that lack the basic living facilities and infrastructure required for smooth running of these institutes, merely to please political supporters and members of the Senate, national and provincial assemblies. They were opened without any planning or thought given to proper teaching and training of medical students and their role in the health care system.

For example, two new medical colleges were opened in Khairpur district, one in the city of Sukkur. One Vice Chancellor (VC) in Larkana started a night medical college and another VC of Liaquat University of Medical Sciences opened a medical college in Hyderabad. The Vice

Chancellor of Dow University of Health Sciences opened a new medical college and two dental colleges in Karachi. The government ordered the opening of a new medical college in Lyari General Hospital. Altaf Hussain of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) ordered the tripling of seats in Karachi Medical and Dental College (KMDC). All these actions were taken in complete violation of existing rules and regulations. The requirement of faculty members, clinical laboratories and hospital beds was overlooked. Shortsighted health officials and vice chancellors of medical universities did not hesitate in spending millions without proper planning and goals.

These medical and dental colleges do not have enough faculty members on the clinical side or in the departments of basic medical sciences. They were not concerned about the number of patients' beds needed for the training of undergraduate medical students. Millions of rupees were spent on buildings and expensive equipment, but no attention was paid to development of human resources.

The functioning of medical colleges and universities does not depend on the use of Italian tiles or red marble; they need competent, qualified and full-time professional faculty members to teach and create critical thinking ability in their students. We all know that construction of buildings and purchase of expensive equipment has some connection to kickbacks, while the development of human resources does not create any wealth for responsible people in the planning division and VC offices.

After the indiscriminate growth of medical and dental colleges in the public sector, the PMDC allowed retired professors, doctors and businessmen to open new medical and dental colleges in the private sector, all over the country with Sindh taking the lead. They were allowed to charge an enormous amount of fees





As medical colleges grow unchecked, the standards of medical education deteriorate.

and donations for admission into the colleges. The majority of these private medical colleges have no proper faculty or facilities. They do not even have hospitals and patients for clinical education and practical experience. Like public sector medical colleges, they have part-time faculty members working and teaching in more than two or three medical colleges at a time.

The Sindh model of medical education was followed by other provinces. The Balochistan government started medical colleges in Loralai, Turbat and Khuzdar. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa opened medical colleges in Swabi, Swat, Nowshera and Banna. The Punjab government followed suit, starting medical colleges in Dera Ghazi Khan, Sialkot, Sahiwal and Sargodha. The government of Azad Kashmir also opened medical colleges without a proper building, hospital, patients or faculty members.

Businessmen, political leaders and doctors in these provinces also followed the Sindh model and many new medical colleges came into existence in the private sector with or without buildings, proper facilities, faculty members and hospitals. Now we have more private medical colleges than public medical colleges in the country.

The armed forces of Pakistan also got involved in the lucrative business of

*The postgraduate medical education and training system is in shambles. In public sector teaching and training hospitals, faculty members work on a part-time basis and have very little time to teach young postgraduate trainees. Wards with over crowded trainee doctors have no structured training programmes.*

medical education. The Army, Navy and Air Force opened new medical colleges to make good money in minimal time, following the example set by corrupt politicians, unethical doctors and crooked businessmen and women with no vision but only greed.

PMDC, meanwhile, was not concerned about the basic requirements to open a medical college, neither were they interested in standards of education, training and the amount of fees charged by private medical colleges.

Unfortunately, doctors themselves played an opportunistic role in the corruption of medical education. Medical professionals working in the government sector failed to press the government to maintain standards in medical education. They acted hand in hand with the authorities, knowing that the ultimate price would be paid by the public.

Retired professors of basic medical sciences in the government sector were used by business people and they played a dirty role as far as medical education and training is concerned. These members of the medical profession worked with their colleagues on the clinical side just for money and power, at the cost of the profession.

These disastrous practices resulted in the production of more than ten thousand glorified quacks every year in the form of doctors and dentists. The majority of these doctors have little scientific knowledge and minimal clinical training, with no sympathy or empathy in their professional practice.

A small number of Pakistani medical graduates who are intelligent and can pass the overseas examinations to practice in the US, Canada and Australia migrate to these countries and never come back. The majority of medical graduates stay in the country where a corrupt system has very little to offer those who are intelligent, hardworking and wish to practice medicine ethically.

The postgraduate medical education and training system, with the exception of very few institutes, is in shambles. In public sector teaching and training hospitals, faculty members work on a part-time basis. They are heavily involved in private practice and have very little time to teach young postgraduate trainees. Wards with overcrowded trainee doctors have no structured training programmes.

For example, a sixty-bedded obstetrical and gynaecological unit in a public sector teaching hospital usually has more than twelve doctors doing their house job and over twenty postgraduate students in

fellowship training. Some units also recruit doctors in their MS and MD programmes. It is humanly not possible to train these postgraduate medical students when none of the faculty members work in the unit full-time. The situation is no different in other specialties like medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, ENT, orthopaedics, neurosurgery, neurology and other branches.

The college of physicians and surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP), the examining body for postgraduate diplomas in Pakistan is not bothered about the whole system of postgraduate training and teaching in the country. They are happy to boast that the majority of candidates fail in the exam because they have a very tough examination system. Unfortunately, this tough examination system does not produce competent specialists who can perform their duties with responsibility, sympathy and empathy.

One sad example of this critical situation can be observed in the specialty of obstetrics and gynaecology. Genital tract fistula is a condition in which a woman loses control of micturition and passes urine all the time because of a hole formation in the urinary bladder. This condition is usually found among extremely poor young girls who deliver babies without skilled help in rural areas and city slums. Recently, however, doctors are treating women in their forties with fistula, after surgery performed by gynaecologists or general surgeons for some benign condition. In our fistula repair centres, half the patients belong to this group. This is not acceptable and indicates that a tough examination system alone does not produce competent doctors.

Due to the flaws in our medical education and training system we are producing glorified MBBS quacks, operation theatre technician dependent surgeons (TDS) and medical representative guided physicians (MRGP). It's no wonder that doctors often face violent attacks at the hands of patients' relatives who lose a loved one due to medical malpractice.

One hundred and sixteen years ago, in 1904, the American Medical Association realised that the country had 155 medical colleges run as businesses by unethical people, producing extremely incompe-

tent doctors, causing death and morbidity in the community. With the help of the Carnegie Foundation, Mr Abraham Flexner was engaged in 1908 to write a report about the status of medical education in the USA and Canada. Mr Flexner published his report in 1910 with his detailed observation of medical education and training. He recommended the closing of 124 medical colleges out

individuals.

The Flexner report was implemented by the governments of the USA and Canada, and very soon the medical profession became the most respected and highly paid profession in North America. The high standard of medical education and training in the US is a result of the Flexner report, which created great hospitals and a very



Without drastic changes in medical education the masses will continue to suffer.

*Medical professionals working in the government sector failed to press the government to maintain standards in medical education. They acted hand in hand with the authorities, knowing that the ultimate price would be paid by the public.*

of 155 existing institutes and the creation of scientific environments in medical schools. He said that medical colleges should have control of teaching hospitals, physicians should practice scientific medicine, the system of medical licensing should be regularised and medical schools should not be the property of

efficient and advanced health care system.

If we apply the minimal recommendations of Mr Flexner to the situation in our country, 80 percent of medical colleges would be closed down, the PMDC/PMC would stop working immediately and the CPSP would be banned from functioning as an examining body.

Our country needs revolutionary changes in the medical education and training system. This will not be possible without the political will of a government who can act against people with vested interests in the existing system. Our health care system needs competent doctors and our people deserve to have a scientific health care system. It is very unfortunate that policy makers in provincial and federal governments have no understanding of the grave situation on the ground. The masses are suffering because of bad doctors and poorly trained medical specialists. Young doctors have no place to go to get good technical training and learn the ethical practice of medicine. Perhaps it is time for Pakistan to commission its own Flexner report. ■



# BOOKSTORE

## A Fresh Start

After a 30 year stint at OUP, Ameena Saiyid sets up Lightstone Publishers to fulfil the needs of readers and writers.



By Maheen Usmani

*The writer is a senior journalist and the author of **The Mercurial Mr Bhutto & Other Stories.***

**A**meena Saiyid is not one for resting on her laurels. After a pioneering and successful 30 year stint at Oxford University Press, she has ventured again into the business she knows like the back of her hand, but on her own terms.

Her primary motivation for setting up Lightstone Publishers was that at OUP she was working within a framework. "That frustrated me a little bit and I really struggled. I would request and make proposals to allow me to publish fiction because Pakistani fiction writers are doing so well."

The second motivation to set up her own firm was her inability to sit still and enjoy retirement. "I wasn't ready to retire! I wanted to do something in my field."

Ameena considers herself fortunate because some experienced people joined her team at Lightstone Publishers, including senior editors Sadia Mirza, Nadia Ghani and Batool Ali, so "it was a perfect arrangement."

Now that Ameena has editorial control, it begs the question: what kind of books is she publishing?

She is candid in her assessment. "In order to survive we have to publish

school textbooks because that is where our bread and butter comes from. LP is publishing in the core subjects of English language and reading, Urdu language and reading, Social Studies, Maths, Science, Grammar, and Information Technology. Since Singapore is recognised as the world leader in Maths and Science, LP has partnered with leading Singaporean publishers to adapt and publish the courses in these subjects. We have already published about 70 school text books, the grades are pre-school to Grade 8, ages 3 to 14."

But what troubles her is her inability to publish for government schools as well.

"Unfortunately we are only publishing for private schools. I would love to publish for government schools, something I've wanted to do ever since Mr M.M Usmani was Federal Secretary, Ministry of Education. I think if he had not retired and had remained Secretary Education, I would have succeeded."

But she is not a quitter even though "They are not opening the market for us. I'm still at it!"

Why are there so many obstacles to publishing school textbooks for government schools when there would be so many benefits accruing from it?

"It's a very profitable business so they don't want to share it and they don't want competition. They want to maintain their monopoly."

How helpful has the current government been on this issue?

"I find that with the new government I'm getting a response. Minister for Education, Sindh, Saeed Ghani has been extremely helpful. Not that I've made a breakthrough, but the conversation is going on."

"I'm also hopeful because the new Administrator of Karachi, Mr Ifkhar Shallwani, has been responsive. He has

always been interested in books and libraries but now, as the Administrator, I believe over a thousand schools in Karachi come under him. I asked him to let me publish books for those local government schools."

He asked me to send him a proposal on what I can do. I've sent it to him and am waiting to hear back from him. What encourages me is that when I send him a message, he replies. When I call him, he doesn't answer but he calls back."

What has been your experience in publishing for private schools?

Her face lights up. "Oh, it's been wonderful! Although we lost this year because of Covid, so it's only now that the schools have begun to reopen. We are

*Ameena states that her aim is to publish 10 books a year. What distinguishes Lightstone Publishers' mode of operation from others in the domestic market is the very quick turnaround time of 3 to 6 months. "Since we are so small, we make quick decisions but we are very careful about not accepting too much work because we don't want to be overloaded."*

getting a brilliant response, but it is next year that will be the real crux."

Recently, Ameena Saiyid held the long delayed formal launch of Lightstone Publishers.

"We wanted to launch it in March-April, but couldn't because of the Pandemic. I



did toy with the idea of having an online launch, but then decided to wait it out. We had a small launch and it was focused on an audience of people from schools. I was overwhelmed at the response. There was the head of a private school who came from Mirpurkhas!

Over a hundred heads of private schools attended the launch which is remarkable during the COVID-19 era. How did she manage such an amazing response from the private schools?

"We were told by the hotel not to bring more than 60 so I requested them to allow more so they said they would extend the room but 80 would be the limit.

Normally you have to invite double the people, because half the people do not turn up so we did that and this time over a hundred came!

A lot of schools are very excited, they want options and they are asking for Pakistani publishers. A school principal wrote to me, saying that in our books we want the children to be Pakistani, we don't want foreign children in our textbooks. Normally people read the Peter and Jane series, the Lady Bird series. I learned reading from Radiant Way and it's still being used."

LP has commissioned authors like Shahbano Bilgrami to write a series of English readers from pre-primary to Grade 8.

"The setting is that of a middle class progressive Pakistani family with Pakistani characters and pets in which the mother is seen as working on a computer or reading a newspaper. It's about the children and their pranks and activities. There is no message or moral in the stories."

And the response has been phenomenal. "Schools have been asking us when are these readers coming?"



*A lot of schools are very excited, they want options and they are asking for Pakistani publishers. A school principal wrote to me, saying that in our books we want the children to be Pakistani, we don't want foreign children in our textbooks.*

What is the difference in the mode of education between the time you were in school and now?

"Now the focus is on the enquiry method, children have to be asked questions. It's also project based. We don't teach one child separately, we

teach them to communicate and collaborate, so they are given projects they can work on together."

Urdu is also on the publishing agenda with a complete Urdu reading programme by Yasmeen Moltasin and Amna Azfar from pre-school right up to 14 year old students.

LP is not neglecting the fiction and nonfiction genre either, much to the relief of Pakistani writers who have been hit by the ban on importing books from India. In the pipeline is the candid memoir of the former Pakistan High Commissioner to India, Abdul Basit, titled 'Hostility' which will go into detail about Pakistan's relations

with India and Ambassador Basit's stay in India and Germany.

Books by Irtisad Abdul Kadir, Sherry Rehman, Fouzia Saeed, Tariq Khosa, Liaquat Merchant, Professor Sharif ul Mujahid, General Fida Hussain Malik and Huma Baqai have already been published or are on the waiting list.

Ameera states that her aim is to publish 10 books a year. What distinguishes Lightstone Publishers' mode of operation from others in the domestic market is the very quick turnaround time of 3 to 6 months. "Since we are so small, we make quick decisions but we are very careful about not accepting too much work because we don't want to be overloaded. The moment you are overloaded, then projects get delayed. We don't have a big bureaucracy. If we count the *chowkidar*, there are 12 people including the Lahore office," she laughs.

LP is filling a huge vacuum for private schools, but it is high time that government schools become able to avail of the services of Ameera Saiyid and her dedicated team. One thing is for sure: with her at the helm, it will be a smooth sail for Lightstone Publishers. ■

## In Quest of Truth

The mystic poetry of Bulleh Shah heals humanity wounded by schisms and conflict.



By Maryam Iraj

*The writer is an independent scholar. She is associated with the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.*

Confronted with unprecedented challenges, humanity is in need of Bulleh Shah's philosophy more than ever before. It is a defining moment of human history as we are faced with an inexorable choice – a choice that will determine our future for good or for bad. Either we choose to descend into voracity, chaos, and conflict or choose to live in harmony and peace to cherish diversity. Wars have left us spiritually incapacitated and bleeding across the world. The Earth is coloured with the crimes of genocide and moral treason. People are left to either grope in the dark or yield to the tyranny of the chosen ones.

Sufism, a spiritual manifestation of Islam, represents a current that intersects with the canons and fundamentals embraced by all religions and mystic orders. Certainly, it is a practice that has imprinted itself upon the folds of human experience over a period of centuries. Bulleh Shah, the poetic genius of the Punjab, left one of the deepest and most lasting of all imprints among the Sufis of South Asia. Being the Sufi that he was, he taught humanity to fall in love – in love with the innermost calling of our souls,



rising above all differences and mundane man-made truths and make-believe. He neither preached the Gnostic vision of the world as a place of irresistible evil nor did he believe in the inherent evilness of man.

With his quintessential Punjabi poetry deeply drenched in spirituality, he exposed the radical and structured corruption of the society of his time. His poetry addressed the historical and individual existence of mankind, inflicted with horror and suffering. Suffering at the hands of those who denied man the life-giving force of religion and projected its death-bearing range. His poetry empowered humanity to view religion not as a tangle of domineering, indifferent forces but as a guiding light for a journey that is inward – a journey that

leads you to do good and experience gratitude for Allah. From human depravity to human greatness, an empathetic soul remains the binding factor throughout the poetic discourse of Bulleh Shah.

As Bulleh Shah often highlights in his verse, it is the intellectual corruption of man that creates divisions within humanity. In the name of racism, caste, religious supremacy and economic class differences, people are led into the Dantesque jungle of pathologies. And we stray so deep into this forest that we learn to accept it as our fate written in the heavens, which it is not.

Let us be privy to who Bulleh Shah was before diving into his poetic precepts. It is important for us to know what ignited the fire in Bulleh Shah. How did a young





Devotees gather at Bulleh Shah's shrine in Kasur, the ceiling of which is decorated with his verses.

boy born Abdullah Shah end up being called Bulleh Shah? It was no easy journey. It was the spiritual undertaking of a man who defied every socio-religious norm of his time, instituted, and deeply ingrained, to suppress human freedom and spiritual equality of the common man.

The exact year of his birth is debatable, but according to most researchers, he lived somewhere between 1680-1757-58. He received his early education in Kasur from the top-notch teachers of his times: Ghulam Murtaza and Mohyuddin, and also from his father Shah Muhammad Darwaish, a religious scholar well versed in Arabic, Persian, and the Punjabi language. According to many historians, Bulleh Shah was considered a scholar par excellence of Arabic and Persian and, according to a few, he was not. But it is evident from his poetry that he was deeply impacted by Persian and Arabic literature. Bulleh Shah's time overlaps with many mystics

who wrote in Punjabi: Sultan Bahu (1629-1691), Shah Shuraf (1640-1724), Ali Hyder (1690-1788), and Hashim Shah (1735-1843), to name a few.

A sustained pedagogical journey in spirituality led him onto the path of piety and celibacy. Like his sister, he never married and dedicated his entire life to serve and learn from his spiritual Murshid, Shah Inayat of the Qadri order. Shah Inayat was not a Sayyid like Bulleh Shah. And this caste difference made Bulleh Shah an outcast among his Sayyid social circle and family. Nonetheless, this only ignited the fire further in his heart for Shah Inayat. And the journey from Abdullah to Bulleh Shah came full circle in the following verses:

*Pray for Abdullah who has returned to his Creator,  
To whom he belonged,  
Now, only the beloved resides in his remains!*

However, despite the stigma he endured from those who believed in the caste system, he was widely loved, sung, and appreciated by all those who were oppressed, less loved and little heard.

Long before Bulleh Shah's poetry was documented by scholars, it was sung by the Qawwals of Punjab in every religious ceremony. The religious scholars and dervish of his time remembered him by many names such as Sheikh of Both Universes, *Sheikh-e-Hurdoalam*, Man of Truth, *Mard-e-Haqqani*, and the Mystic Guardian of the Hidden Truths, *Razon ka Mahram*.

Louis Untermeyer, a 19th century critic and poet, once said "Poetry is the power of defining the indefinable in terms of the unforgettable." And, Bulleh Shah defined the indefinable: divine love and a journey from physical to the metaphysical, in his poetry that rightly continues to be unforgettable beyond his grave. A grave was denied to him as a final resting place in his family graveyard of Sayyids, for the very fact that his entire life was nothing but a sheer act of rebellion against religious hierarchy and socially structured oppression.

That was Bulleh Shah who crafted language to undo oppression, systematic and structured as part of a social discourse. He, with his spiritual poetry, guided those who were lost in the long stretches of loneliness and segregation onto their path of communion with the Higher Being. In search of love and compassion, we often fall into dark spots – spots only the light of God can rescue

us from, and this makes the Sufi poetry of Bulleh Shah particularly relevant. If we could sum up his poetry and life in a few words, that would be love, compassion, and freedom.

Germane to Bulleh Shah's unique concept of love is the notion of freedom – freedom from social and ethical pathologies of man, which bring him to a spiritual and emotional halt. Truth that is deeply connected with love can only be appreciated with compassion. But, as rational human beings, we try to forge a connection between reason and the mundane truths of the world. And this is exactly the point at which we are lost. Truth, which Bulleh Shah sought and discovered, can never be unearthed by only a rational mind and heart devoid of lenity. Tyranny, as part of social discourse, is always full of fear and buttressed by guards. Bulleh Shah lets go of these guards and liberates the heart with his words. He teaches us to rise above shallow differences and to embrace equanimity in human affairs with grace.

*Bulleh Shah taught humanity to fall in love with the innermost calling of our souls, rising above all differences and mundane man-made truths and make-believe. He neither preached the Gnostic vision of the world as a place of irresistible evil nor did he believe in the inherent evilness of man.*

*Destroy the temple, demolish the mosque  
Raze everything to the ground, in your power, in your grasp  
But don't ravage the heart of a man  
For it is Rab who is nested in there*

To reclaim our humanity, we need to let go of our ego. To be one with the One, we need to dance to the tune of selflessness in absolute humility. Bulleh Shah, in love of his Murshid, danced and sang in

an attempt to let go of that image which a man wakes up to every morning. Bulleh Shah, in love of the Divine, interceded with the usual and the normal, and rose above gender differences too. In short, you have to let go of your identity in search of truth, in search of love. *I am the alpha, the omega, not in the know of the other.*

*Perceptive of all, but Bulleh Shah, whom do you behold and discover?  
Bulleh Shah, how do I know whom am I?*

Be it Bulleh Shah, Rumi, Shah Hussain, or Shah Latif of Bhitt, all refused to entertain the limited definition of truth, particularly when a community claimed the monopoly of the truth while ostracising those who did not belong to their class. Bulleh Shah rebelled against bigoted and condescending intolerance, and paved the way for enlightenment of a common man with his poetry, as well as prompting a spiritual and intellectual evolution. With his Sufi renditions, he has been healing wounded humanity for centuries. ■

**Excellence in Financial Services**  
Our team of highly qualified professionals provide:

Research

Equities

Online Trading

Corporate Finance

Fixed Income

Optimus Capital Management (Pvt) Ltd  
13-C Stadium Lane 2, DHA Phase V, Karachi, Pakistan  
PABX: +9221-3529 6888  
Email: info@optimus.pk

[www.optimus.pk](http://www.optimus.pk)  
Broker License No. 8/Securities Broker/ 2020  
TREC No. 008  
Management Rating: BMR3+



# MEDIAMATTERS

پیارا صدق

BANNED

اڈاری

جہان

Ishqiya

## Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil, Do No Evil

Banning popular plays that touch on uncomfortable topics seems to suggest PEMRA believes no news is good news.



**By Omaid Alavi**  
The writer is a senior journalist, who has written for several publications.

**N**o matter how many new and different mediums are introduced in a country, television will remain the most mature medium of distribution. It is not fading like the print medium, it is not as 'vague' or questionable with regard to authenticity as social media, and it is accessible to both, rich and poor – whoever can afford a television set. However, seen through PEMRA's eyes, it is this very accessibility and its impact on the general audience's mind that makes it a dangerous tool.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is supposed to keep an eye on what's being shown on TV, and determine what should be shown, and what shouldn't. However, instead of devising an intelligent way to 'regulate' the medium, it is seen doing the bidding of others and increasingly going off track. In a civilised society, people don't ban things without offering any justifiable reason, before at least trying to discuss with the creators of the 'objectionable'

material how to amend it and ask that they refrain from creating offensive material again. But in Pakistan, banning is the first, as opposed to the last resort.

A couple of months ago, PEMRA caused an uproar by banning the re-runs of not one, but two very successful plays – HUM TV's *Pyar Ke Sadqay* – which also simultaneously aired on Pakistan Television, and ARY Digital's *Ishqiya*. According to PEMRA, they did so because of 'complaints' against the two dramas. The question is, why did they impose the

contend they took the extreme action of enforcing a ban against the two plays because it was considered that both went against social and religious values. But the way they were banned defies all logic. They had been watched once, engendered a wide-scale response, begun a discussion on topics in dire need of attention – and they are still available on YouTube. The bottom line the message they aimed to deliver has already been conveyed to the audience.

Understandably then, PEMRA's actions

*"Television drama brings up important social problems that need correction. Do we muzzle voices that help reflect the changes in our society? Is this the democratic way of life?"*

Atiqa Odho



ban after the two dramas had completed their run and succeeded in winning the audience's admiration – or in PEMRA's lingo, "after the damage was done?" Then, if that was not enough, PEMRA banned another ARY digital play, *Jalan*, which had been on air for 12 weeks. That, however, was allowed to air after timely intervention by the Sind High Court. Ironically, *Jalan*, is doing better rating-wise after the ban.

So what blueprint does PEMRA follow, to the beat of what drum does it march?

HUM TV and ARY Digital have two sister channels – HUM Sitaray and ARY Zindagi – where they air their already telecast dramas, especially the ones that have been successful. PEMRA officials

have not gone down well either with those involved in the television industry, or among audiences. Following the ban of the programmes, actress Atiqa Odho, who was part of *Pyar Ke Sadqay*, wrote an angry post in which she blasted PEMRA.

The *Sitara Aur Mehruunnisa* actress asked the regulatory authority whether this was "the democratic way of life?" In her post, she questioned the reason behind the ban, asking PEMRA "Do we muzzle voices that help reflect the changes needed in our society?"

The actress unarguably has a point. She has been around for nearly three decades and has worked in meaningful dramas like *Nijaat*, *Hum Safer*, and others in which several genuine issues were highlighted



and, in a few cases, solutions were actually devised.

Odho added, "Television drama brings up important social problems that need correction. It helps educate people about mental health, social injustices, hypocrisy, abuse, misuse of power, etc. If we start to brush things under the carpet and don't bring them out for discussion, we will never grow as a nation towards positive change. Stop treating viewers as if they are dumb and don't have exposure to the rest of the world! PEMRA should be making policies to create more social awareness through Pakistani drama and not reducing content to falsified garbage."

complaints against this play instead of addressing them. Writing is my bread and butter and the same goes for the entire writing fraternity; how can they expect us to be disloyal to our profession when we want our family and fans to watch the dramas and be educated in a subtle way."

So, the million dollar question: should Pakistani dramas stick to time-worn, tried and tested formulas – many of which a new age and new generation have outgrown – or explore new ideas relevant to the here and now? Is banning a drama that highlights social evils the right thing to do, or is it just the easiest way to avoid controversy? In 2016, PEMRA issued a

of a few complainants; the audience's reaction came out as a loud protest. I am glad that the producers fought the show cause and the drama went on to win awards for breaking the unspoken rule of discussing a taboo topic at prime time."

Given this one step forward, two backward backdrop, where do we go from here?

This is not the first time that Pakistan is being pushed back to the stone ages; the film industry was worst hit during General Zia ul Haq's regime and hit rock bottom due to his mindless, obscurantist restrictions. Later, at a time when the technological world was advancing due to YouTube, the Pakistan government banned the website for nearly four years, depriving an entire generation

of free informative content that could have helped them grow in many ways.

Theatre, film, and TV actor Omair Rana believes that instead of banning dramas, there should be an alternate process. The actor who played the 'evil' stepfather in law in *Pyar Ke Sadqay* feels that instead of offering channels guidance and support, PEMRA is their

biggest detractor, banning everything they either don't deem fit, or at somebody's behest. He defends his character in *Pyar Ke Sadqay* and contends the drama was "one of the best plays in recent years."

"*Pyar Ke Sadqay* tackled not one but multiple issues; my character met an unhappy end and this is exactly how things should happen in an ideal world. I do agree with audiences that of late an abundance of extramarital affairs, divorce and similar issues have been featured on TV. And I understand that this puts many people off. Right now, the best way to skip those topics is by switching to other channels. But that is not the answer; the best way forward would be the introduction of a rating system for the audience where time would be allotted as per the theme of the drama. By introducing time slots, audiences could choose what would suit their sensibilities, and regulators like PEMRA would not need to arbitrarily ban plays and programmes." ■

*"To deprive people of telling stories is nothing less than a criminal act because ever since humans have started to communicate, they have been telling stories. In the modern era, these stories are used to highlight issues, educate the audience, and make society a better place."*

Mohammad Ehteshamuddin



Mohsin Ali, who wrote the other banned drama, *Ishqiyu*, supported Odho's views. The writer/director who has been active for a few years maintained that no writer in his right mind would try to make the audience uncomfortable, or deliberately cross ethical boundaries because they all have a built-in self-censorship sensibility.

"This is not the first time a drama of mine has suffered at the hands of PEMRA; they were also against the airing of the mini-series *Bhook*, which was based on a real incident and was directed by me. That survived because the intelligent audience out there loved it. As for *Ishqiyu*, no sane person who actually watched the drama could have labelled it immoral. Like many plays aired before this one, it was a simple revenge story revolving around two married couples and had the censors followed the drama from the first episode, they would have dismissed the

show-cause notice to HUM TV for airing *Udaari*, a drama that had educated the audience on the social evil of child molestation and won awards after it completed its run for its brilliant execution and performances.

Mohammad Ehteshamuddin who directed *Udaari* expressed his thanks to the producers and the audience for their support when PEMRA came down on them; because of the backlash from various quarters, PEMRA reversed their ill-thought decision.

"To deprive people of telling stories is nothing less than a criminal act because ever since humans have started to communicate, they have been telling stories. In the modern era, these stories are used to highlight issues, educate the audience, and make society a better place. I still remember the difficult time when *Udaari* was on air and PEMRA had issued a show-cause notice at the behest



# Short Run or Long Haul?

Can the inherently contradictory PDM components become an

alliance formidable enough to oust the PTI government?

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has been creating waves since the newly formed 11-party opposition alliance held its first public meeting in Gujranwala on October 16, but many are

sceptical about its future. A number of analysts highlight the inherent contradictions and clash of interests among its major component parties, but there are others who say that the Pakistan

Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) anti-army rhetoric is making even the staunchest opponents of Prime Minister Imran Khan's government wary of crossing this red line. Narratives asks four

senior journalists what their view is on the future of the PDM.



**Shaheen Sehbal**

Senior journalist and former Group Editor The News

**T**he PDM was formed in a hurry to protect the three big partners – the PML-N, the PPP and the JUI – from the onslaught by the government and state against them for their alleged corruption. Other smaller parties and groups also sought shelter under the PDM umbrella in the hope of bolstering their bargaining position. However, the alliance is a non-starter. It has neither a principled political agenda, nor any democratic motives. It has just a single goal to remove Prime Minister Imran Khan from power. Apart from rallies, how it seeks to do so has not been clarified.

Apparently, the idea was that massive rallies on the streets would create enough pressure on the Establishment to promise the opposition leaders some relief from the accountability process and persuade Imran Khan to back off – at least a little. The entire exercise backfired.

The street shows did not produce a mass turnout, instead,



**Mazhar Abbas**

Senior journalist and analyst

**T**he PDM may remain intact until the next election as Prime Minister Imran Khan has targeted all three men spearheading the alliance – Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari and Maulana Fazlur Rahman – and so, the enemy of my enemy is now my friend. However, cracks may appear within the key PDM component, the PML (N), if the alliance fails to achieve anything substantial by January. Horse trading will surely be on the cards after January and before the Senate

elections. In all probability, the PTI will get the majority in the Upper House, but would like to seize more seats through adjustments. Thus the PDM has a challenge ahead. In Pakistan's charred political history, anti-government movements have often resulted in unconditional interference by external forces.

Anti-Ayub and anti-Bhutto movements for example, resulted in Martial Law. The only chance the PDM has is to gather at least three to five hundred thousand people in Islamabad and either force Imran Khan to resign, or to compel the Establishment to distance itself from him. The big question: when the civil and military leaders appear to be on the same page, will the PDM be able to do either?

every event produced a new controversy which damaged the PDM. Starting off with Nawaz Sharif's tirade against the army, to the desecration of the Quaid's mausoleum, the talk of Baloch separation and then the Ayaz Sadiq outburst against the army, it has been so far, so bad.

Meanwhile Imran Khan turned even more rigid in his resolve to have accountability, and the Establishment, instead of coming under pressure, came out publicly against what it considered as overt blackmail. Now all backdoor channels have been publicly shut and Nawaz Sharif has become a big liability for his own party.

The fallout: cracks have started appearing in his party, and people have started speaking out and deserting the N-Titanic which has hit a huge iceberg in very cold waters.

Making matters worse for Sharif, are his coalition partners. Trusted JUI aides of Maulana Fazlur Rahman have been heard speaking out against the PML-N suprema. And the PPP seems uninterested and has sidelined itself.

The future of the PDM is bleak, and its sole target of ousting Imran Khan seems to be even further away. It is only a matter of time then that the other components of the PDM will drift away.



**Imtiaz Gul**

Senior analyst and author

**P**DM's component parties will likely retain their individual identity and character in the months and years to come, but it will probably not survive as an alliance of parties so disparate in nature who speak a conflicting and competing lingo. Most of them represent the status quo – largely driven by the desire to stay politically relevant and with the common goal of getting rid of

Prime Minister Imran Khan.

With the recent controversial statements by Nawaz Sharif, followed by those of Sardar Ayaz Sadiq – essentially targeting the army – the PDM has already suffered dents in its ranks, starting

with the resignation of General Qadir Baloch from Balochistan.

It is quite obvious that both Sharif and Sadiq have acted as 'Trojan Horses' – attempting to prick the security establishment like never before. But they have crossed the red-line around national interest in doing so, and eventually this step may prove to be the noose around the PDM's neck – unless all components of the alliance go along with the extremely irresponsible Sharif narrative and gang up against the army. Chances are they will see through the games Sharif seems to be playing to keep his daughter Maryam relevant to the country's politics – going all out against the army sitting in the safe haven of London while they in Pakistan certainly don't have that luxury. And most of them are wedded to Pakistan. They then will probably chart a relatively safe path, unlike the nihilistic one Sharif has embarked on. So this difference of approach has already set limits on what the PDM can do.



**Dr. Jabbar Khattak**

Senior journalist and Editor in Chief of the Sindhi-language daily Awanj Awanj

**T**he formation of the PDM was the logical consequence of pushing all the opposition parties – the components of the alliance – against the wall by the PTI government as well as by the Establishment.

The target of the PDM is not only confined to the removal of the PTI government, but also to put an end to the alleged hostile attitude of the Establishment against them. The PDM has openly demanded the impartiality (preferably the partiality towards them) of the Establishment.

Although there is a lack of trust among the component parties of the alliance, they have in the past few months

developed more unity between them and a greater measure of confidence, which has bolstered the PDM.

Meanwhile, the PPP is engaged in an intensive election campaign in Gilgit-Baltistan, where there are bright chances of an overwhelming victory. It is speculated that in case of a PPP victory in the Gilgit-Baltistan election and in this event the formation of its own government there, it may lead to a weakening of the PDM, but even so, the PPP will have no other option but to remain an integral and important component of the alliance till at least the proposed Islamabad sit-in of January 2021. A successful show in Islamabad would further strengthen the PDM.

Even in the event of failure of the proposed sit-in, it would not dismember the PDM, even if the PPP's zeal for the alliance may abate. In that situation, the PPP would probably just adopt a formal status in the PDM in the hope that in the face of a unified opposition, the Establishment would have no alternative but to make a PPP-friendly gesture in the future. ■