

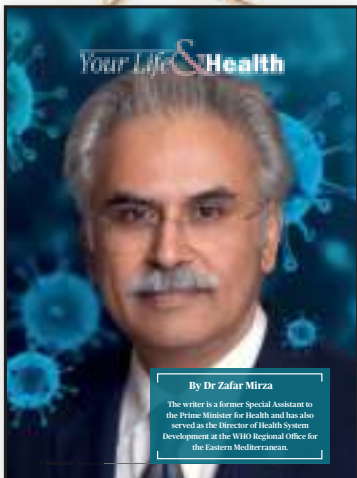
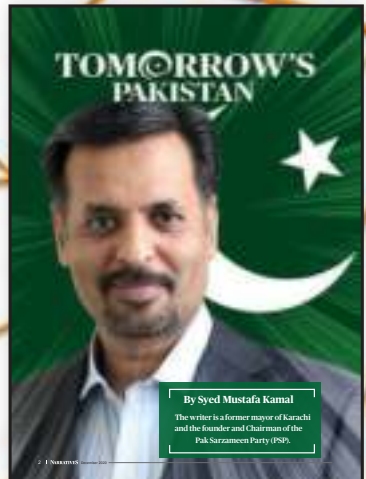
December 2020

# NARRATIVES

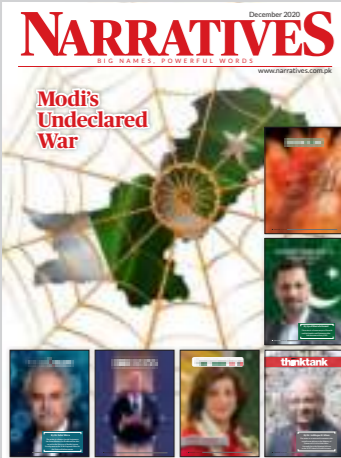
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## Modi's Undeclared War



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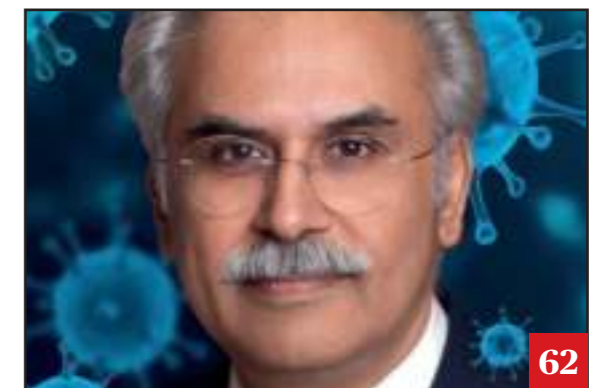
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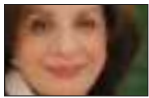
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**Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying What?**

# Setting the Tone



Ibrahim Sajid Malick  
Editor, Narratives

Undoubtedly, the calendar year 2020 will remain ingrained in our memories for a lifetime – a year marked by a raging pandemic, environmental catastrophes, fifth generation warfare waged by our increasingly anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistani neighbour to the east, major economic challenges and ongoing opposition rallies. Which memories from this momentous year will future generations of Pakistan inherit?

When reflecting on 2020, our elected officials should remember that historically nations that invest in innovation during a crisis outperform their peers in recovery efforts and other areas. Emergencies create a sense of urgency that can engender collaborative effort; they can break through organisational silos, and overcome institutional inertia. New readings of the world could throw up possibilities of much-needed social and material change.

As with the rest of the world, Covid fatigue has also overwhelmed us – we are tired of social distancing, desperate to indulge in all those daily activities which pre-Covid we took so much for granted. However, as the numbers of those affected spiral, as the death toll mounts, there is a growing realisation of the need for caution. Unfortunately, clearly, not everyone is of that view. We have witnessed our politicians irresponsibly campaigning in Gilgit-Baltistan and elsewhere, and holding rallies – despite warnings and appeals from doctors and health experts – teeming with masses of the unmasked. So as we mourn the loss of the eight thousand plus victims of the virus, and take into account the rapidly mounting figures, we hope that our elected officials take the measures so desperately needed to protect the lives of our people, and that our politicians garner the sense and courage to act responsibly and rationally. And now, with the promise of vaccines on the anvil, we pray 2021 brings an end to this pandemic.

We also hope that our institutions will strengthen the firewalls guarding our economy – rendered increasingly shaky on account of cumulative reasons.

And as global environmental crises continue to escalate, we should remember that environmental stewardship is an essential function of Islam, enshrined in both the Quran and the Hadith. We should be mindful that Islam conceives of a natural universe permeated with God's grace and humanity. To man is given the responsibility of acknowledging and honouring God's grace by preserving the vessels – the natural world's elements – through which it flows.

That, however, is not the end of it.

Unfortunately, our country is also confronted by several external threats and an arch-rival hell-bent on weakening Pakistan's federation. Usually, populist movements seek to create a "public," i.e., a voluntary association of people who gather around an idea or cause with a positive, public purpose.

However, in Pakistan, the anti-everything stance is a form of ethnic nationalism that needs conspirators, villains, and enemies. Led by waderas, sardars, Khans and funded by Pakistan's enemies, the separatist voices weaken the country's genuine progressive, patriotic and nationalist platforms. In stark contrast, a progressive worldview summons citizens not to provincialism and parochial thinking, but to achieve broader national goals. We hope and pray that 2021 will bring people together with the goal of a strong, stable and modern Pakistan.

There will be no escape from a downward spiral and no healing of Pakistan without the downright rejection of the destructive forces unleashed by foreign-funded separatists. To create a new, more inclusive, civil, and humane society, we wish the New Year brings peace in all the provinces, cities, districts, and towns of the country.

And as we bid farewell to 2020, we must remind ourselves and all the talking heads on the rating-hungry digital media of the sagacious advice of Imam Ghazali: "Adopt a gentle tone when speaking, for verily the tone at times, has a greater impact than the speech."

## Top-notch Magazine

At a time when the print media is facing a sharp decline, launching a top-notch magazine was the need of the hour. The quality of Narratives' content, as well as its printing, are exceptional. One comes across a lot of diversity in the content of the magazine. Readers would happily welcome and appreciate this effort. Good luck to the editorial team.

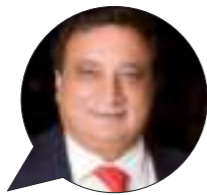
**Nazir Leghari**  
Senior journalist  
Editor-in-Chief Bol News



## Filling the Gap

Congratulations upon bringing out a much-needed English language political magazine. Following the closure of Altaf Gauhar's prestigious magazine, South, there was a big vacuum. But after seeing Narratives, I feel that the vacuum has been filled. Its editorial team has a vast experience in journalism; I am sure that the intelligentsia will like this magazine, and people like me will learn a lot from it. I wish the Narratives team good luck.

**Barrister Khawaja Naveed Ahmed**  
Former High Court judge



## Sharif's Extradition

Flying abroad on medical grounds to dodge court cases has now become a common practice among Pakistani politicians. A year ago, following the law suit against him, PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif flew to London with an undertaking to return within four weeks. His brother Shehbaz Sharif signed an agreement to ensure his return. As expected, Nawaz Sharif did not return, and neither does he plan to do so in the near future. London has become his safe haven to hurl diatribes against the respected institutions of Pakistan. In fact, Sharif is trying his best to seek political asylum in the UK. These facts were aptly highlighted by Ather Kazmi in his article 'The Other Home Country?'

We must remind the entire PML-N brigade of their false promises about Sharif's return to Pakistan. The nation cannot be fooled anymore by their hollow political rhetoric of 'free and fair trial.' They must come back to the country without putting any pre-conditions. It is time the Pakistan government accelerate its efforts to seek Sharif's extradition from the UK.

**Umair Arain**  
Karachi



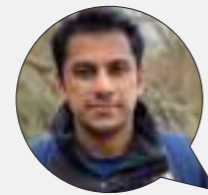
## Spiritual Dimension

Sufism is a concept that has always remained under the spotlight with researchers of Islamic doctrines. Sufism is a spiritual dimension of Islam that covers all the fundamentals of society. One of these fundamentals covered in the article, 'The Quest for Truth,' is humanity. The concept of humanity and love is the essence of all the literature that has been written on Sufism. As highlighted by Maryam Iraj in her book review, Bulleh Shah was second to none in his advocacy of humanity.

In my opinion, ego is one of the many factors that stop a person from practicing humanity. As stated in Sufism, the concept of ego will remain incomplete, if it's not discussed with respect to self-discovery. All the teachings of the Sufi preachers lead to God through the journey of self-discovery.

Sufism has many dimensions that can help us understand humanity. It can guide a person to fathom the spiritual dimension of Islam. The key here is to understand Sufism from authentic literature and learned preachers instead of imbibing knowledge from dubious sources.

**Zain Iqbal**  
Islamabad



## Democratic or Dynastic?

The slogan of working towards restoring democracy in its true essence, by parties associated with the PDM, should compel one to ask the sloganeers a few questions. How can they claim to strive for the 'restoration' of democracy when their own parties' internal structures have no democratic values to speak of? Was it a divine command that the new breed of dynastic politicians should take over the parties' reins once their parents had had their turns? If they wish to restore true democracy, they should perhaps begin by making their own parties democratic.

Moreover, their taking turns at ruling the country, in succession, doesn't help their narrative either. How can they claim to work for the restoration of democracy when they failed to carry out a population census and hold local bodies' elections until the Supreme Court intervened and forced them to do so? It makes their claims of struggling for democracy questionable. A truly democratic Pakistan would make it possible for men and women from any social strata to takeover the leadership of parties such as the PPP or PML-N. Will the new breed of dynastic leaders, spearheading the PDM movement be willing to make that happen?

**Umer-bin-Ajmal**  
Hamburg, Germany



## Corona Takes All

While present-day analysts predict what the post-Covid world will look like, many future historians will definitely view this year as a turning point in the history of the 21st century. The pandemic seems to have catapulted China to a position that was previously held by the US – that of saviour of the world. While China emerges stronger in the post-Covid world, the US population seems to be more divided than ever, thanks to Trump's isolationist policy of "America First."

The virus that originated in China seems to have devoured other nations, especially its rival – the US – but given the outcome of the current American presidential election, it remains to be seen if the US will be able to regain its status in the world.

In Pakistan, the PTI government struggles to stay in control, while the opposition holds rally after rally to garner support to remove the incumbent prime minister. On the other side of the border, farmers are giving the fascist Modi government a tough time. It appears that the corona virus has taken its toll on all and sundry.

**Bilal Mustikhan**  
Karachi



## Wise and Viable

Like other Muslim-majority countries, Bangladesh also experienced protests against the French President. Any statement or projection that demeans Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or Islam, provokes Muslims. The recent protests across the Muslim countries were the outburst of such feelings.

As a citizen of a democratic nation, I support freedom of speech, but it shouldn't be practiced at the expense of any religion, class, ethnicity, culture or individual. We must promote mutual respect and understanding. On the other hand, I find it hard to digest the demands made by some religious groups, of breaking diplomatic ties and boycotting the French market.

France is one of the largest buyers of ready-made Bangladeshi garments. As a booming economy, it would be unwise of them to snap ties with France. Fortunately, the Bangladeshi government subscribes to this view. So, while we must take necessary action to record our protest against France, our approach should be wise and viable. It should not hurt our own people and our own economy.

**Tajwar Quasem**  
Dhaka, Bangladesh



## Trump Tantrums

The year 2020 will always remain memorable in history as it witnessed many unprecedented events that shook the entire world. The COVID-19 pandemic created a global health and economic crisis and had its ramifications for the Trump administration as well. The US voters decided to oust President Donald Trump by electing Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States. The election result has shown that most Americans have firmly rejected the Trump administration, foreign as well as domestic policies.

To date, Trump has refused to concede defeat and falsely claimed, without evidence, that he has won the elections "by a lot of votes," and that the results have been tampered with. His social media team worked hard to spread numerous conspiracies to substantiate their allegations of electoral fraud. His legal team filed several lawsuits in swing states, most of which were thrown out. The rejection of President Trump's lawsuits has compelled his administration to concede defeat and commence the transition process. It would be interesting to observe at the Presidential inauguration on January 20, 2021, when Biden replaces him as President of the U.S.

**Sarah Alam**  
Toronto, Canada



## Workable Solution

'Lift the moratorium' is a rationale-driven read arguing for the saner option among the many suggested by our policy-makers, the majority of whom are advocating for populist choices.

It is the need of the hour that instead of trying to gain political mileage by proposing impractical solutions, our state apparatus should work on implementing, refining and reforming the laws which are in place to curb crime. This article attends to the same workable solution through which a criminal justice system can operate efficiently.

**Syed Ijlal Haider Naqvi**  
Taxila

**Letters should carry the writer's name, address and phone numbers.**  
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space.  
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# ZEROING IN



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

## The Big Chill

*Pakistan's relations with two of its most valuable allies – Saudi Arabia and the UAE – are estranged, following a series of diplomatic gaffes*

**W**hen in March 2019, the 46th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was held in Abu Dhabi, the protracted Jammu & Kashmir dispute was kept out of the joint declaration by the host country.

The only mention Pakistan could get in the 50-point declaration was that the OIC welcomes “the positive initiative undertaken by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, H.E. Imran Khan, to hand over the Indian pilot as a gesture of goodwill to de-escalate tensions in the region.” This was a huge diplomatic win for India, which for the first time ever was invited as a guest of honour at Abu Dhabi's OIC meeting, despite Pakistan's protests.

However, at the 47th Session of the CFM in Niger, the Niamey Declaration at least reiterated the OIC's position on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, calling for “a peaceful settlement in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.”

This is a step forward, but it still falls short of Pakistan's expectations. Why? Because by scrapping the special status of occupied Jammu & Kashmir in the Indian Constitution and taking aggressive steps to change the demographics of this Muslim-majority region, New Delhi has crossed many red lines and lowered the threshold for conflict in the region.

The routine OIC resolution fails to take into account this changed reality of occupied Kashmir, where the level of Indian oppression and brutalities has increased manifold as India attempts to unilaterally “resolve” the matter in its favour bypassing other parties to the conflict – Kashmiris and Pakistan. There



is no mention, no condemnation of India's unilateral move of August 5, 2019 and the steps it has taken since.

Still, the Niamey session cannot be seen as Pakistan's diplomatic failure, though Islamabad will have to work harder to mobilise international support, including that of Muslim countries, for the Kashmir cause.

Influential Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have massive economic stakes in India. And Niger, where the 47th OIC session was held, is also a recipient of Indian investments and funds. Even the venue where the OIC conference was held in Niamey was built with Indian money. According to a former ambassador, Pakistan's weak economic muscle constrains its diplomatic ambitions.

In the last couple of years or so, Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and its main ally, the UAE – the driving force behind the OIC – have again turned frosty. Officially it may be hard for the Saudi and Pakistani governments to admit this harsh reality, but there has been a rupture in their ties, which they tried to reenergise after Prime Minister Imran Khan came to power in 2018.

In 2015, the first schism between the two long-time allies was caused by Pakistan's refusal to be part of the Saudi-

led coalition fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen by then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government. This time around, Prime Minister Imran Khan's announcement to participate in the Kuala Lumpur Islamic summit of December 2019 ruffled feathers in Riyadh. Although Pakistan pulled out of the summit at the last moment to assuage the concerns of Saudi Arabia, the damage to the relationship was already done.

According to diplomatic sources, the Saudi government was caught by surprise by Prime Minister Imran Khan's sudden announcement of participation in the Malaysian summit, along with Turkey, Indonesia and Qatar. The move was seen as an attempt to undermine the Saudi-led OIC, which for many leaders of the Muslim world has transformed into a mere debating club, devoid of any meaningful purpose and absolutely impotent when it comes to taking any action on critical issues.

“The Saudi sensibilities were hurt by the manner in which the whole issue was handled,” admits a senior Pakistani diplomat privy to these developments. “For Saudis, Islamabad should have consulted and taken Riyadh into confidence before going public with the announcement of Pakistan's participation in the Kuala Lumpur summit by none other than



India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj addresses the OIC as Pakistan's protests fall on deaf ears.

Prime Minister Imran Khan himself.”

The diplomatic faux pas occurred only a few months after the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's high-profile Islamabad visit in which he had pledged \$20 billion worth of investments in Pakistan.

The senior diplomat said that given Pakistan's close relations with Saudi Arabia and the fact that Riyadh has always extended financial assistance and support to Islamabad in its moments of crisis, Pakistani policy-makers should have anticipated the reaction. But the Kuala Lumpur initiative was dealt with in an amateurish manner, without giving due thought to the pros and cons of the move. This resulted in estrangement of ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, besides creating an embarrassing situation with our Turkish and Malaysian friends.

As if this mishandling was not enough, the investment projects announced by the Saudi Crown Prince also failed to take off. One Pakistani diplomat said that despite some serious efforts by the Saudi Ambassador, there was a complete lack of interest from the concerned ministries and ministers in putting the promised investment projects on fast track. Mohammed Bin Salman, who com-

*Influential Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have massive economic stakes in India. Pakistan's weak economic muscle constrains its diplomatic ambitions.*

mitted himself to these projects, perhaps felt let down by his Pakistani friends.

However, a former Pakistani ambassador said that the issue has to do with Pakistan's absorption capacity for any huge foreign investment rather than lethargy or a lack of interest. “Our Chinese friends also have similar grievances when it comes to materialising investment plans and executing projects.”

Unlike past rulers, Prime Minister Imran Khan made little effort to build and

cultivate “personal relations” with the Saudi royal family, especially the Crown Prince, or maintain regular contact with Riyadh through its envoy or Pakistan's own special representative.

“Saudi Arabia is a monarchy. Personal relations count a lot in maintaining and boosting diplomatic and economic ties; unfortunately, the Pakistani leadership lacked focus on this front,” the ambassador remarked.

Then the highly irresponsible outburst of Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi against the OIC because of its inaction on the Kashmir dispute was also taken as an affront by the Saudis. The result was a rapid deterioration in the relations between the two countries. Pakistan's top military brass, including Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa, tried to iron out the differences but relations are not yet back on the same level, as they once were.

For Pakistan's civil and military leadership, reviving relations and building trust with Saudi Arabia should be high on the agenda, though for now that seems easier said than done.

However, Saudis, too, cannot sideline Pakistan completely despite their “vicious reaction” to Shah Mehmood's outburst, as on many key issues Islamabad remains their most dependable ally.

But Prime Minister Imran Khan and Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa will have to take a personal interest and make an effort to repair the damaged relations.

Pakistan's relations with Turkey – which is competing with Saudi Arabia for the leadership of the Muslim World – and other Muslim countries are as important as its relations with Riyadh, but one must not be at the cost of the other. The art of diplomacy requires maintaining a fine balance even between rivals. But there is one significant lesson to be learnt from this unpleasant chapter in Pak-Arab relations: Pakistan and its policymakers must realise that for achieving political and diplomatic independence and sovereignty, reviving the economy and putting our own house in order should be the top priority. Even our Muslim brother countries do not judge us by our good intent and love for them, but by our economic and military clout. We have to make both these punches work simultaneously, to secure better deals for Pakistan and aggressively fight and win Kashmir's case. ■

## Corona And Politics

*Oblivious to the challenge posed by the deadly second wave of COVID-19, the PDM continues with its jalsas to oust a beleaguered government that is struggling to cope with the economic fallout of the virus*

Ideally, our politicians – whether in the government or the opposition – should have adjusted and readjusted their priorities in line with the myriad challenges faced by the country, including the rising second tide of the COVID-19 pandemic. But perhaps it is too much to expect from those driven by their own selfish power game.

Instead of educating the masses, through their words and deeds, on how to follow the doctors' advice of maintaining physical distance, staying away from political, social and religious events and wearing masks, our politicians are doing their utmost to undermine, belittle and violate these Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Their attitude is selfish, myopic and amateurish to say the least, while their followers exhibit nothing but a slavish mentality.

The ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) took its own time in announcing a ban on rallies and meetings. But even after this much-delayed, but welcome announcement, one observes that wherever there is an official function attended by some minister or government functionary, the SOPs of social distancing and wearing of masks are hardly followed. Additionally, the government has failed to engage the opposition, the media and opinion-makers in building a national consensus on the pandemic challenge and ensure safe and healthy economic activities, which are a must to keep the country's economy afloat in these tough times. The government should have tackled the problem on a war-footing.



The role of the opposition, operating under the banner of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), has been outright criminal; it continues to hold anti-government rallies, risking the lives of its followers and all those who come in contact with them.

A number of the opposition stalwarts, including Pakistan Peoples' Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, were themselves afflicted with corona, but the PDM's game plan remains unchanged.

The PPP, which won praise even from critics for its role at the outbreak of COVID-19, has of late done a volte face. For a family function – the engagement ceremony of Benazir Bhutto's daughter, Bakhtawar – the Bhutto-Zardari clan rightly asked guests to provide a negative coronavirus test report and adhere to SOPs, but alongside it is asking its followers and workers to attend the PDM public meetings, where maintaining physical distance is next to impossible. In the PPP-ruled Sindh, the provincial government has been advocating precaution, but contrary to the federal government's precautionary measure of closing down educational institutions, the provincial government wants them to remain open.

This is a steep climbdown from the days when Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, with clasped hands and teary eyes, used to make appeals

for lockdowns, urging people to stay home. Unfortunately, PPP's poster-boy for corona was also struck down with the virus.

As for the rest of the PDM leadership, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders, from Maryam Nawaz to Rana Sanaullah Khan, leave no opportunity to trivialise the challenge posed by the pandemic. Many PML-N leaders appearing on assorted television talk shows or at media briefings, when asked about their irresponsible behaviour and continuing political activities in times of coronavirus, sidetracked the issue by making a dig at the government or branding Prime Minister Imran Khan as “COVID-18” or a bigger virus than corona.

The smaller religious and sub-nationalist parties, which are a part of the PDM bandwagon, also seem oblivious to the coronavirus challenge. For short-term and maybe tactical gains, a majority of the politicians are acting in a highly irresponsible manner. As they move from city to city holding rallies and public meetings, they are putting the lives of more and more citizens at grave risk, and nullifying all the efforts to combat the pandemic. As the death toll mounts, prices skyrocket, unemployment rises and people struggle to stay afloat, can the country afford the economic fallout of the second deadly wave of COVID-19? ■

# The Final Blow?

*With Trump's parting Middle East policy, one could be forgiven for mistaking America for the United States of Israel*

**A**s the Trump era comes to a close, the American and Israeli administrations are on a sprint to legalise tyranny and legitimise Palestinian oppression with changes that cannot be easily undone by the Biden administration.

In its final weeks in office, the Trump administration endorsed the Israeli occupation by announcing that US assistance to Israel could be allocated for West Bank settlements. As if to reinforce its position on the issue, in a formal visit to a West Bank settlement – a first for a US Secretary of State – Mike Pompeo announced that products made in Israeli settlements could be sold in the US labelled “Made in Israel.”

Then in an egregious effort to silence critics of Israel, Pompeo announced that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other global human rights groups would be designated anti-Semitic for challenging Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights.

These moves further cement Israeli control over the occupied territories. The bottom line: the Trump administration's changes in policy toward Jerusalem, Israel's entire settlement enterprise, and the changed nomenclature now used to describe the occupied lands, amount to official recognition of Israeli sovereignty in those territories, thereby implementing the underpinnings of the “Deal of the Century.”

The Netanyahu administration has been just as busy as the Trump one in the last few weeks. To permanently sever Bethlehem from Jerusalem, the Israelis announced plans to add 1,257 settlement housing units on Palestinian land. Another 4,948 settlement units between Ramallah and Nablus strengthen the settler presence in the West Bank's heart, further impeding Palestinian movement



*Trampling the Palestinian dream.*

northward. In Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and the northern West Bank, entire Palestinian villages are being demolished to expand Israel's control. While 1,700 Israeli settlement units built without permits have been legalised, Palestinian homes built without a permit are being destroyed. To compound this situation, the Netanyahu administration has accelerated the demolition of European Union-funded schools and field hospitals.

The damage done in the last days of Trump will make Biden's pledge to return to the status quo almost impossible. Joe Biden pledged allegiance to the “two-state solution,” during his campaign. Now, thanks to the Trump administration, that hill has become significantly harder to climb.

US administrations before Trump were also complicit, in varying degrees, to Israel's acquisitiveness. For decades, the United States turned a blind eye or neglected to take adequate measures to restrain Israel's settlement expansion in Palestinian lands. They sinned by omission. However, the pro-settlement agenda pursued by the Trump administration has amounted to a more grievous sin of commission.

The past two decades of failed policies created several deformities that make the future of a two-state solution

difficult to even envision. The territories that were to have been dedicated to the future Palestinian State have been cut into pieces by Israeli settlements, infrastructure, and Jewish-only roads connecting them to each other and Israel proper.

Years of US enabling and coddling of the settlement enterprise has so emboldened Israeli hard-liners that politics in that country have moved dramatically rightward. By contrast, the peace camp has shrunk to a tiny fraction of Israel's political map. As a result, it is impossible to see how any coalition government could emerge in the coming years that would be willing to make peace with Palestinians that would include a sovereign, contiguous, and viable Palestinian State.

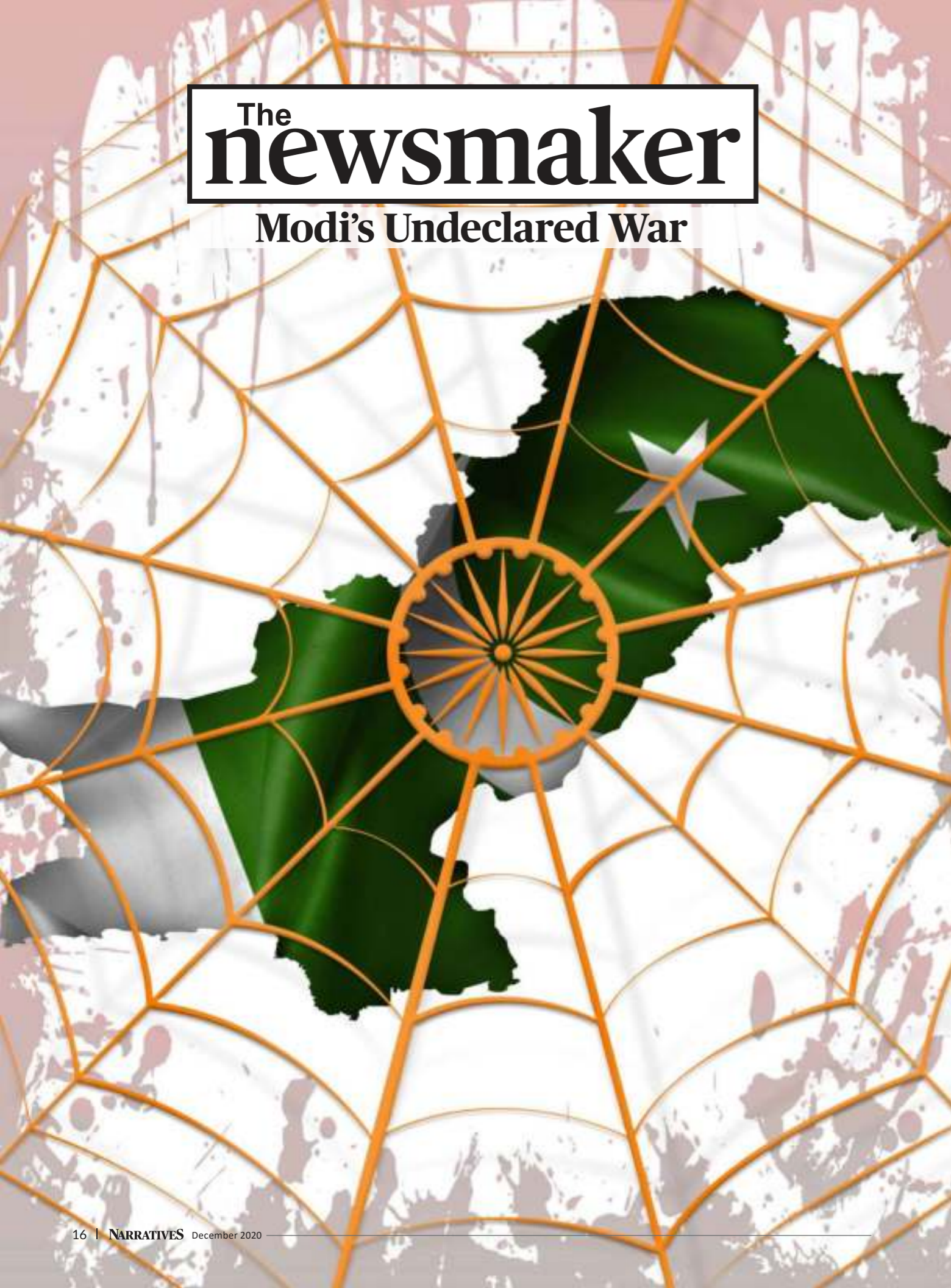
Meanwhile, US acquiescence to Israel's disgraceful, abusive treatment of the Palestinians has weakened the Palestinian Authority's credibility in the West Bank, while empowering and emboldening Hamas's consolidation of power in the Gaza Strip.

Finally, the erratic, often incoherent, and always pro-Israel US policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have discredited the US's role as the main party responsible for brokering a just peace. But this is true not only for the Palestinians; it is also true for much of the rest of the world. ■



# The newsmaker

## Modi's Undeclared War



## India's Web of Terror

India spreads its terrorist network across Pakistan, more specifically Balochistan, to sabotage CPEC



By Amir Zia

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



*A dossier of crimes: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and DG ISPR Major General Babar Iftikhar, presenting their case against India.*

**P**akistani security forces and intelligence agencies are locked in a deadly cloak-and-dagger game against shadowy terrorist groups and cells – linked directly or indirectly with the country's arch-enemy, India. From the congested neighbourhoods of Karachi to the small clusters of mud huts in the arid plains and hills of Balochistan, and from the lush valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir to the rugged mountains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this undeclared war has only intensified in recent years.

Its sole objective: to destabilise and destroy Pakistan.

Operating under the Indian umbrella are extremist Islamist and sectarian bands of terrorists, as well as those who claim to represent various ethnic and sub-nationalist groups.

Yes, Indian involvement in fanning violence and terrorism in Pakistan is an old story and one living proof of it is available with Pakistan in the form of Indian spy, Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was arrested in March 2016 during a counter-intelligence operation in Balochistan. But what successive Pakistani governments and authorities had been revealing from time to time in bits and pieces, and with a lot of restraint, has now been compiled in detail along with documents, transcripts of

audio and video clips and other proof in the form of a 100-plus page dossier, which has been shared with the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and other important world capitals.

The Indians have woven a net of terrorism inside Pakistan with the aim to wipe out its gains in uprooting terrorist groups, disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), destabilise the country and use terror incidents in Pakistan to dilute and divert its support for the legitimate freedom struggle in occupied Kashmir.

According to the Pakistan Foreign Office dossier – presented by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and the Director-General of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Major Gen. Babar Iftikhar in a joint press conference on November 14 – the funding trail reflects that during the past few years, India has invested a massive sum of more than Rs. 22 billion to prop up terrorist organisations.

India's main focus is Balochistan, where at least Rs. 18.57 billion have been spent on sub-nationalist terrorist groups, followed by Rs. 2.88 billion on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Rs. 0.51 billion on Altaf Hussain's MQM and around Rs. 20 million in Azad Jammu Kashmir and

Gilgit-Baltistan, says the dossier, quoting meticulously collected details of bank accounts, transcripts of chilling audio recordings of terrorists talking to their Indian handlers, along with photographs.

Ashraf Jahangir Qazi, who served as Pakistan's ambassador to the United States and India, said that in the past Islamabad did share dossiers of Indian involvement in terrorism in the country, but the latest dossier is "more comprehensive and backed by documents and evidence." Although Pakistan should not expect quick diplomatic results from this dossier, it is good that this document has been prepared and shared, he remarked.

Authorities reveal that there has been a spike in terrorist attacks in the country during the last three to four months and all evidence points towards India, as its agencies try to revive those terrorists groups which were smashed in successive operations by Pakistan's security forces.

The dossier says that a special cell has been created in the RAW Headquarters under the direct supervision of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with an initial budgetary allocation of \$500 million to disrupt CPEC.

The Director General ISPR, Maj. Gen. Babar Iftikhar, while sharing details with the media, said that India has raised a militia of 700 persons to undertake terrorism



June 29, 2020: A botched terrorist attack at the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi.

in Balochistan, more specifically to sabotage CPEC.

"A commission comprising 24 members was created, which included 10 RAW operatives...60 million dollars were dedicated for this force," he said.

The Indian Embassy and consulates in Afghanistan regularly distribute money among sub-nationalist groups, and Pakistan has documentary proof of four such transactions of \$23.35 million. However, evidence of only one such transaction worth \$5 million – given to a sub-nationalist group to create unrest in Balochistan – has been included in the dossier.

Balochistan is the prime focus of Indian agencies because more than two dozen major CPEC projects, including the Gwadar Port, are located there. In recent months, there have been a number of attacks in various remote parts of Balochistan, in which terrorists used IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) to primarily target Pakistan's security forces.

At the same time, terrorists attempted to carry out "spectacular attacks" in an attempt to gain media attention and create fear and uncertainty, though a majority of them were foiled by Pakistani agencies. One such high-profile attack was carried out jointly by the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Balochistan Liberation Front at the PC Hotel, Gwadar on May 11, 2019, in which five civilians and four terrorists were killed.

According to the dossier, RAW officer Anurag Singh planned this attack for which \$0.5 million were allocated. One

**India has invested a massive sum of more than Rs. 22 billion to prop up terrorist organisations in Pakistan.**

of the attackers, Hamal Nawaz, used an Afghan phone number (+93794087914) to stay in touch with an Indian phone number (+916396067562) during the attack.

Terrorist kingpins, Dr. Allah Nazar and Aslam Achoo – who travelled to India on fake Afghan passports – masterminded the attack. Pakistan has 17 audio clips of Dr. Allah Nazar's conversations with Indian handlers, in which he is getting directives on future terror operations.

Pakistani authorities also smashed a RAW-sponsored six-member terrorist group involved in the June 29, 2020 botched attack on the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi and other terrorist activities, which included providing suicide jackets to assorted terrorist groups.

Efforts are also afoot by Indian agencies to help form a "consortium" of the TTP with Balochistan-specific terror groups – the BLA, BLF and the Balochistan Republican Army – which are already united under the banner of BRAS (Baloch Raaji Aajoie Sangar) since 2018.

The Indian game plan is to create

shock and awe by sponsoring high-profile attacks in major Pakistani cities and sustained terror strikes in the remote areas. Under this strategy, Indian intelligence operatives are using various proxies to carry out assassinations of prominent people including ulema, police officials and notables in major cities, target high-profile places like the Pakistan Stock Exchange, and engage Pakistani Security Forces by planting IEDs and staging hit-and-run attacks.

In this multi-pronged strategy, both secular subnationalist groups and religiously-motivated militants are being used to destabilise Pakistan.

Indians have fixed the rates for various types of terror attacks, according to Pakistani investigators. For instance, local masterminds of a suicide attack are paid Rs. 10 million; those who target vehicles of security officials using IEDs also get Rs. 10 million; an IED attack in some remote area or a target killing is rewarded with Rs. 1 million each. But the highest 'reward' of Rs. 50-80 million is 'reserved' for the target killing of important personalities.

Indian agencies are trying to establish 'Daesh-e-Pakistan' to hurt the country domestically, as well as diplomatically. Pakistani authorities say that recently, 30 Indian Daesh militants were relocated from India to various camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border by two Indian intelligence agency operatives. These militants were handed over to Daesh Commander Shiekh Abdul Rahim alias Abdul Rehman Muslim Dost, according to sources. Additionally, the Indian intelligence has helped unify two major factions of the TTP in August 2020.

Afghanistan serves as the main spring board for Indian operatives to execute their plans. According to the DG ISPR, Maj Gen. Babar, there is solid evidence that Indian embassies and consulates, operating along the Pak-Afghan border, remain the "hub of terror sponsorship against Pakistan" from where Indian diplomats supervise terrorist activities and fund proxies.

"In one such instance, the Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan and the Indian Consular in Jalalabad had detailed discussions with collaborators to provide financial support to the TTP and dissident Baloch elements."

Pakistan also has evidence of the presence of multi-purpose camps in both

Afghanistan and India, which are utilised for harbouring, training and launching terrorists in Pakistan. Indian intelligence agencies are managing 87 such terrorist camps, out of which 66 are located in Afghanistan and 21 are in India.

Ajmal Pahari, a known operative of Altaf Hussain's group, after his arrest confessed that India had established four training camps in Dehradun and Haryana for the Karachi and Hyderabad-based groups.

Altaf Hussain, according to the dossier, personally met, at least two RAW Chiefs, Ashok Chaturvedi and Vikram Sood. Altaf Hussain's once close aides, Muhammad Anwar and Sarfraz Merchant have confirmed such meetings. Recently, security forces discovered a RAW-affiliated sleeper terrorist cell in Karachi and arrested 13 of its members, though the main accused Mehmood Siddiqui, who operated this network, remains an absconder and now resides in India.

Pakistani officials say that Indian fingerprints are visible on scores of past mega-terrorist attacks in Pakistan. For example, investigations into the Agriculture University Peshawar attack of October 26, 2017 led to the masterminds of the Army Public School Peshawar (APS) massacre of children and teachers.

RAW had hired three facilitators to plan the attack on the Agriculture University, including Malik Faridooon, who was also involved in the APS attack and celebrated this butchery in the Indian Consulate in Jalalabad.

In 2017, Faridooon visited India for medical treatment where he was admitted in Primus Hospital. His name is on the patients list and his photographs with an attendant and handler Amarjit Singh prove his connections with RAW.

The Agriculture University attackers were in contact with various Afghan mobile numbers and live-streamed the videos of this assault for their handlers, who uploaded them from Afghan IP addresses.

Similarly, India is aggressively trying to destabilise the AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan. "Tangible evidence indicates that RAW is involved in the planting of IEDs in AJK to target civilians and military personnel... Since January 2016, at least 60 IEDs were planted, out of which 38 exploded, resulting in the casualties of 13 civilians and 46 military personnel, whereas the remaining 22 IEDs were successfully neutralised,"



Caught in the act: Indian sleuth Kulbhushan Jadhav and Allah Nazar Baloch.

**A special cell has been created in the RAW Headquarters under the direct supervision of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with an initial budgetary allocation of \$500 million to disrupt CPEC.**

Maj. General Iftikhar Babar shared.

"Indian intelligence handlers, Colonel Pandit and Colonel Maaz, using numbers +919796840949 and +917051328325, have delivered nine IEDs to the miscreants at the Line of Control since January 2019."

The forensic analysis of these IEDs confirms the use of Indian components.

Pakistani officials maintain that India has for long been trying to create unrest in Gilgit-Baltistan, especially after Pakistan announced plans to grant provisional provincial status to this region.

On September 28, 2020, an important meeting was held in the Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, to plan subversion, fan dissent and stoke violence in this region, as well as in Azad Kashmir.

While India is proceeding full-steam ahead to fuel violence and terrorism, it is also pushing hard to damage Pakistan on the economic front, in which the forum of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) appears key to its designs.

As pointed out by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, India has consistently been trying to politicise the forum for "economic coercion of Pakistan."

Pakistan has tangible evidence that Indian diplomatic missions lobby extensively in FATF-member countries to undermine Islamabad's achievements in controlling terror financing and streamlining its financial system to keep the country at least in the grey list or push it to the blacklist. The dossier says that evidence reveals that extensive lobbying was done -- from February to April 2018 -- to downgrade Pakistan's status in June 2018.

"Despite India's persistent efforts, Pakistan has come a long way, which has also been acknowledged by the international community," says the DG ISPR. "On the contrary, it is India which needs to be scrutinised at the FATF platform, in light of all the evidence presented by Pakistan."

As things stand today, Pakistan's fight against India's network of terrorism will prove to be a long haul. The dossier, according to former defence minister Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi, is a move in the right direction, but to expect that the international community will take a just and firm stance against India would be naïve.

"Pakistan has done its duty by officially exposing India's involvement in stoking terrorism – a fact which was already known to the world powers. And now, if and when we react, at least we will have a justification for it."

In the final analysis, Pakistan has to not just expose, but take on and destroy Indian agents, their proxies and political faces on its own – the same way it did, in the war against terrorism. ■

## DEFENCELINE

The Real Face...



## From India to Hindia

Modi marches India into Brahmin Zionism



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

*The writer is a prominent defence analyst. During his long military career he served in a number of command positions.*



Fascism on the march.

**W**here is Bharat or India going? On the way to greatness? Actualising dreams of Akhand Bharat, a behemoth which would steamroll everything in its path, Brahmins lording over everything under their collective gaze, the lower classes within the Hindus and minorities reduced to servitude only? This is actually the crux of Hindu mythology. So, from India to 'Hindia'?

The facade of secularism, pretty thin to start with, wore out a long time ago, with the emergence of the BJP, a well-crafted front for the ultra-radical Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). If Zionism has a face, a Modi-led Hindia defines it perfectly for those of us who have not seen or read about the emergence of ultra-orthodox Jewish Zionism. The Hindian media, echoing Akhand Bharat's leadership 24/7/365 would have me and many like me believe it unconditionally. Doubts if any on this score, were clarified by Obama in his book which has recently hit the stands – and he is recognised as a Hindian lover. And this jingoism is not restricted to the BJP, which has been rather

crude about it. The Congress too has contributed its share to this policy, but with greater refinement.

Against this backdrop, could India ever revert to what it was before Pakistan came into being? Just imagine if it was as the situation stood on the eve of 14, August 1947 – the British leaving the subcontinent, no Pakistan, and no Hindia either. It would be just the subcontinent comprising over five hundred different states, a land where rajas, kings or ameers were forever in conflict for one reason or the other. Shocking as it may sound, thanks to rising Hindutva or Brahmin Zionism, India is already beginning to look like that kind of land. That India today resonates with Christian and Jewish Zionism is no accident. Just look around and see who they are in bed with, or better still, who their enemies are – or is.

Let's go back to the eve of August 14, 1947 when Pakistan, and a day later India, emerged on the world map. Suddenly, things not officially declared as part of the plan, started happening, in retrospect it is now clear because this had been orchestrated by the outgoing



Man for no seasons: Narendra Modi.

British rulers in connivance with a shrewd Nehru. How else can one rationalise the presence of the Maharaja of Patiala's forces in Srinagar prior to the division of the subcontinent? Or that present-day India is about 40 percent larger in size compared to what it was on August 15, 1947? Expansionism was and still forms the core of the Brahmins' strategic thought. To be fair, India certainly has the population and geographical size fit for a claim to greatness, and it has been consistent in its policies. And that's not all.

The night of August 14-15, 1947 saw two different sets of people emerging from the same geographical entity. First, Nehru led India with the very heavy baggage of having been under Muslim rule for over 700

*Having dealt with a Hindian-sponsored and CIA supported war on terror, Pakistan is one extremely tough nut to crack. Will Hindia cross the Rubicon then?*

years, a period which saw the weakening of the Brahmins' hold over lesser classes of fellow Hindus. The self-anointed masters of their own people could never reconcile to this reality. This factor was to acquire a life of its own with the passage of time, providing the basis for a continuity and consistency in its policies. Hindu philosopher, Chanakya Arthshastra, claiming to be in the same class as Machiavelli's 'The Prince,' provided the required guidance and motivation – not that it was really needed.

Having "captured" Hyderabad, Junagadh and part of Kashmir, Nehru's India declared openly that "Pakistan is an unnatural state. It will wither away on its own, or else will be undone by force." Akhand Bharat was an undeclared national objective. 1962 against China, and 1965 against Pakistan proved to be unsuccessful adventures for this mindset. Undeterred, the Indian leadership kept at it and achieved its crowning glory in '71 when East Pakistan was separated to become Bangladesh. Feeling on top of the world, Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of Hindustan, declared triumphantly that the "two-nation theory," the raison d'être of Pakistan, had been sunk in the Bay of Bengal. And India hasn't looked back since.

The size, location, population and motivation were all there already. '71 had provided the necessary impetus. The acquisition of nuclear capability, the development of an aircraft carrier-based, nuclear submarine-equipped blue water navy, intercontinental ballistic missiles, the world's third largest standing army, and a huge air force supported by a fast-developing indigenous weapons-manufacturing capability were obvious follow-ups. A proxy war against Pakistan had been fought and won. The Sikh separation movement had also been crushed by force. Indian dreams had started to become a reality. But not quite.

While India's drive to regional power status, on the way to becoming a global one, was gaining momentum, simmering fissiparous tendencies started surfacing in various forms in different parts of the country. It wasn't a homogeneous society to begin with. Ever-increasing Hindu Nationalism didn't do any good to the waning confidence of the minorities, Muslims were a specially targeted lot. Modi, who had shown the way as Chief Minister Gujrat, was elevated to lead the BJP and

went on to win the 2014 elections based on a hard-nosed anti-Pakistan (anti-Muslim) manifesto. Now "democratically" empowered, Modi set about transforming India into Hindia, where minorities were to be reduced to nothingness.

9/11, a watershed in many ways, also provided the much needed impetus to further strengthen the long-nurtured hope of an Indo-US partnership which would see the two countries working for the same goals, in the region and beyond. India grabbed the opportunity with both hands, and got the space and sufficient freedom of action to launch yet another full-fledged proxy war against Pakistan with the aim of balkanising it further into manageable entities. And India has used all the possible tools at its disposal for this purpose. Meanwhile, some of us in Pakistan became part of their scheme unintentionally, while others jumped in knowingly, offering all kinds of logic in support of what they were/are doing. China and others with interests in the region could not have remained mere spectators in this power game. And they didn't. China made its move in 2015 through One Belt, One Road (OBOR), the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being its flagship. This huge project aimed at regional and international connectivity for economic development, has equally huge geo-strategic significance as well. It hasn't gone down well with the growing Indo-US partnership.

Re-elected in 2019 with a thumping majority, Modi's India moved swiftly to absorb illegally occupied Kashmir, disempower Muslims through various acts of parliament and generally stamp India as a hardcore Hindu state, Hindia in every sense of the word. The Himalayan range, long considered a barrier against China, failed Modi when needed the most. In a brilliantly conceived and executed move, the Chinese juggernaut activated India's eastern front, moving deep into Ladakh while posing credible threats elsewhere, leaving Modi to wonder about the price Hindia has to pay for becoming a willing bulwark against the fast-emerging superpower. Nature, quick and firm as ever, is laughing too. The Hindian economy has tanked, Covid is taking its toll, the Kashmiris are as defiant as ever, seven southern states are not letting up, and Pakistan didn't oblige when Modi flexed his muscles on February 26 last year. On



The price of adventurism: Indian soldiers lie battered after a clash with the Chinese juggernaut in Ladakh.

the contrary, Pakistan's response left egg on Hindia's progressively ugly face.

Currently, there is a kind of stalemate, which is not natural. Something has to give. Evicting China from Ladakh and forcing it to abandon its strategic outreach is fraught with danger. Undoing OBOR by taking out CPEC is much more so. Afghanistan isn't as hospitable either. That leaves Pakistan, one extremely tough nut to crack, as Hindia has learnt in the last two decades. Having dealt with a Hindian-sponsored and CIA plus Mossad-supported war on terror, Pakistan is in no mood to accommodate anyone or anything which is even remotely against its national interests. Will Hindia cross the Rubicon then? Go to war with a country which has left no doubt that it will go the

distance – and beyond if need be, to protect its interests.

Well, it has happened before, miscalculations leading to unforeseen happenings. We may not acknowledge it, but Pakistan is in the middle of an undeclared war right now. Transitioning to a declared one wouldn't be very difficult, even if extremely challenging. Unfortunately, the major part of our media isn't really concerned with the evolving power game, while the Hindian media, in total harmony with national policy, continues to spew venom against Pakistan 24/7. What's more worrisome is that our political leadership in general also appears to be oblivious to the threats we are faced with.

I would like nothing more than to be proved wrong this one time. ■



Hindia's Enemy No. 1: Muslims.

# Views from Abroad

Interview :  
Nayeema Mahjoor



## Interview

### “Only pro-India parties can survive in Kashmir’s electoral politics”

- Nayeema Mahjoor



**By Ather Kazmi**

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



**C**urrently India is holding the local bodies elections in occupied Jammu and Kashmir in 8 phases, from November 28 to December 19, 2020. These are the first elections being held after the BJP-led government ended the special status of Kashmir. *Narratives* spoke to Nayeema Mahjoor, a well-known Kashmiri journalist and former BBC editor who has also served as chairperson of the Women’s Commission in the state government in Occupied Kashmir, about the importance of these polls for the BJP government and how the Kashmiris, in turn, view them.

**Senior BJP leaders and the Indian government appear to be giving far too much importance to these elections? Is this impression correct?**

The BJP government had held local government elections in Kashmir in 2018 as well. Many Hindu Pandits, who had left Kashmir decades ago, were brought back with the support of the central government to stand in these elections. However, mainstream Kashmiri political parties did not participate in them.

Referring to these elections, the BJP said that they wanted to strengthen democracy at the local level, because in the

past the Kashmiri parties had failed to hold local bodies elections in the state.

Following the end of Kashmir’s special status, the local parties formed an alliance, known as the ‘Gupkar’ alliance. The purpose of this alliance was to restore the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Now this coalition of seven Kashmiri political parties, which also includes pro-India parties, is also participating in these elections. They are of the view that the BJP is strengthening its roots in occupied Kashmir through these elections, so they need to politically block their move.

**Has any new personality or party come to the fore in these elections, which enjoys the support of the Indian government?**

Many members of Mehbooba Mufti’s party, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), and other Kashmiri politicians, including former members of the state assembly and ministers, have left their parties to contest the elections. Former PDP member Altaf Bukhari is among them; he has formed his own party, the Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party, which is enthusiastically taking part in the elections. It is being rumoured that he has the support of the BJP government, especially Narendra

Modi.

It’s quite obvious that the BJP-led government has recruited people from assorted political parties for Mr Bukhari’s new party in an attempt to give the impression that Apni Party is a local party of Muslims.

The Gupkar Alliance has also fielded joint candidates in these elections.

**The Gupkar Alliance, which was formed to campaign for the restoration of the special status of Kashmir, seems overly enthusiastic about the local bodies elections. Don’t you think by participating in this electoral drama being staged by the BJP government, they are legitimising the electoral process?**

The Alliance claims that they are taking part in these elections to deny political space to the BJP, but the reality is that by forming an alliance with the BJP in the past, the PDP had already provided space to them in Kashmir. And prior to that, Omar Abdullah had served as minister in the centre with the BJP government. So they have already extended all possible help to the BJP to strengthen its roots in Kashmir. Now for them to say that by participating in these elections they want



*A senseless exercise: A few Kashmiris line up to vote in the elections.*

to block the path of the BJP seems to be merely a hollow slogan.

Secondly, these elections are not state elections; they are taking place in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. If you wish to restore the special status of Jammu & Kashmir, then why are you participating in them and making them credible?

**What is BJP's top leadership hoping to achieve through these elections?**

The situation in Kashmir at the moment is such that all the important government posts are occupied by outsiders, that is non-Kashmiris, whether it is in the local administration, the judiciary or the police; they have absolutely no connection with the locals. They have a long-term political plan. Through these elections, the federal government wants to connect with the people in the state.

The state assembly is currently suspended. There will be legislation in this regard, and if Kashmir is given the status of a state, then there will also be a Chief Minister. The BJP wants a large number of Hindus to be settled here, after which you will see that Kashmir, where the Chief Minister has always been a Muslim, may have a Hindu one in the future. Their main objective is to destroy the Islamic identity of Kashmir.

*After 1947, India deliberately promoted political families who supported their position on Kashmir. No one else has been able to create a space in the mainstream politics of Jammu and Kashmir other than these few families.*

**Does the ordinary Kashmiri share BJP's excitement about these elections? Are people on the ground participating in them?**

If we talk about ordinary people, they are almost indifferent to the whole process; they regard it as a meaningless exercise. The majority of Kashmiris were not even interested in the state elections held in the past. And they are even less interested in these local bodies elections. But due to the participation of pro-India political

parties in these elections, a small number of people will participate in the voting.

**If we talk about the electoral politics of Occupied Kashmir, would it be fair to say that politics there is limited to a few families?**

The United Nations and the international community recognise that Kashmir is a disputed territory. After 1947, India deliberately promoted political families who supported their position on Kashmir. These few pro-India families consider themselves Indians, which is why a large number of Kashmiris have always remained indifferent to their politics. These families have been trying their best to suppress the independence movement. No one else has been able to create a space in the mainstream politics of Jammu and Kashmir other than these few families. Dr Shah Faisal tried but he couldn't succeed; you cannot survive in Kashmir's politics without the support of the Indian establishment. Only pro-India parties can make a place for themselves in Kashmir's electoral politics because they have the support of the Centre.

**In recent days, we have seen Kashmiri nomads called Bakarwals or Gujjars being evicted from certain areas of Jammu. Why are they being evicted?**

According to the 2011 census, the population of nomads or Bakarwals is about 1.5 million. That number could be even higher. These wandering nomads spend a few months of the year in one place and a few months in another. In winter, they head to Jammu. The majority of them are Muslims. Their numbers were increasing in Jammu. The impression was created that if their numbers continued to rise, their population would outnumber the Hindu Dogras there. This fear-mongering and propaganda has been going on for some years, as a result of which in 2018 a young Bakarwal Muslim girl, Asifa, was raped and killed in the area. The attack was carried out to scare away Muslim Bakarwals from Jammu. So the recent eviction of Muslim nomads from Jammu is just another attempt by the BJP government to maintain the Hindu majority in the area.

Incidentally, they are also relocating Hindu families from other parts of India in Jammu and Kashmir. A Hindu majority would benefit BJP and other pro-India parties in the elections. ■



## Biden as Mediator?

Is Biden up to the task of bringing peace to South Asia by mediating between archenemies, Pakistan and India?



**By Abdul Basit**

*The writer is a former envoy of Pakistan to India and Germany, and President of Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), Islamabad.*



**A**t a recently held international seminar in Islamabad, I was asked to speak on the challenges to stability and prosperity in South Asia, and whether the regional states were up to the plate to address them and benefit from a myriad opportunities unleashed by globalisation.

These questions are not new. Nor is it difficult to identify the challenges and their solutions. However, one finds the region in a state of seemingly intractable dysfunctionality. Worryingly, there is not a single country in the region that is able to coalesce all the other countries around a comprehensive regional agenda that also, in a way, helps settle bilateral conflicts.

South Asia is the least integrated region in the world with intra-regional trade at around 4 per cent. From travel restrictions to impediments in cultural cooperation, the South Asian picture is one of disappointment. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), that was founded in 1985, is literally affected with atrophy. No wonder, its leaders have been able to meet only 18 times during the 35 years of its

existence. The 19th summit meeting that was to take place in November 2016 in Islamabad, fell prey to India's characteristic hubris and intransigence now tightly wrapped in the retrogressive worldview of 'Hindutva.'

Regional cooperation, in general, remains elusive if bilateral relations in any given region are riven with deep mistrust and disputes. Simply put, regional cooperative frameworks cannot be built on rickety and unpredictable bilateral relations. And in the case of South Asia, hostility between India and Pakistan is the biggest barrier. Unfortunately, the two countries have failed to resolve their bilateral issues, especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Their relations have been moving from a logjam to a logjam, squandering bilateral energies in breaking stalemates rather than crafting a tenable *modus vivendi*.

The two countries have almost exhausted all the possibilities – from fighting wars to putting together a whole raft of confidence-building measures to negotiating disputes and issues from Kashmir to terrorism through back-channel diplomacy. But instead of re-



*A moribund platform: The last SAARC Summit was held six years ago.*

solving their existing problems they have ended up adding more to the list, further complicating the bilateral relationship. All these years they have been moving one step forward to taking two steps back.

And then comes the fateful day of August 5 2019. India strips Jammu and Kashmir of its special status in breach of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, as well as its own constitution. The jingoistic India, showing no mercy to Kashmiris, imposes a complete lockdown, depriving them of even the basic facilities of mobile phone and internet to vent their outrage. The harrowing lockdown continues, with no respite in sight. To add insult to injury, New Delhi is now all out to gradually change the demographic realities of Jammu and Kashmir by encouraging and allowing Indians to settle in the illegally occupied land. Hindutva's long-term agenda to turn the Muslim majority there into a minority is now being implemented in full swing. And to one's utter chagrin, the international community, by and large, remains insouciant to Indian's genocidal policies.

By taking such horrendous steps, India has yet again betrayed its predilections to compounding situations almost beyond redemption. As expected, and justifiably so, Pakistan reacted sharply to India's brazen volte face by, among other things, downgrading diplomatic relations and halting bilateral trade. Their relations are stuck in another impasse, once again, and this time there is barely any space left

*SAARC is literally affected with atrophy. No wonder, its leaders have been able to meet only 18 times during the 35 years of its existence.*

for bilateral diplomacy to get bilateral engagement back on track.

The irony of the matter is that their bilateral conflict has also been regionalised, especially in the context of Afghanistan. India's defensive-offence doctrine that seeks to destabilise Pakistan through its western neighbour is not only widening the bilateral chasm but also making intra-Afghan reconciliation ever more problematic. Similarly, the US-China competition, nay rivalry, and India's evolving strategic partnership with the US, are also destabilising the security dynamics in the region, pushing it into a vortex of an interminable arms race. India's Cold Start doctrine, espousing dangerous notions of preemptive and preventive strikes in a nuclear environment, leaves no option for Pakistan but to keep upgrading its full-spectrum deterrence with the view to maintaining its credibility.

India's vociferous opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), supported by the US, has further vitiated the regional environment. The ongoing tension between China and India in eastern Ladakh, in proximity to the China-Pakistan border, also in a way reflects China's resolve to not let India subvert the CPEC. Should India continue abetting insurgencies in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, the situation can turn irredeemably ugly. Making the Gwadar port fully functional is fundamental to the success of CPEC, and China's sensitivities in this regard can hardly be overestimated.

It cannot be gainsaid that the nuclearised South Asia is in a witches' brew. The international community cannot absolve itself of the responsibility to push Pakistan and India towards finding peaceful solutions to their longstanding problems. Bilateralism of the last 50 years, as was envisaged in the 1972 Shimla Agreement, has failed. And more of the same approaches are unlikely to produce different, positive results.

India's aversion to third-party mediation remains a hurdle to overcome. Accordingly, diplomacy will have to be conducted off the public glare to push matters forward. While Norway, with its experience of mediation between Palestine and Israel, immediately comes to mind, the South Asian Gordian knot may be too difficult for it to untie. The only country that can make a difference is the US, given its evolving strategic partnership with India. Pakistan, no doubt, would be wary of this aspect but would still welcome US mediation as was expressed by Prime Minister Imran Khan after his official visit to the US in July 2019.

The question is, would the 46th president of the US be willing to put his diplomatic credentials at stake. Will President-elect Biden be able to convince or force Modi to accept US mediation? This may or may not work. But if the proposed initiative is kept under wraps, it may meet with some tangible success. If Jared Kushner's sub-rosa diplomacy could deliver in the Middle East, a serious, well-thought-through initiative by Biden could also pay off in South Asia. Such an initiative will obviously warrant both perseverance and perspicacity on the part of the mediator as achieving quick results would be well-nigh impossible. The carapace of animos-

ity hardened over the last seven decades will not crack easily.

A way forward could be paved with some concrete steps such as (1) turning the 2003 ceasefire understanding into a formal agreement; (2) renouncing use or threat of use of force against each other; and (3) treating Afghanistan as a neutral country. Meanwhile, the other SAARC countries may consider undertaking some joint efforts to convene the much delayed 19th summit to at least ameliorate the atmospherics, if nothing else.

In all likelihood, India will agitate against these suggestions. However, Biden, in view of his vast experience in

*The key for Biden would be to avoid being seen as a supporter of India's anti-Pakistan agenda. Putting undue and unfair pressure on Pakistan would be counterproductive.*

statecraft, should be able to nudge the two archenemies towards laying a foundation for eventually addressing the most cumbersome Jammu and Kashmir dispute. The key for Biden would be to avoid being seen as a supporter of India's anti-Pakistan agenda. Putting undue and unfair pressure on Pakistan would be counterproductive, to say the least.

The cul-de-sac Pakistan and India presently find themselves in is far too dark and narrow, thus raising the spectre of miscalculations. Bilateralism that has become hostage to preconditions will not lead them out of the blind alley. However, the US, under Biden, does provide a glimmer of hope for the people of South Asia to live in harmony and leave the legacies of peace and prosperity for posterity.

Is Biden up to the task and willing to help the people of South Asia in their quest for peace? For that to happen, the Biden administration will have to look at its relations with India and Pakistan anew by dispensing with undue biases against Pakistan. ■



*China's Xi Jinping and India's Modi: Rivals for regional supremacy?*



*Trump and Modi: On the same page.*



# Retrosp<sup>ect</sup>

Resisting the Indian Might

KASHMIR



## The Kashmir Cauldron

Four wars and many summits and declarations later, the unresolved Kashmir dispute continues to threaten peace in South Asia



**By Ali Mahmood**

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



*"95 percent of Kashmiri Muslims do not wish to be or remain Indian citizens. I doubt, therefore, the wisdom of trying to keep people by force where they do not wish to stay."*

*(An excerpt from J.P. Narayan's letter to Nehru on May 1, 1956)*

**I**n the 18th century, the empire of the great Afghan conqueror, Ahmad Shah Durrani, included western Iran, Pakistan, Kashmir, and parts of northern India up to Delhi. Kashmir remained part of the Durrani Empire from 1752 till 1819, when it was conquered by the armies of Ranjit Singh. After the First Anglo-Sikh War of 1845-6 and the Treaty of Lahore, Kashmir was ceded to the East India Company which, in turn, sold Kashmir for the sum of Rs 7.5 million to Gulab Singh, an influential noble in the court of Ranjit Singh, who subsequently became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and founded the Dogra dynasty which ruled Kashmir as a princely state under the British until Partition in 1947. The population of

Kashmir comprised 77 percent Muslims, 20 percent Hindus, and 3 percent Sikhs and Buddhists.

At the time of Partition, the Two-Nation formula passed on Hindu territories and states to India and Muslim territories to Pakistan. However, there were complications in the case of three of the princely states: Junagadh and Hyderabad with Hindu majorities but Muslim rulers fell to India, but the fate of Kashmir with its Muslim majority and Hindu ruler was undecided. The Maharaja dismissed his prime minister, who had supported a third option – an independent Kashmir – signalling his intent to join India.

An insurgency began in the western part of Kashmir, which was supported by tribal militias from Pakistan. The Maharaja panicked and reached out to India for help. And in September 1947, he requested Nehru to accept his accession to India. Nehru set a pre-condition, that his dear friend, Sheikh Abdullah be released from prison. Abdullah was released, Mountbatten accepted the accession to India, and Abdullah became the

first head of the Kashmir administration under India. India accepted the accession with the proviso that a referendum would follow as soon as peace was restored, since only the people, not the Maharaja, could decide where they wanted to live. But the referendum was never held. On October 24, 1947, a provisional government was formed in Azad Kashmir. On October 26, Kashmir was declared a part of India and a day later Indian troops occupied Srinagar.

The Kashmir dispute has led to four wars between India and Pakistan in 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (Kargil). After the 1971 war, the Simla Agreement formally established the Line of Control that divided the territories controlled by the two nations. The territory of Kashmir remains divided – 55 percent is with India, 30 percent with Pakistan, and 15 percent with China.

As violence continued, India approached the UN for a resolution of the Kashmir dispute. On April 21, 1948, the UN passed Resolution 47 calling for an immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of Pakistani tribesmen from Jammu and Kashmir, re-



Indian Premier Shastri with Pakistan's President General Ayub in Tashkent in 1966: The long and short of it.

China and India in 1962, in which China advanced but withdrew after a ceasefire. However, it retained Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram area.

On May 27, 1964, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru died. The new prime minister was a small, simple Congress Party leader, Lal Bahadur Shastri. Pakistan took the opportunity afforded by the death of the powerful Nehru to launch Operation Gibraltar, a plan to infiltrate Kashmir and incite a rebellion against the Indian occupation. The name Operation Gibraltar was chosen in memory of the Muslims crossing through Gibraltar in the conquest of Spain. Pakistan and its supporters in Kashmir built up a formidable position, but to their surprise India countered by invading the Punjab. Heavy fighting saw the greatest tank battle after World War II, but after 23 days, on September 23 a ceasefire was called.

An agreement was reached at Tashkent for both sides to withdraw to their pre-conflict positions and not to interfere in each other's affairs. The tall, handsome and distinguished General Ayub, in his smart western suits, provided a stark contrast to the diminutive Shastri, in his simple homespun Indian clothes, but the two leaders gave each other respect and had a positive interaction. A day after the signing of the Tashkent Declaration, Shastri suddenly died. Headlines said a heart attack was the cause of death, but no post-mortem was conducted. At 3 am, the KGB arrested the butler, the cook, and three other assistants on suspicion of poisoning Shastri.

Shastri's body was flown home. Lalita, his wife, was not satisfied and asked, "If it was a heart attack, why does his body have cuts? Why is blood dripping out? Why is his body swollen? Why has it turned blue-black in colour?" Kuldip Nayar, Shastri's press secretary's reply to her was, "I am told that when bodies are embalmed, they turn blue."

The Indian Parliament constituted an enquiry committee and two key witnesses were summoned to give evidence: Dr Chugh, Shastri's personal doctor and Ram Nath, his servant. Dr Chugh set off for Delhi by car; on the way his car was hit by a truck that killed both him and his wife. Ram Nath left Motilal Nehru's residence for parliament but was hit by a vehicle on the way. His legs were crushed and later

*An agreement was reached at Tashkent for both sides to withdraw to their pre-conflict positions and not to interfere in each other's affairs. A day after the signing of the Tashkent Declaration, Shastri suddenly died.*

duction of Indian forces, followed by a plebiscite. The ceasefire was finally signed on January 1, 1949 by the two commanders-in-chief, General Douglas Gracey for Pakistan, and General Roy Bucher for India. The resolution called for Pakistan to withdraw first, and Indian withdrawal to follow; Pakistan refused, saying there was no guarantee that India would withdraw afterwards. In the end, no withdrawal was carried out and no plebiscite took place.

The conflict in Kashmir continued, and numerous plans and proposals to resolve the issues came to naught. A war ensued between

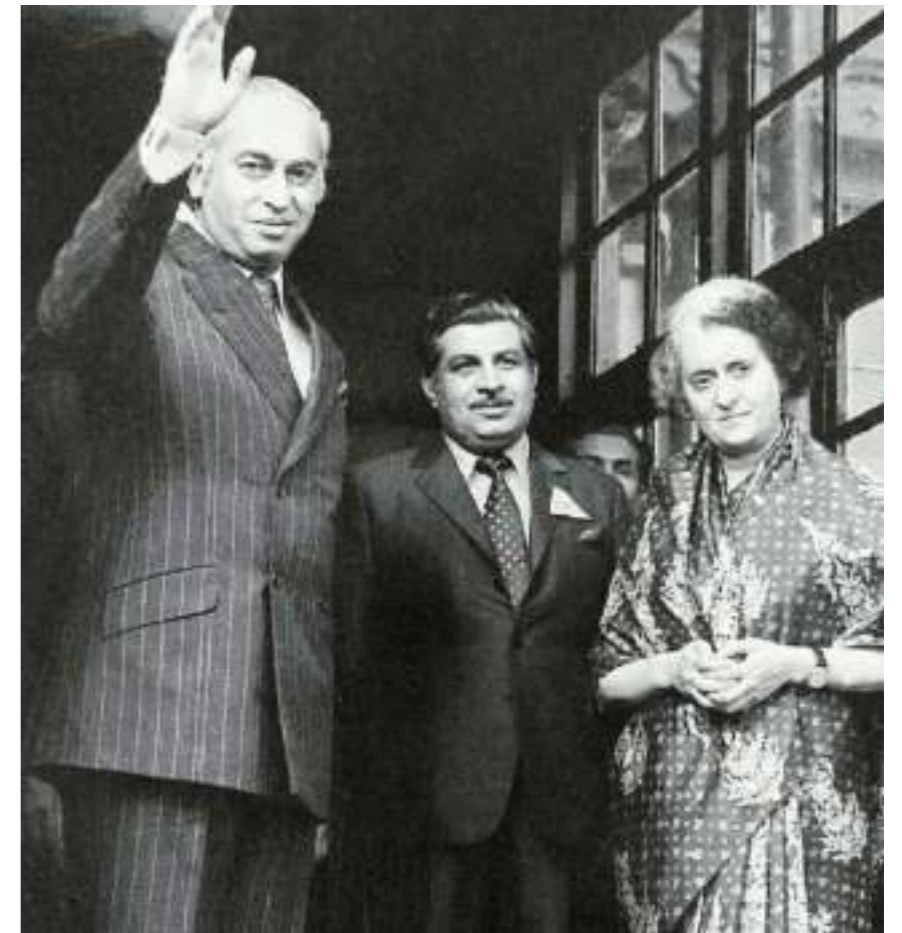
amputated. He suffered total memory loss and could not testify.

But the deaths did not stop here. Shastri was a supporter of India's nuclear programme. On January 24, 1966, Homi J Bhabha, the father of the Indian nuclear programme who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Physics, died when his aircraft exploded in Switzerland. Gregory Douglas, a journalist who investigated the air crash, wrote that the CIA was responsible for his assassination, which set back India's nuclear programme. Five years later, Vikram Sarabhai, the physicist who initiated India's space programme and also helped its nuclear programme, died in suspicious circumstances in a hotel. *The Times of India* wrote a story headlined, 'Mystery behind Vikram Sarabhai's death.'

After the disastrous 1971 war that led to the creation of Bangladesh, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi met at Simla. Bhutto wanted the repatriation of the 90,000 Pakistanis who had been taken prisoners of war (POWs); Indira wanted a durable solution to the Kashmir issue. An agreement was reached between them to avoid war, preserve peace, and observe the sanctity of the Line of Control, with India in control of Indian-administrated Kashmir and Pakistan in control of Pakistani-administered Kashmir. A second meeting was to follow, but it never took place.

Bhutto tried to maintain the peace, but after his hanging, General Zia followed a different strategy. With strong US support to fight the war in Afghanistan against the Russians, Zia encouraged Islamist militants to become more active and aggressive in Kashmir. Violence escalated. In 1990, violence led to the mass exodus of the Hindu Pandits from Kashmir to safer territory in India, leaving only a few thousand behind. Indian repression in Kashmir grew harsher. Elections were rigged. An Indian Congress Party leader, Khem Lata Wakhloo wrote: "I remember there was massive rigging in the 1987 elections. The losing candidates were declared winners. It shook the faith of ordinary people in the elections and the democratic process." Normal life in Kashmir disappeared.

In 1999, war broke out in Kargil. In the bitterly cold winters, it was the usual practice for troops to come down from the peaks since they did not anticipate any enemy attack. That year, Pakistani forces moved into the Kargil Heights to block



New players, same game: (Above) Bhutto and Indira Gandhi at Simla in 1972; (Below) Musharraf and Vajpayee at Agra in 2001.





*A Kashmiri man amidst the ruins of his home which was raided by Indian troops.*

the highway, the only link between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. In the battle that ensued, India recaptured most of its territory. This small war was disproportionately dangerous due to the fact that both India and Pakistan had proven nuclear capacity. Bill Clinton called on the warring parties to back off. War ended, but the confrontation that developed between then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and then Chief of Army Staff General Musharraf had far-reaching repercussions on Pakistan's politics. Meanwhile, the Kashmiris were caught between the repressive Indian authorities and the harsh Islamist fighters and the mujahideen.

The war against the Russians in Afghanistan ended in 1989. This released fighters – and weapons – who were then sent to Kashmir; consequently the violence and repression increased; protests, armed struggle, police firing and curfews followed. Musharraf met Vajpayee for talks in Agra in 2001, but peace stood little chance when 38 were killed in an attack on the Kashmir Assembly in Srinagar in October 2001. Two months later, in December, the Indian parliament in Delhi was stormed. Musharraf continued his efforts for peace and restored the Delhi-

*Kashmiris appear in no mood to yield. Against all odds, they have continued to resist the great Indian might.*

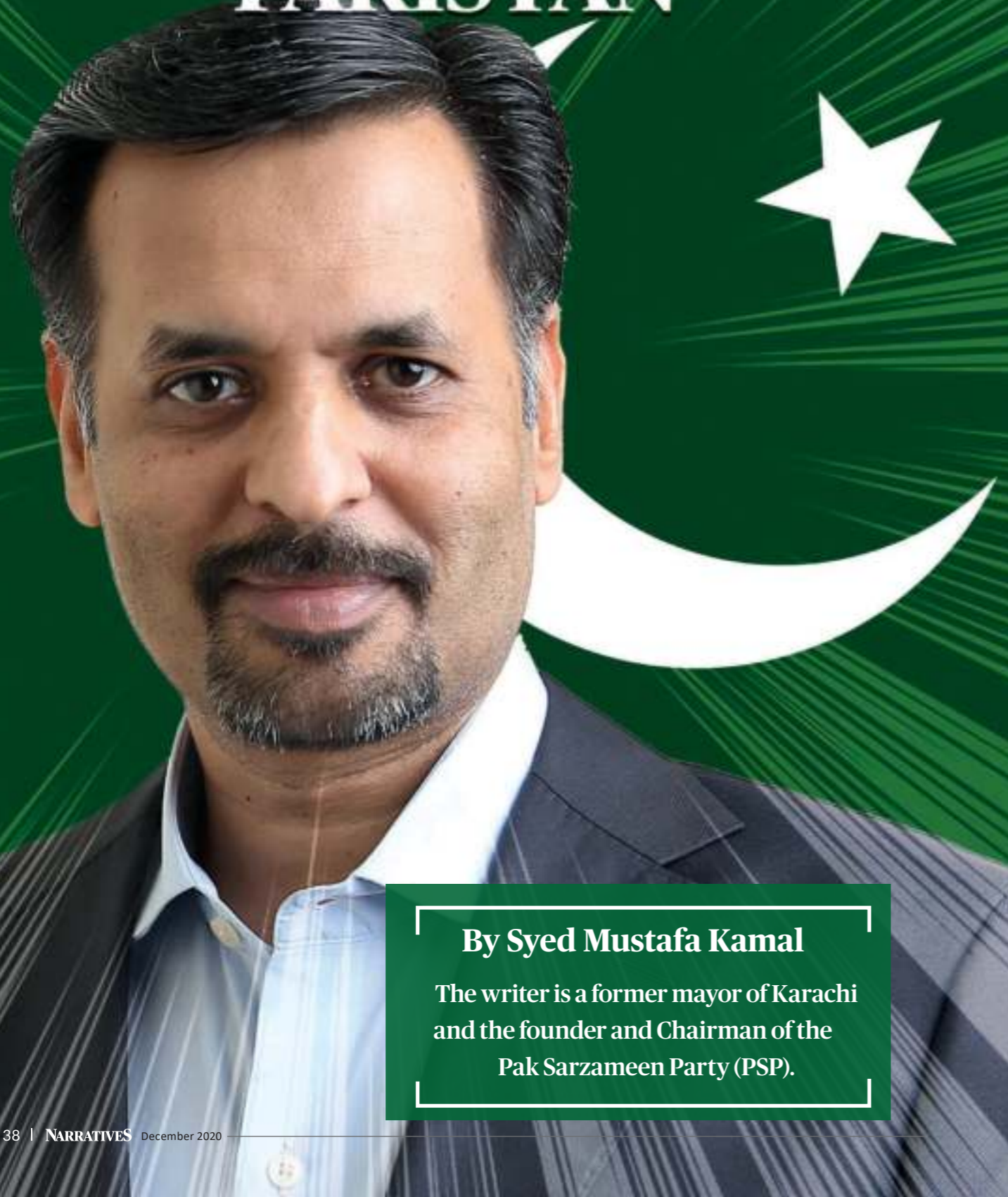
Lahore bus service in 2003. In 2004, he met Manmohan Singh, the Indian prime minister in New York, but the meeting did not yield any conclusive results. The situation worsened, and in 2009 hordes of Kashmiris marched through Srinagar demanding independence. India called the fighters 'terrorists,' Pakistan called them 'freedom fighters' but it was highly embarrassing when then President Zardari, in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* in October 2008, referred to the 'freedom fighters' as terrorists.

In 2019, Indian Prime Minister Modi sprung a surprise on Pakistan when it revoked the special status granted to Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of 2019. Now

there was no going back. The Chinese response was to capture additional territory in Kashmir, which resulted in skirmishes between the two giants of Asia. Pakistan responded by announcing that Gilgit-Baltistan would become the fifth province of Pakistan.

Does this mean an end to the dispute? Most certainly not. There might be a covert push from the world and regional powers to make these three nuclear-armed neighbours accept their current disputed frontiers as permanent lines, but Kashmiris appear in no mood to yield. Against all odds, they have continued to resist the great Indian might. They will continue to fight as a grave injustice was inflicted upon them at the time of Partition by the departing British Raj and its successors in New Delhi. Accepting the disputed frontiers as permanent would also be a hard sell, especially for Pakistan's civil and military leaders, to the majority of Pakistanis. Pakistan might take two steps back because of economic and international pressures for the time being, but it will never abandon the Kashmir cause. This means Kashmir's cauldron will remain on the boil, and along with it the entire South Asia, threatening regional and world peace. ■

# TOMORROW'S PAKISTAN



**By Syed Mustafa Kamal**

The writer is a former mayor of Karachi and the founder and Chairman of the Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP).

## A Case for Devolution

“It is imperative that we have highly empowered local governments across Pakistan”

**I**f you want to destroy a nation, rob its people of hope. Pakistani society has never been in such a state of despair and so demoralised as it is today.

For the first time in the country's painful history, people have lost hope not just in the sitting government and the opposition but, astonishingly, even in the powerful state institutions that the forlorn masses customarily turned to as a last resort for some relief. This widespread disappointment should not be taken lightly. It is reflective of dangerous hubris and the flawed ethos of the Executive, the Opposition and the Institutions.

The incompetence of the sitting government has severely affected the life of a common Pakistani. This grave situation is a consequence of a lack of communication between the Federal and the Sindh governments and the deep-seated mistrust between the two from day one. Skyrocketing inflation, the lowest per capita income, all-time high unemployment and added to it, the poor management of the corona pandemic has only worsened the situation and made survival difficult for the average person.

In spite of the deterioration in every sphere of life, no sincere efforts have been made by the government in power or the opposition parties to lessen the miseries of the common man. Consequently he/she has lost faith in the government, as well as the opposition parties. The recent movement of the combined opposition parties, gathered under the banner of PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) against the government, has not elicited much response from the people other than creating ripples in talk shows. The fact is that the PDM narrative against the government has failed to attract the common man because it barely offers any hope. The people have rejected their call because these very parties that are using the opposition card today, have remained in governments for many years, and one of the main parties in this alliance, the



PPP, has been ruling the second biggest province of Pakistan, Sindh, for the last 12 years. In the last 10 years, the Sindh Government is said to have spent Rs. 8342 billion on the province and yet the entire province presents a sorry spectacle – the provincial capital Karachi is ranked fourth amongst the most unliveable cities in the world today. The main objective of the PDM movement is to oust the government and to return to power. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister and his cabinet are not above blame – they spend morning to evening maligning the opposition. There is nothing for the people in their narrative. They are completely oblivious to the day-to-day miseries of the common man.

A deep rot has not only set in, but permeated the country's entire political, administrative and financial system, which is nearing collapse. Neither the government nor the opposition can bring about any worthwhile change in people's lives under the prevailing structure. What it desperately needs is a “reboot” – in order to avoid the dreaded boot. Major reforms are needed across the board – without any exceptions – in order to avoid anarchy and the collapse of the state and its institutions. The ethos of the nation has to be redefined and, most importantly, an

all-encompassing, fresh narrative needs to be scripted in light of the new emerging realities and changing paradigms in external and internal stability and sustainability, with economics and connectivity being the driving forces.

In our decaying and highly centralised political setup, the administration and the entire wealth of the country are controlled exclusively by five persons: the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the four provincial Chief Ministers. They are the only custodians of the entire country's power structure and money, with no delegation of any administrative or financial powers to the districts, cities, towns and union councils of Pakistan. This blatantly over-centralised system of management has, without any doubt, accentuated the feeling of deprivation, and taken away the sense of ownership and participation from the cities and towns, where the revenue and growth engines of the national economy are located. It has compromised the rights of citizenship. In such a degenerate democracy, it is only to be expected that corrupt political mafias will run a country of 220 million people like a cartel, with an autocratic, over-centralised style of management.

Our problems have multiplied, be-



*Karachi: An unliveable city.*

come humongous – grown from a small sore to a cancer. We have around 25 million kids of school-going age who are out of schools; 43 percent of our population faces stunting problems due to lack of food and clean drinking water; our criminal justice system is rotten to the core, so much so that a common citizen is denied justice; our government-run health facilities are abysmal; and most households even lack basic necessities like water, a proper sewerage system, a solid waste disposal system, electricity and gas; proper roads, transport, recreational facilities and community policing are negligible. All of the above-mentioned issues can never be resolved unless there is DEVOLUTION OF POWER from the provinces to the districts, cities, towns and union council administrations.

The 18th Amendment was a good step towards decentralisation and devolution. A substantial number of powers and authority were devolved from the centre to the provinces. Those powers were supposed to be further devolved to the districts, cities, towns and union councils of every province, but due to the dictatorial mindset of our so-called democratic political governments, devolution from the provinces to the grassroots level did not take place; instead all the powers were parked at the CM house, under the cover of provincial autonomy. The Chief Minister (CM) of the province became all-powerful and he did not delegate power to the different tiers of the province. There is total disenfranchisement due to

*“A fresh narrative needs to be scripted in light of the country’s new realities and changing paradigms.”*



*Down but not out.*

a highly over-centralised form of governance by all the provincial governments. People have yet to see the fruits of the 18th Amendment in Pakistan.

This half-hearted devolution needs to be completed and all the provincial districts, cities, villages, towns and union councils must be given their due powers. This move will enhance the standard of living of the common citizens of Pakistan; leakages in public money spending will be controlled and minimised, and pub-

lic representatives will be made more accountable at the grassroots level.

Distribution of funds through the National Finance Commission Award (NFC) from the federal to the provincial governments is just one step towards devolution. These funds should further be distributed through the Provincial Finance Commission Award (PFC) from the province to all the district governments of that province, but this is not happening. Huge financial powers have been given to the CM of the province with no compulsion whatsoever on him to distribute this money further down the administrative unit chain. We need to fix this and base the PFC award on a formula that is similar to the NFC Award.

And finally, there are complaints regarding the census results from different parts of Pakistan. Take Karachi, for instance. There is a consensus among all stakeholders that the census results of this city are not accurate. The PPP Chairman, Asif Zardari has repeatedly said, on record, that Karachi’s population is more than 30 million. The honourable Chief justice of the Supreme Court has publicly stated that Karachi’s population is 35 million. However, according to the government’s official record, it is still 16 million, based on the current census report.

But according to my estimates, Karachi’s population is more than 25 million people, not 16 million. We have to revisit the census process in all the mega cities of Pakistan, particularly Karachi.

Besides resolving the all-too critical issues of Devolution, Census & PFC, at the end of the day, it is imperative that we have highly empowered Local Governments all over Pakistan, with proper constitutional protection, and introduce the long overdue Electoral Reforms. ■

## Sold Down the River?

The IMF employs an outdated formula that hurts instead of helping economies at risk

**T**he roots of the IMF go back to World War II, a war that left Europe totally devastated and the global monetary and financial system in a dysfunctional state. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt invited the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference to deliberate on the issues of reconstruction and development of Europe, and to restore global monetary and financial stability. A conference was held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, US, during July 1-22, 1944. Forty-four nations attended the Conference. After over three weeks of deliberation, two Institutions were created with the names of the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), better known as the World Bank. The two persons that played key roles at the technical levels for the establishment of these institutions were Harry Dexter White, a senior US Treasury official and John Maynard Keynes, an advisor to the British Treasury. Keynes later emerged as the father of modern macroeconomics.

The IMF was made responsible for maintaining an orderly international monetary system and for providing short to medium term financial assistance to member countries experiencing temporary balance of payments difficulties. The IBRD was made responsible for providing financial support to member countries for developmental activities. These two institutions of officially came into existence on December 27, 1944.

From the viewpoint of the IMF, whenever a country faces a balance of payments crisis, it is because of the excessive demand prevailing in the economy. In other words, aggregate demand exceeds aggregate supply. The IMF believes that by curtailing aggregate demand through various policy instruments, the country can restore a balance with aggregate supply. It is critical to note that the IMF never advocates raising aggregate supply or never prescribes supply side policy.

There are four key policies that the IMF advises member countries seeking resources: i) market-based exchange rate policy (meaning devaluation), ii) tight monetary policy (raising interest rates), iii) tight fiscal policy (raising revenue and curtailing expenditure) and iv) raising utility prices (gas and electricity). These are a set of policies on which a consensus was developed among the three institutions, namely the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury in the early 1980s for countries seeking IMF resources. They became the standard policy prescription of the IMF under the title of the stabilisation policy/demand management policy/austerity policy for countries seeking balance of payments support. They represent the “one shoe fits all” prescription, whether it is Egypt, Ukraine or Pakistan. The world has undergone considerable changes since the early 1980s but the IMF prescription has remained unchanged. The time has come to review the Washington Consensus, a term coined by John



*Eating his own words: PM Imran Khan meets with IMF Director Christine Lagarde.*

Williamson, a British Economist working for the World Bank in 1989.

Let me describe how these policies work in reality. The country would be asked by IMF staff to pursue a floating or market-based exchange rate policy, which invariably leads to devaluation (the objectives are to reduce imports and increase exports – the two components of aggregate demand). Devaluation is by definition inflationary as all the landed costs of imported items in local currency increase. To counter inflationary pressure, the Central Bank immediately tightens monetary policy by increasing the discount rate, which in turn, increases overall interest rates in the economy. A higher interest rate discourages private sector investment (one component of aggregate demand).

Tight fiscal policy on the other hand, prevents the government from spending more (another component of aggregate

**By Dr. Ashfaque H. Khan**

The writer is a renowned economist, who served as an advisor to the Ministry of Finance & D.G of its Debt Office. Currently he is the Principal & Dean at the NUST School of Social Sciences.

demand). Given the committed nature of spending such as interest payments, defence, running the civil administration and subsidies in which there is little or no flexibility, the axe of spending cuts falls invariably on development expenditure. A cut in development expenditure means that public sector investment also declines. Therefore, total investment as a percentage of GDP declines. Investment

of payments support and implements the stabilisation policy, it never emerges from the crisis. In fact, the crisis is perpetuated by the nature of the policy prescriptions. The IMF Programme is not a stabilisation programme, rather it is a destabilisation programme in which investment and growth slow down, leading to a rise in unemployment that gives birth to social unrest in the country. It also increases the

cost of capital), devaluation (increases landed costs of imported inputs) and increase in utility prices, adding to the cost of production, and hence the country loses external competitiveness with serious consequences for its exports.

There are two sources of instability; one is exogenous and the other is self-induced shocks. Exogenous shocks include terms of trade shocks, natural disasters, capital flight, a sudden rise in oil and commodity prices etc. Many developing countries have a narrow export base. Any adverse shock to the prices of their commodities will have a strong adverse impact on their export earnings. A sharp increase in oil prices will increase the import bills of the developing countries that are net importers of oil. This will worsen the trade and current account balance and may force the country to seek IMF assistance.

Self-induced shocks are the result of the poor macroeconomic management of the country. For example, excessively loose fiscal policy increases aggregate demand, which is translated into higher imports, and worsening trade and current account balances. Such developments put pressure on exchange rates; leading to devaluation, rise in public debt, increase in interest payments, erosion of fiscal space, and decline in investment in physical and human infrastructure.

A country that faces such shocks and experiences balance of payments difficulties approaches the IMF for a bailout package. The IMF applies the 1980s vintage Stabilisation Policy. In my opinion, this Stabilisation Policy or Washington Consensus has lost its charm because the IMF doesn't distinguish between the two types of shocks. It treats exogenous and self-induced shocks as one and the same and applies the same medicine.

To illustrate, consider that there are two countries – country A and country B. Country A has been managing its economy well. Economic growth has been robust, both budget and current account deficits have been low and the country has sufficient foreign exchange reserves to finance four months of imports. All of a sudden, the country is hit by a massive external shock like the unprecedented surge in oil and commodity prices in 2007/08, that created a serious balance of payments crisis. Country B, on the other hand, is failing in managing its economy

well. Economic growth is low, budget and current account deficits are high and foreign exchange reserves are depleting fast. While Country A is hit by a sudden external shock, not of its own making, Country B is facing serious difficulties because of its inability to manage the economy properly. Both countries go to the IMF for financial support. Should the IMF prescribe the same medicine to both the countries?

In my view, the answer is No. Country 'A' should be treated differently from Country 'B'. Country 'A' has been pursuing prudent macroeconomic policy. External shocks have created a temporary balance of payments problem. What is required from the IMF is to provide one-time financial support to build its reserves so that the country can withstand the external shocks. Country 'B', which was mismanaging its economy, should be treated differently. Policies should be designed to bring its budget into balance and the external account into a comfortable zone, for which tight fiscal and monetary policies are the solution. The problem with the IMF is that it does not differentiate the root cause of the problem. Its generic medicine, instead of addressing the problems, in fact further compounds the difficulties faced by the countries. In order to address one problem, it gives birth to many problems and hence in the process, the country and its people continue to suffer. There is an urgent need for the IMF to shed the "Aspirin Approach to the Balance of Payments Crisis."

Pakistan is one of the nine prolonged users of IMF resources. In fact, it has become addicted to the IMF Programme. Whenever we had a headache, we went to the IMF for an aspirin tablet. We got temporary relief but neither the IMF nor the Pakistani authorities ever tried to find out as to why the headache recurred every two to three years. Pakistan approached the IMF for the 22nd time in July 2019, for a 39 month Programme ending in September 2022. Prime Minister Imran Khan, while in the opposition, said many a time that once he came to power he would not go to the IMF. After 22 years of struggle, the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan went to the IMF for the 22nd Programme. What a coincidence.

Against the backdrop of the second lost decade (2008-18), the present government took charge of affairs on August 18,

2018. There are no two opinions that the present government inherited a shattered economy with growth decelerating; unemployment and poverty rising; budget and current account deficits deteriorating; and foreign exchange reserves falling. The government either had no option, or was 'forced' to go to the IMF for the 22nd IMF Programme. From November/December 2018 onwards, Pakistan con-

seldom observed in the past.

Should the results of the 22nd Programme be different from the previous 21 Programmes? Could there be a 23rd Programme in the making? Since Pakistan has gone once again to the fold of the IMF, it is legitimate to question the efficacy of the IMF's four decades old prescription. Will the same medicine prove to be effective the 22nd time or will his-



The architects of the IMF: Harry Dexter White (left) with John Maynard Keynes.

is the critical input to economic growth, and lower investment slows economic growth. Slower economic growth slows the pace of job creation and hence, there is a rise in unemployment and poverty.

Tight monetary policy leads to a higher discount rate and a rise in overall interest rates. Higher interest rates increase the cost of financing the government's budget deficit, which in turn, increases interest payments, hence current and total expenditure. Devaluation also increases dollar denominated public debt in rupee terms, which increases overall public debt. Given the rise in interest rates, high public debt increases interest payments, current expenditure and hence, total expenditure. Slower economic growth slows revenue generation and given the rise in total expenditure, it increases the budget deficit, which is counter to the IMF policy of tight fiscal policy. A higher budget deficit forces the government to borrow more and hence, accumulate more public debt.

The IMF policy of stabilisation, in fact, leads the country into a debt trap. Once the country goes to the IMF for balance

*The IMF stabilisation policy leads the country into a debt trap. Once the country implements the stabilisation policy, it never emerges from the crisis. In fact, the crisis is perpetuated by the nature of the policy prescriptions.*

country's debt. Hence, low investment, slower economic growth, rising unemployment and poverty, more inflation, a higher budget deficit, more debt, and rising social unrest are the outcomes of the IMF Programme. It also transforms a low cost economy into a high cost economy through the hike in interest rates (increas-



Bretton Woods 1944: Though times have changed the formula remains the same.

*Pakistan's economy was severely damaged as a result of implementing the four decades old standard policies. It not only failed to increase exports but added Rs. 4666 billion in public debt.*

continued to implement 'Prior Actions' for the Programme and from July 1, 2019 onwards the country continues to implement the four decades old prescriptions to stabilise Pakistan's economy. As in the previous 21 Programmes with the IMF, Pakistan continued to implement the standard policies like tight monetary and fiscal policy, the so-called market based exchange rate policy, and raising utility prices at a pace

tory repeat itself?

Pakistan's economy was severely damaged as a result of implementing the four decades old standard policies. The country's Central Bank pursued a tight monetary policy and raised discount rates from 6.5 percent in June 2018 to 13.25 percent in July 2019, maintaining that level until February 2020. We were told that this increase in interest rates was required to control inflation, which was hovering at the double-digit level. The Central Bank, without realising that Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation in Pakistan is measured through the supply side as well as changes in government administered prices, blatantly used the interest rate as an instrument to deal with aggregate demand and not aggregate supply. Instead of controlling inflation, the continued hike in interest rates fuelled it. Higher interest rates increased the cost of capital and businesses simply passed on the high cost of capital to consumers by raising the prices of their products.

Figure-I clearly depicts the positive relationship between the interest rate and overall inflation. The Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) had stated time and again when releasing his mon-

Figure-1

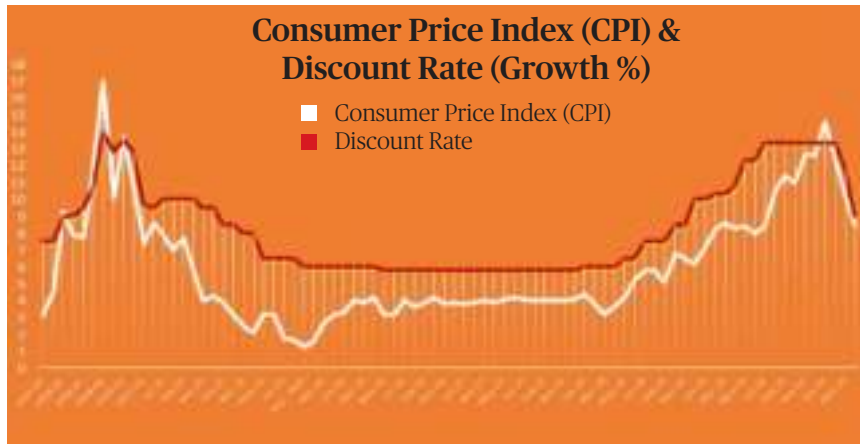
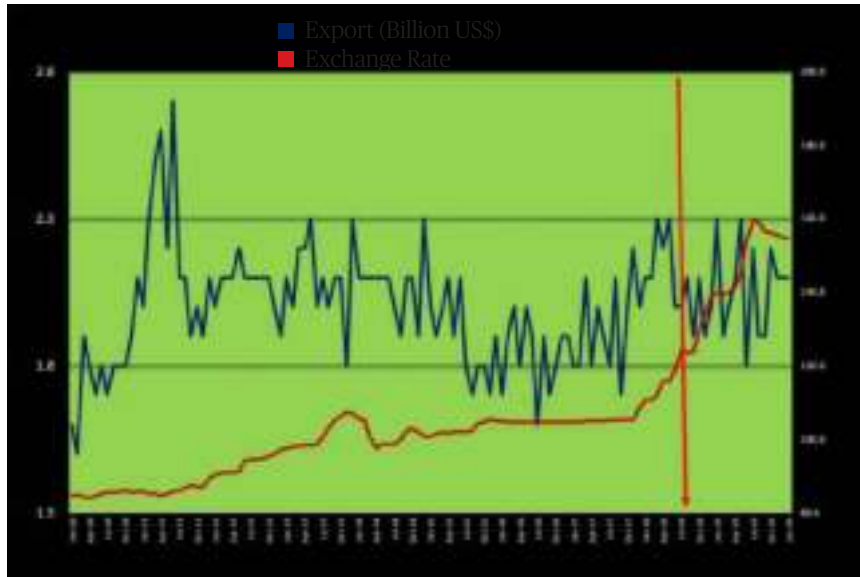


Figure-2



etary policy statement, that inflation in Pakistan is a supply side phenomenon followed by the rise of government administered prices (prices of electricity gas and medicines), and yet he continued to hike interest rates to “control inflation.” He kept on prescribing the wrong medicine.

What damage has it caused to the budget and the economy? Such a prolonged hike in interest rate policy not only discouraged private sector investment but added Rs. 1687 billion to interest payments. Interest payments surged from Rs. 1500 billion in 2017-18 to 2620 billion in 2019-20 – an increase of 75 percent in just two years. As a percentage of

*Pakistan is now pursuing its 22nd programme and outcomes indicate that there will be a 23rd. The Washington Consensus is dated and there is a need to develop new policies, which must be different from the current “one shoe fits all” stand.*

GDP, it increased from 4.4 percent to 6.3 percent. Such a rapid increase in interest payments as a result of the ill-informed policy of the SBP contributed immensely in widening of the fiscal deficit and the attendant increase in public debt.

Under the so-called market based exchanged rate policy, the SBP put the rupee on free fall, depreciating from Rs. 121.5 per dollar in June 2018 to Rs. 166.4 per dollar by March 2020. The stated objective of devaluation was to improve external competitiveness so as to increase exports. It not only failed to increase exports but added Rs. 4666 billion in public debt without borrowing a single dollar. As shown in figure-2, exports continued to move in the narrow range of \$ 1.7 billion to \$ 2.1 billion monthly over the last 100 months, irrespective of the exchange rate.

These two policies (hike in interest rates and devaluation) alone have cost Pakistan Rs. 6353 billion or approximately \$40 billion for a \$6 billion IMF Programme from July 2018 to February 2020. Who is responsible for this misguided policy?

I have not discussed the cost of raising utility prices that have added to the cost of production and made Pakistan’s industries non-competitive globally. Was the IMF Programme meant to damage the economy of Pakistan? Has the IMF programme improved the economy? I leave it to the readers and the people of Pakistan to decide.

Let me conclude by saying that as an institution the IMF is a great institution. Their staff are true professionals and I have had the privilege of working with thorough, professional economists. What is wrong with the IMF is its decades old policies which, instead of improving the economies of member countries actually damage them. There is a serious fault in the design of their policies vis-à-vis countries seeking their resources. Pakistan is a classic example. After 21 programmes with the IMF, the country’s economy still remains fragile. Pakistan is currently pursuing its 22nd programme and the outcomes of the programme thus far clearly indicate that there will be a 23rd programme in September 2022. The Washington Consensus is now dated and there is a need to develop a new consensus on the set policies, which must be different from the current “one shoe fits all” stand. ■



# The Big Question

One of the biggest challenges to Pakistan's economy remains its ever ballooning power sector circular debt. When the PTI government came to power in August 2018, it declared energy sector reforms, including addressing the issue of circular debt, as one of its top priorities. But almost half-way through its term, the government continues to struggle on this front.

This month's 'Big Question' is ...

## How to manage the power sector's circular debt?

*Narratives asked Dr. Fiaz Ahmad Chaudhry, a former Managing Director of the National Transmission & Dispatch Company Ltd and Professor at LUMS, Mohammed Sohail, CEO of Topline Securities and Dr. Shahid Rahim, a freelance consultant specialising in sustainable energy system planning and development, to give their views on the subject.*

## Dr. Fiaz Ahmad Chaudhry

Professor and Werner-Von-Siemens Chair School of Science & Engineering LUMS

**C**ircular debt is not unlike a virus that continues to plague Pakistan. It has infused itself in the blood vessels of the power sector, crippling the economy and creating misery for the people. While the treatment required structural reforms and a shift away from conventional practices, historically, little has been done, with governments focused on managing the symptoms and not remedying the underlying conditions. At present, though, there appears to be a stronger political will and long-term sustainable-thinking in vaccinating the power sector. This article discusses some of the ways the government is managing the challenge of circular debt.

The circular debt was born over a decade ago when the actual cost of providing electricity began to surge amidst lack of revenue realised by the DISCOs. Over time, the cash deficit widened due to a host of reasons: poor planning, meagre governance, ballooning capacity payments, grid deflection, un-budgeted, delayed and/or insufficient tariff differential subsidies by the government, delayed fuel price adjustment mechanism, high T&D losses, and low recovery and theft. While these are visible causes, there are also hidden elements of 'out-of-merit' system dispatch to cater for unwarranted power purchase obligations and flawed network infrastructure. The root problem has really been the inability to let go of control of un-bundled power institutions as typically enjoyed by the government apparatus in the previous vertically integrated utility. In the absence of sound, sustainable and evidence-based integrated system planning, the payables of the government increase and the corresponding debt has accumulated to a mammoth Rs. 2.5 trillion, as of November 2020.

Recently, the government entered into MOUs with IPPs that noticeably deal with lowering the fixed capacity costs, the main contributor to the rising cost of generation. Although the process was disjointed and there may be medium to long-term implications for future investments by the private sector, both sides needed to accept the reality that the existing financial eco-system of the power sector was simply not tenable. The intention of these MOUs is to smoothen the "front loaded" tariff profile of power projects and provide direct relief to rate-payers. Nevertheless, this step merely provides a breathing space, which must be complemented by structural reforms to make it meaningful. A competitive wholesale market model has been approved by the regulator for deployment by April 2022 and the process of integrated system planning has been initiated by NTDC through preparation of Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP)

and the corresponding Transmission System Expansion Plan (TSEP). Both developments are welcome, long over-due and will ensure optimal generation development and improve service in system operations but require an enabling institutional framework to be worthwhile.

A roadmap is in the works by the government, which is promising, albeit belated. It focuses on corporatising the DISCOs through public-private arrangements to improve recovery and reduce losses and theft. A performance-based model is indeed apt in the current climate as the private sector can bring financial discipline and improved managerial competence. This will coincide with opening up the retail market, which will bring the power of choice to consumers. Simply put, the power sector risks are being re-organised through a competitive market regime that rewards efficiency and penalises rent-seeking culture. In addition, the government should formulate and implement 'ease of doing business' policies and strategies, especially for industrial consumers. The purpose would be to reduce electricity costs and increase base-load on the national grid. Some policy changes and initiatives may include, to bring back to grid the load being served by inefficient captive generation, electrification of rail roads (ML-1), induction of electric vehicles, and development of efficient electrical appliances for space heating, cooking, etc.

The reform roadmap must address other critically important issues such as myopic leadership, outdated administrative practices and lack of workforce agility. These must be addressed immediately to prevent institutions from falling into the same well that they are trying to climb out of in the first place. ■



## Mohammed Sohail

Chief Executive Officer  
Topline Securities

**O**ne of the biggest issues currently faced by the Pakistan economy is Energy Sector mismanagement. Though load shedding has declined in Pakistan after huge expansion of capacity over the last few years, circular debt and other matters are affecting the whole energy chain of Pakistan along with the government's own budget.

Circular debt in Pakistan is growing by Rs. 400-450bn a year, wherein DISCOs' inefficiencies (T&D losses and recovery issues) contribute around 37 percent, followed by late tariff adjustments, 26 percent, and unbudgeted subsidies, 18 percent, to the annual circular debt in the country.

Populist socio-economic decisions by the government in the form of tariff subsidies for the residential and agriculture sectors and/or export oriented industries lead to accumulation of funds against the government (by DISCOs), which due to poor budget planning and fiscal space of the government remain uncollected in the system.

Unbuilt portion of T&D losses and recovery shortfall (together called aggregate technical and commercial losses) in the consumer tariff creates a gap of -12 percent in the system and every single percent costs the economy Rs. 10-12bn. As a result, this amount is cumulated under the DISCO inefficiencies head.

Due to these losses, CPPA/NEPRA are unable to pay due amounts to IPPs, which in turn rely on bank borrowings to finance their working capital. The shareholders of IPPs are also affected, as their investments do not yield good returns in the form of dividends.

The total stock of circular debt in Pakistan has crossed Rs. 2tn, which is indirectly a liability of the government of Pakistan, although it is parked in the books of PHPL and DISCOs. If converted to government debt, it will increase interest expenses by Rs. 160bn a year.

Historically, the government has not been able to address the root cause of this problem. A couple of times, the incumbent and previous governments have issued Sukuks to clear backlogs. But that is a short-term and temporary solution.

The government is exploring different options to resolve circular debt. Amongst the options are (i) increase in the energy tariff by Rs. 4-6/kwh, (ii) negotiation with IPPs to reduce future capacity payments, (iii) out-of-the-box solutions like divesting shareholding in one public company to repay debt of another public company and (iv) issuance of Sukuks and bonds to clear outstanding backlog.

Governments have spoken/negotiated with lenders to re-

*The total stock of circular debt in Pakistan has crossed Rs. 2tn.*

duce this spread and extend loan tenor from 10 years to 20 years. In recent negotiations, these points are also under consideration by government committees, but success depends on Pakistan's relationship with international lenders.

Better management of DISCOs and their privatisation should also be followed.

Moreover, power sector subsidies should be targeted for the poor and specific sectors only and not for all. Plus, to address this issue, there should be a more cost efficient energy mix, including renewables, which are less than 5 percent of the total mix as of now. T&D losses in the system, which are at 18 percent vs. the regional average of 10 percent, must also be reduced.

The new team has done a few things like i) negotiating with IPPs, and ii) increasing the energy tariff. However, they are unable to address the root cause in the system, which is aggregate technical and commercial losses.

Reduction of T&D losses requires huge investment. The best way is to privatise DISCOs, which requires political will. A successful model in these reforms is K-Electric. At the time of acquisition, K-Electric's T&D losses were above 30 percent and in a decade these losses have come below 20 percent.

Apart from this, in Gujrat India, the Gujrat Electricity Board, a public company, turned itself from loss to profit through political will and investment. ■



## Dr. Shahid Rahim

The writer is a freelance consultant specialising in sustainable energy development

**T**he power sector's circular debt, which now tops Rs. 2.3 trillion, is spiralling fast and it is feared to grow into a vicious monster in just a few years. It must be checked before it jeopardises our economic survival. Analysts often cite pervasive inefficiencies and poor management in this sector to be the main causes behind this menace. This sector's problems are, however, acute, chronic, multi-dimensional, and have accumulated over decades. They are all feeding the monster. Improving efficiency and management will be necessary, of course, but will not be sufficient to heal this sector back to full health.

We cannot afford to continue running this sector on traditional lines – trying to serve all electricity demand through the central grid. Electricity consumers are no longer a helpless lot captive to this sector's outdated systems and dysfunctional institutions. They now have choices to satisfy their needs independently of the grid. A new vision and a carefully-crafted programme stretched over 3 to 5 years along the lines below is required to save it from sinking, and to transform it into a viable contributor to the nation's progress.

An old English saying offers a short-run (next 2 years) remedy: "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging". First, no more capital-intensive power projects through long-term contracts, since in the rapidly changing energy landscape, making any commitment beyond 3 to 5 years carries huge risks. Second, spread the fixed-costs of existing generation by incentivising existing consumers to stay with the grid and attract new ones. Third, shift from the present volumetric (kWh-based) rates to a two or three-part tariff – a fixed capacity charge, a variable energy charge, and a service charge – for all consumers. Fourth, put the "Net Metering" policy on pause until the monster is tamed. Fifth, grasp the industrial demand patterns, and make aggressive efforts to win back the demand that has switched to captive plants and encourage new demand for the grid.

In the medium-run (next 2 to 3 years), plan to serve any new demand by squeezing additional energy out of the existing facilities through grid modernisation, improving operational practices, and reshaping the system's demand curve. Switch from traditional least-cost central planning to integrated and value-based planning. Bigger is no more better or cheaper as small-scale, distributed, and renewable energy technologies now offer more feasible alternatives to serve demand at or near its source. Therefore, shift the business-case evaluation from generation

*A solid grid is critical for optimising generation and subsequently its reliable and economic operation.*

terminals to distribution substations.

Plan to recast the power sector over the long-run (from 3 to 5 years and beyond). NTDC's present strategic plan contemplates adding 50 GW of new capacity by 2030 to serve peak demand of 44 GW and replace 6.5 GW of retiring capacity through USD 70 billion of new

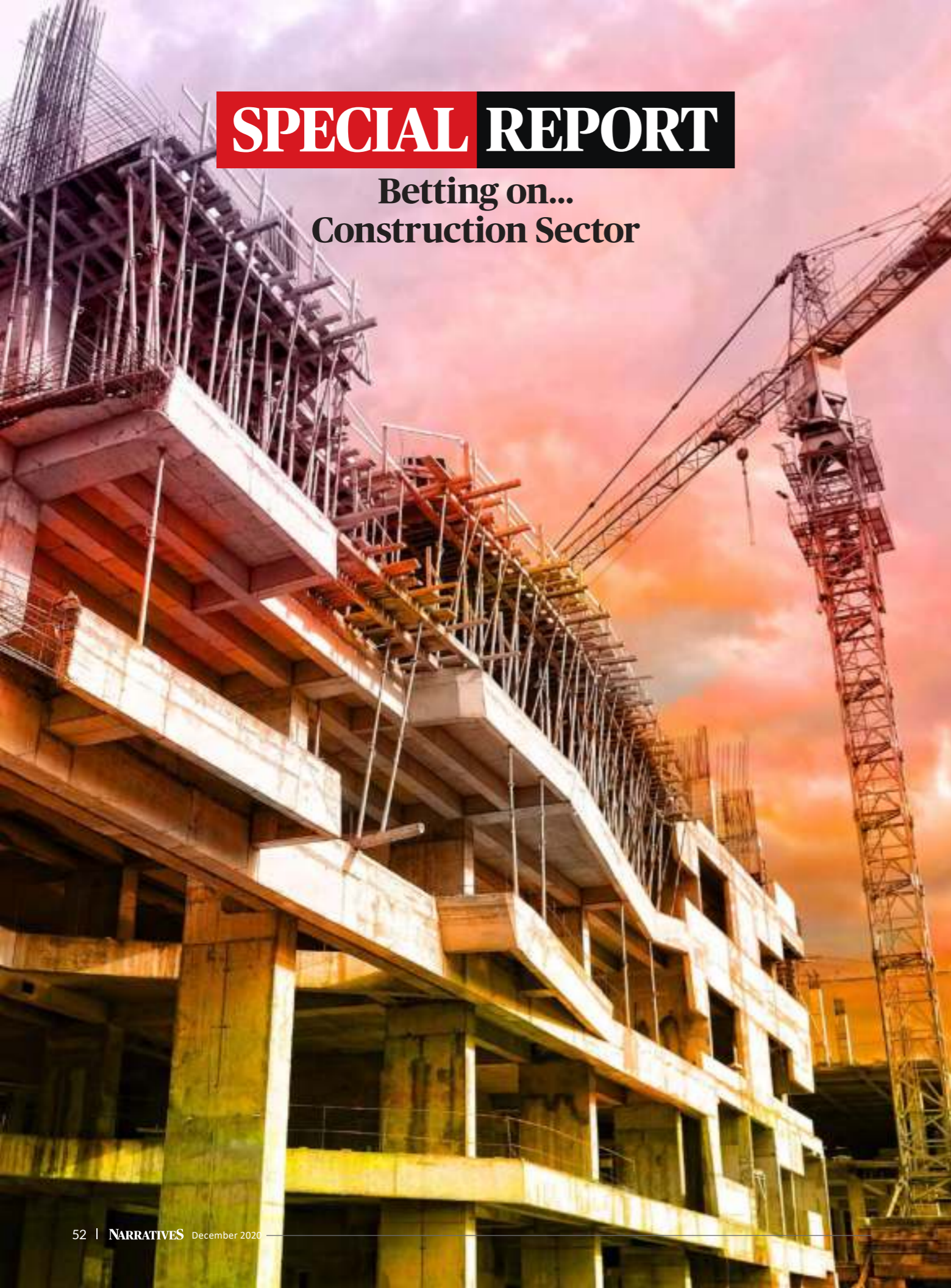
investment. As the cost of serving one MW of demand at source can avoid 1.5 to 2 MW upstream, use every opportunity to avoid future costs by serving demand closer to its source. A solid, robust, and resilient grid is critical for optimising generation and subsequently its reliable and economic operation. Therefore, focus future investment in modernising and strengthening the transmission. Also, 15 to 20 percent "reserve" in the system is normal but the 70 percent envisaged in the above plan, to cover the intermittency and variability of renewable plants (government's 30 percent by 2030 target), is way too high. Though highly desirable, deployment of renewables via central grid may not be the best policy. Other distributed and off-grid options may be more feasible and must be explored.

The remedies prescribed for the short-run will only help to stop the patient's bleeding while those for the medium-run will acclimatise it for the main surgery that can be performed best over the long-run. Collectively, these will take the sting out of the monster and gradually neuter it. ■



# SPECIAL REPORT

## Betting on... Construction Sector



## Building on Hope

The PTI government attempts to boost the economy and fill a critical gap in housing with the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme

**A**fter two years of consecutive low-economic growth – ranging between 1.9 to minus 0.4 percent – Prime Minister Imran Khan appears to have made the right bet on the country's housing sector to boost economic activity and create new jobs in these times of pandemic.

"Pakistan is adding 4.2 million people annually to its population," says Zaigham Rizvi, chairman Task Force for the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme. "The country needs at least 700,000 new houses every year to match the annual increase in population if average household size is taken at six persons per family," he told *Narratives*.

Prime Minister Imran Khan made an electoral promise to provide five million new houses to people belonging to the low-income groups and the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme aims at delivering on this promise. Almost halfway through his five-year term, critics say that the PTI government is unlikely to meet this target. However, the government camp remains optimistic, saying that despite a slow start, the housing programme would prove one of the mainstays in efforts to escalate economic activity in the coming months. Both the public and private sectors plan to launch new projects and complete those in the pipeline at an accelerated pace, from early 2021 onwards.

Zaigham Rizvi says that it was not practically possible for the government to fast track the housing programme. "It took time, because firstly rules and procedures needed to be laid down, then there were the Herculean tasks of identifying state land in 40 cities for the construction of houses, framing banking laws for mortgage financing and involving the private sector in this initiative."

The Naya Pakistan Housing Programme is the first of its kind in the country, as along with urban centres, it fo-



cuses on rural areas, where such schemes have never been launched.

According to the programme's official website, Pakistan faces an overall housing backlog of 11-12 million units, out of which the urban housing shortage is estimated to be around four million – mostly among the low- and middle-income groups.

Traditionally, the housing developer sector caters mostly for the middle, upper-middle and rich segments of the

*Private industry sources say that Imran Khan has shown remarkable determination in pushing through the housing programme, removing one obstacle after another.*

population, while the low-income group remains neglected by both the public and private sectors. The result is mushrooming of slums in the urban centres, many of which have been regularised for political reasons or because of public pressure. People living under sub-human conditions in these slums remain bereft of basic amenities, including piped water, a working sewerage system, open spaces, educational institutions and healthcare.

"When we talk of housing in big cities like Karachi and Lahore, it is only about the elite and upper-middle classes," says Zaigham Rizvi. "*Kutchi Abadis* (slums) and periphery-urban areas are never included in housing development plans. Now our villages, where 60 percent of the population live, have also turned into slums, as housing problems in the rural areas were never addressed."

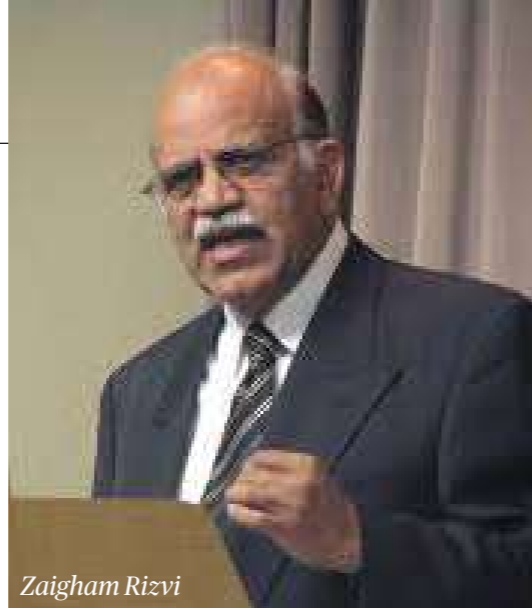
Indeed, the housing sector, despite its money-minting appeal, remains neglected and disorganised, as successive governments despite paying lip-service to the cause never moved beyond mere political rhetoric and slogan mongering. As a result, encroachment mafias filled

the vacuum created by the apathy of successive governments. These thugs settled people on encroached lands, forcing people to live in abysmal conditions.

From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's catchy slogan of "roti, kapara aur ma-kan" (food, clothing and shelter) to Mohammed Khan Junejo's scheme of "shelter for the shelterless," from Yousuf Raza Gilani's announcement of building a million new housing units annually to Nawaz Sharif's 500,000 housing units per

year, there is a long list of broken promises.

Private industry sources say that Imran Khan has shown remarkable determination in pushing through the housing programme, removing one obstacle after another. A construction tycoon, who requested anonymity, said that the prime minister chaired more than 30 meetings to develop the housing programme. "I am a witness to this fact ... he held meetings almost every week to materialise this initiative. There were a lot



Zaigham Rizvi

## Interview

# "Biggest Growth Engine"

Mohsin Shekhani

Patron-in-Chief

Association of Builders & Developers

**F**rom January 1, 2021, Pakistan's housing sector is likely to witness an unprecedented boom – thanks to the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, which focuses on low-cost housing in both urban and rural areas. A number of low-cost housing projects across Pakistan are being launched by developers and builders, boosting demand in affiliate industries of the construction sector and creating new jobs.

The government has announced a tax incentive scheme for developers and builders under which they are required to declare a project and deposit their undeclared money into dedicated bank accounts as allocated amount for the projects.

The significance of the incentive scheme is that those persons availing immunity are required to complete projects by September 30, 2022. In case of failure to meet the deadline, the undeclared money will be added to the income and tax authorities will recover income tax on normal rates besides imposing fines and penalties.

Experts believe that the announcement of the unprecedented incentive package for the construction industry will open new opportunities for investment and development and play a key role in reviving the national economy.

Pakistan faces a shortage of around 12 million housing units. However, the government aims to build around 5 million housing units under the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, for which the prime minister announced the first ever package in the country's history for the housing sector.

Mohsin Shekhani, Patron-In-Chief, Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD) shares his views about the housing package.

### What's the government's incentive package to boost the construction industry?

Developers and builders will not be questioned about their source of income if they invest in the sector by registering with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) by December 31, 2020. The registrations for new developments and projects will be processed by the government within 45 days. However, the incentive is subject to the condition that the grey structure of projects must be completed before September 30, 2022 to avail the incentives. Further, taxes will be computed according to the size of the property (per square foot or per square yard), instead of the price of the property, which was the case previously, and, as a result be substantially lower.

### Are provinces relaxing the sales tax on services?

Yes. Sales tax on builders and developers at the time of sale of property will be levied by all provinces at fixed rates of Rs. 50 per square foot for builders and Rs. 100 per square yard

for developers. Further, builders and developers may not be required to withhold tax when purchasing building materials (except steel and cement) and on certain services (such as plumbing etc). This is beneficial to companies that manufacture and sell such materials (e.g. marble, wood, tiles etc.) because they will no longer be required to declare sales tax on their sales. Sales tax on construction services will be exempted by all provinces, provided the builders and developers are chargeable to sales tax at the fixed rates mentioned above, at the time of sale of property.

### What are the benefits for builders and developers on construction under the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme?

If builders and developers take on a project related to low-cost housing under the Naya Pakistan Housing and Development Authority, then the relevant taxes will be reduced by 90 percent.

### Is there any incentive for purchasers of housing

of hurdles. Our bureaucrats, rather than facilitating, seem to focus on how to create obstacles... but Imran Khan took a personal interest in this programme, which will be a game-changer for the economy."

More than 42 allied industries will get a boost because of construction activity, he added. "Cement and steel sales have already hit record highs... all the other related industries are booming, and we have yet to reach the optimum level of work as the demand for houses outstrips their supply."

The government plans to con-

struct 400,000 houses in the rural areas, 200,000 in the peri-urban areas and 400,000 in the urban areas annually, starting from 2021.

The official website says that in the peri-urban areas, dominated by slums, the policy would largely use an incremental housing model. "In the peri-urban areas the Policy will develop and improve sewerage systems, water supply, service roads, electricity, and common places/parks for community as well as equipping the habitat/community with basic health and education facilities."

In the rural areas, where people overwhelmingly live in mud houses – the same way their fathers and forefathers have lived for decades and centuries – the government plans to "launch the scheme of model villages, in which simplicity of rural life immersed in maximum possible facilities of urban life may be provided," says the official website.

Zaigham Rizvi said that model villages will be built on three to five acres of land with 60 to 70 houses, which will have all amenities including playgrounds. "Children and youngsters are forced

### units in declaring a source of funds?

The law has been amended and the first purchaser of a building or a unit in the building is not required to explain the source of funds used for purchase from a project registered with the FBR under this scheme. Further, people selling their houses for the first time will be exempted from several taxes, including capital gains tax, stamp duty, advance income tax, registration fee etc.

### Is the government supporting the programme through a subsidy?

The prime minister announced Rs. 30 billion subsidies for the poor, and this subsidy would cater to the first 100,000 houses to be constructed under the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme – which means a subsidy of Rs. 300,000 on each house. Those borrowing from the bank to construct their homes would get loans on a subsidised interest rate of 5 percent for a 5-marla house and 7 percent for a 10-marla one. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and all other banks have been advised to set aside 5 percent of their portfolio for the construction industry.

### What are the other initiatives to make the programme successful?

A one-window operation, under the Naya Pakistan Housing Authority, has been launched in all four provinces. A National Coordination Committee on Housing Construction and Development has also been set up to attend to the various obstacles. Taxes have been reduced in the provinces and the complicated procedure of getting NOCs (No Objection



Certificates) has been eased out.

### To what extent has ease been provided?

The decision makers deserve credit for successfully convincing the international community to allow this amnesty of sorts in view of the country's ailing economy. Expensive bank loans – coupled with cumbersome paperwork, involving guarantees in particular – have thus far discouraged people in Pakistan to exercise the mortgage option to build or purchase a home.

### Do you think the government is serious about accomplishing the task?

The prime minister unveiled the plan for revival of the construction sector after the maiden meeting of the newly formed National Coordination Committee on Housing and Construction. The incentive package is evidence of government interest. There will be a 90 percent tax

exemption on construction activity related to the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme. The general sales tax has been reduced from 15 percent to two percent, while withholding tax has been abolished on construction material. The plan will make it affordable for low and middle-income people to build houses with low rate mortgage financing.

### What is the role of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in facilitating the Naya Housing Programme?

The SBP has announced several regulatory measures to facilitate the housing programme. Under these regulatory provisions, commercial banks would allocate five percent of their portfolio for construction activities. Some Rs. 20 trillion was circulating

in the informal, unregistered economy and this is the opportunity for people to get this huge amount of money declared by investing in the real estate sector by December 31, 2020. It is a fact that now a person with an income of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 100,000 could build a 5-marla house with mortgage financing at 5 percent.

The SBP also decided to set a mandatory target for banks so as to extend mortgage loans and financing for developers and builders.

### Will the housing programme be beneficial for other industries?

The initiative under the programme will be a jumpstart for the economy and will also prove to be the biggest growth engine. Besides job creation, the housing scheme may revive around 40 other allied industries. ■

– Shah Nawaz Akhter



### Will the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme change the living condition of slums and low-income households?

to play in fields as there is no concept of open spaces or playgrounds for the community.”

Former administrator Karachi, Fahim Zaman, who actively campaigns against encroachments and advocates people- and environment-friendly development, said that the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme cannot be called ideal, but it has many positives, which will help mitigate the housing problems of the low-income group.

“Slums are expanding in big cities mainly because people do not have an alternate... this initiative will help empower many people of the low-income groups to buy houses as the government is providing low-interest rate loans,” he said. “The poorest of the poor may not benefit from it, but people with small incomes would be able to afford houses... those who pay Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 12,000 monthly rent for small quarters in the slums of big cities like Karachi.”

Zaigham Rizvi said that another big challenge in providing low-cost housing is the use of old construction technologies. “If we want fast paced construction and low-cost housing, then it means we have to be innovative and apply new technologies.”

To incorporate new technologies and methods, the government has set up housing research centres in 25 universities that have also been tasked to experiment with new materials in the construction sector. However, the biggest challenge remains mobilising funds and ensuring housing finance – an area where Pakistan lags behind in terms of mortgage-debt-to-GDP

*Development projects are now being approved online within 45 days. Earlier this process used to take from six to eight months, said Zaigham Rizvi.*

ratio, which hovers around less than one percent. This is the lowest, even by South Asian standards.

The House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC), the only specialised housing finance institution has declined, while the commercial banks’ share in this sector is miniscule. Now the State Bank of Pakistan has been leading the effort through a series of regulatory measures to encourage commercial banks to enter the house financing market in a big way.

The government has also involved NGOs to ensure micro financing to the low-income group families to build or buy houses. One example is that of the “Akhwat Foundation – the Pakistani version of Bangladesh’s iconic Grameen Bank – which has been taken on board in this scheme. The government has committed a Rs. 5 billion Revolving-Fund for the Foundation, out of which Rs. 3 bil-

lion has already been disbursed, against which 7,500 houses have been built and delivered, officials say. The government will give another Rs. 2 billion to the Foundation to build more houses, they said. In micro financing, the recovery rate is almost 100 percent. Poor people may delay loan repayments, but never default, Zaigham Rizvi said.

In Punjab, the Naya Pakistan Housing and Developing Authority (NAPHDA) has been established and its work is gaining momentum, but the second largest province, Sindh, is not owning the programme, he added.

“ABAD (Association of Builders and Developers) is also on board and its members have launched many projects or have projects in the pipeline, which is encouraging,” Zaigham Rizvi says, adding “development projects are now being approved online within 45 days. Earlier this process used to take from six to eight months.”

“What we were not able to do in 70 years, we managed to do in a short span of time, bringing ABAD with its 1000 members in the mainstream, making house financing and getting construction permits quick, easy and transparent and introducing new technologies.”

“In China, a 60-storey building gets completed in a couple of months, using steel structure, columns, and beams, and here, we are still stuck with the old methods. It is time to change, reform and innovate.”

It seems the PTI government has gone to great lengths to push the scheme through and the results should soon be apparent. ■

**Dispatches** *from* **Chundrigar** **Rd**



## Hitting the Jackpot

Naya Pakistan Certificates are an attractive instrument for non-resident Pakistanis but some ambiguity in the tax rules needs to be resolved for resident Pakistanis



**By Shahnawaz Akhter**

*The writer is a senior business journalist*



**N**aya Pakistan Certificates (NPCs) were launched on November 12, 2020. These are sovereign instruments, denominated in US dollar and Pak Rupee, issued by the Government of Pakistan under Public Debt Act, 1944 and NPC Rules 2020. They can only be purchased through Roshan Digital Accounts – an initiative of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), launched in September 2020.

Prime Minister Imran Khan launched this important instrument, mainly designed for overseas Pakistanis. However, resident Pakistanis are also allowed to invest in this certificate provided that they have assets abroad that are declared in their annual return of income and statement of assets.

The NPCs offer a high rate of return over the five-year tenor. An investor will get up to 7 percent rate of return on dollar denominated certificates and up to 11 percent on rupee denominated certificates.

The timing to launch the debt instrument is significant as most countries are experiencing a recession-like situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the first half of the year, (January-June) the pandemic caused huge losses to financial markets the world over and Pakistan is no exception. In response, central banks of all the big economies slashed their interest rates, mak-

ing borrowing cheaper and encouraging spending to boost economies. The interest rates in most developed countries are less than one percent, while central banks of a few countries have brought down the interest rate to negative.

The pandemic has reduced investment avenues and lower rates of return offered by financial institutions have also made investment less lucrative. In this scenario the 7 percent rate of return on US dollar denominated certificates is a jackpot for overseas Pakistanis.

It is evident that overseas Pakistanis

*The pandemic has reduced rates of return offered by financial institutions. In this scenario the 7 percent rate of return on US dollar denominated certificates is a jackpot for overseas Pakistanis.*

deposited over \$100 million in a short span of time in their Roshan Digital Accounts, which are the only source to invest in NPCs.

The tax treatment on yield of NPCs makes this debt instrument more attractive. The SBP in NPC FAQs says: “The return/profits on NPCs are subject to 10 percent withholding tax as full and final settlement of tax liability on NPC profits.” The SBP further says: “The non-resident investors are also not required to file any tax return if their only source of income in Pakistan is profits earned on NPCs.”

Going by the statement, it seems all NPC investors are subject to the same tax rate. However, this is not the case for resident Pakistanis.

The external finance wing of the Finance Division on September 08, 2020 issued SRO 817(I)/2020 to notify the rules to make the debt instrument operational. As per the eligibility criteria to purchase the NPCs under the rules:

“Every non-resident Pakistani having National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis, Foreigners having Pakistan Origin Card, member of Overseas Pakistanis Foundation, an employee or official of the federal government or a provincial government posted abroad, who are eligible to open Foreign Currency Value Account (FCVA) or Non-resident Rupee Value Account (NRVA) as per the

relevant regulations shall be eligible either individually or jointly to purchase the certificates.”

The rules define the eligibility for resident Pakistanis as: “The resident Pakistanis having assets abroad, duly de-

says: “Only non-resident individuals can purchase Naya Pakistan Certificate, who maintain bank accounts abroad or foreign currency accounts maintained in Pakistan.”

The FBR statement goes against the

There is no ambiguity that non-resident Pakistanis as investors of NPCs are subject to 10 percent withholding income tax, which will be full and final liability, on yield. Further, they are also not required to file an annual return of income and statement of wealth.

However, as far as resident Pakistanis are concerned, the tax treatment shall be applicable as per prevailing rates. The rate of tax shall be the same as applicable on profit on debt.

Recent tightening of tax laws add more obligations on resident Pakistanis to comply with requirements of declarations related to their foreign assets.

Through the Finance Act, 2019 a major amendment made to Section 82 of Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 related to definition of resident individuals. It explained resident individuals as he/she is present in Pakistan for a period of, or periods amounting in aggregate to, one hundred and twenty days or more in the tax year and, in the four years preceding the tax year, has been in Pakistan for a period of, or periods amounting in aggregate to, three hundred and sixty-five days or more.

Furthermore, through Finance Act, 2018 a new Section 116A was inserted to the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 making it mandatory for resident taxpayers to file statements of income and assets with foreign income of not less than ten thousand US dollars or having foreign assets with a value of not less than one hundred thousand US dollars.

Besides, the resident taxpayers, who are required to file statements under Section 116A, are also required to file an annual return of income under Section 114 of the ordinance.

The different tax treatment may discourage resident Pakistanis with declared foreign assets from investing in NPCs. The government needs to provide an incentive to resident Pakistanis, as it will be unfair to impose different rates of tax for the same debt instrument.

By allowing fair tax treatment the government may make investment in NPCs more attractive. This will also help the government to fetch more US dollars to manage balance of payment issues.

Further, the FBR needs to issue a comprehensive guideline related to tax treatment of yield on NPCs for resident and non-resident Pakistanis. ■



clared in the latest tax return filed with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), may also invest in the certificate through their FCVA in Pakistan subject to such controls, conditions and operational procedures as may be notified by the SBP under these rules from time to time.”

The Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 has a different treatment for resident and non-resident Pakistanis.

The SBP statement on 10 percent withholding tax has created some misconception for resident Pakistanis. A large number of persons living in Pakistan have assets abroad they have declared through their income tax returns and are willing to invest in the debt instruments. Furthermore, there are also those persons, who declared their money and assets through past amnesty schemes announced by the FBR, and are also willing to invest.

The FBR on November 27, 2020 issued a clarification on the NPCs. The FBR says: “Naya Pakistan Certificate, a new instrument launched by the Government/ State Bank of Pakistan, qualifies as a debt instrument in terms of Clause (5AA) of Part-II of the Second Schedule of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. Therefore, profit on debt on the Naya Pakistan Certificate is subject to tax at 10 percent which is final tax.”

Further reading of the clarification makes things more confusing. The FBR

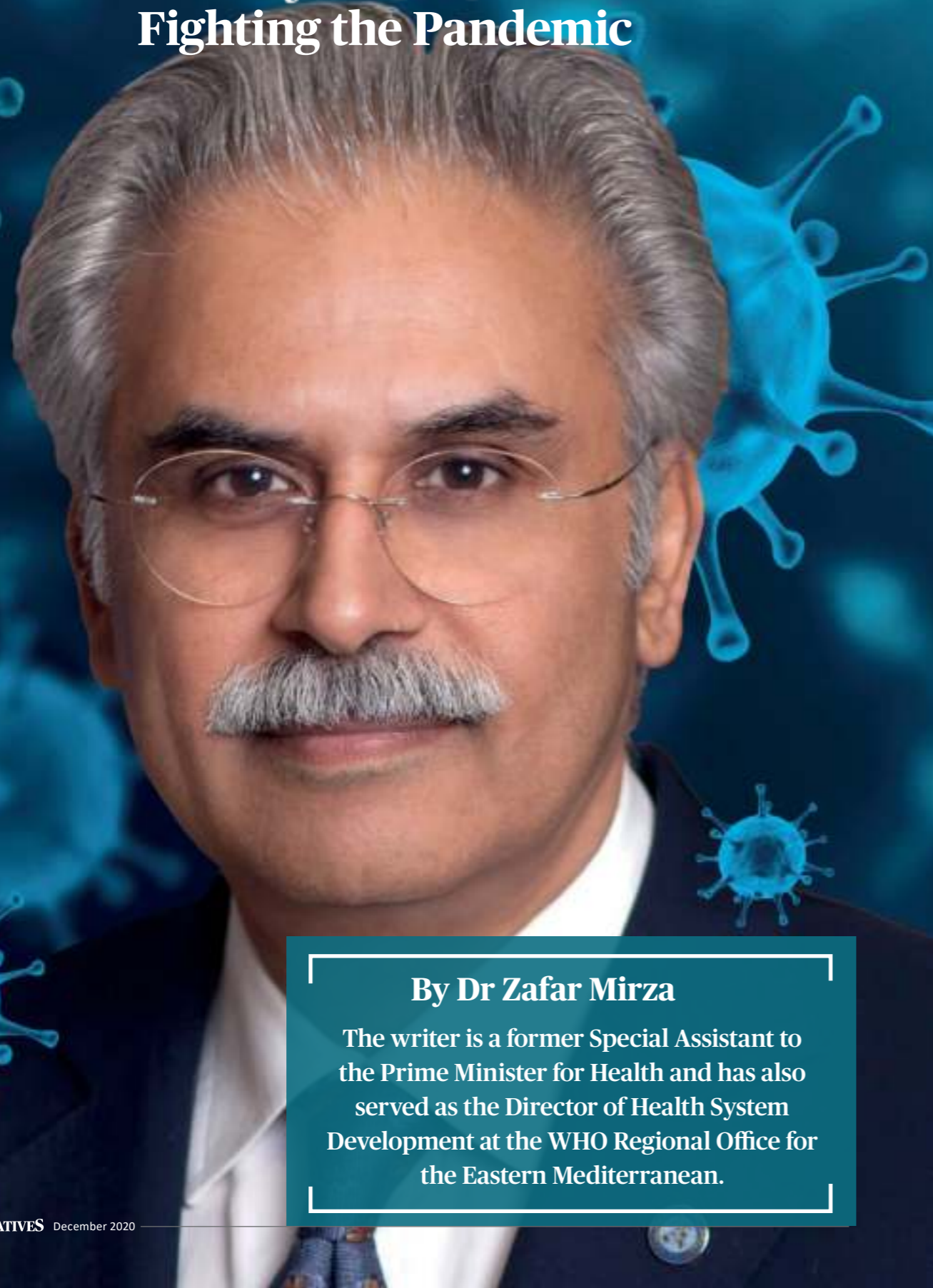
*The different tax treatment may discourage resident Pakistanis with declared foreign assets from investing in NPCs. By allowing fair tax treatment the government may make investment in NPCs more attractive.*

rules notified by the Finance Division, which clearly allows purchase of certificates by both non-resident Pakistanis and resident Pakistanis who declared their foreign assets.

The careful reading of the rules notified by the Finance Division removes the ambiguity in treatment of taxation on yield of NPCs purchased by resident and non-resident Pakistanis. The rules explain: “The profit on the certificate shall be subject to deduction of tax in accordance with the law for the time being in force.”

# Your Life & Health

## Fighting the Pandemic



**By Dr Zafar Mirza**

The writer is a former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Health and has also served as the Director of Health System Development at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Hoist by Our Own Petard

Complacency could lose us the Covid challenge in the second wave

**W**e had hardly managed to rein the Covid outbreak in Pakistan, the so-called first wave, before it struck again. Despite cautioning against declaring premature victory, borne of misplaced pride and complacency, despite cautioning against resurgence, we have, in the last four months, ended up witnessing all this. And now, with every passing day, we see the rising tide of cases, those on ventilators and those dying. With every passing day, the curve takes on a significantly upward trajectory, increasingly it seems, with a vengeance.

By early December, daily fatalities were inching up to the near 75 mark – the highest number since the peak in June – and more than 300 Covid patients were on ventilators in different hospitals of the country. Of these it was estimated, 80-90 percent, if not more, would not survive.

Some expert field epidemiologists and I have been constantly ringing alarm bells about the Covid resurgence in Pakistan. It is no secret that a second wave has enveloped the globe. Record daily cases and deaths are being reported from more and more countries. The world is being locked down, yet we seem to have developed a belief that Pakistan has become fire-walled to the virus. With *Inshallah* being the standard solution we offer as the answer to all our troubles, perhaps we are testing Allah too much. Defying science and deriding statistics, our complacency seems to have permeated all layers of society, from cortex to core and from head to tail.

This time we had the benefit of hindsight. We knew exactly what to do, what worked last time and what didn't. And yet this time round, there is a visible incomprehensible, impenetrable indifference at best, and straightforward denial at worst. The National Command Operation Center (NCOC) has been making, even if not without delay, the right recommendations, but has not been able to reach a con-



Playing with fire... the PDM holding rallies despite the pandemic.

*Seemingly indifferent to people's right to life, the opposition has announced it will defy the government's ban on political mass gatherings.*

sensus on the Covid issue and not due to scientific differences, but due to political reasons. Seemingly indifferent to people's right to life, the political opposition has announced it will defy the government's ban on political mass gatherings. We are allowing ourselves to slide into an abyss of our own making.

To begin with, we have unarguably delayed remedial action the second time round. The vigour of the response during the first wave is just not present. And not only are we late, we are doing too little.

We have lost the last four months largely through inaction.

What makes it more reprehensible is the fact that we saw the rising trend more than 10 weeks ago. The NCOC kept raising the red flag, but no one came up with any remedial measures. Schools were allowed to open when the numbers were already rising. Educational institutes can admittedly not be kept indefinitely closed, but a better time for opening could have been chosen. Our risk-communication has gone down. Electronic channels have moved away from public service messaging, which was so effective during the early phase. Taking their cues from the lackadaisical attitude at the top, the public swiftly shrugged off any precautionary behaviours. Marriage halls started teeming with people with few masks in sight, and virtually no physical distancing. School vans on their way to and from school saw children stuffed into them without any consideration of social distancing. Mosques once again had shoulder-to-shoulder and ankle-to-ankle congregations. This against a backdrop of cases rapidly increasing. Through this in-





*A charity food drive in Karachi, a consequence of the lockdown's economic toll.*

action, we have let the transmission reach a disturbing level, and it is now accelerating exponentially.

And still we continue to do too little. What difference does it make if shops close at 10 or 6 pm? What difference does it make if the 1000 guest limit at weddings is now cut down to 500? Meanwhile, the opposition actively participated in elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, despite calls for a ban on public gatherings, and continues with its rallies attended by hundreds of thousands of unmasked people in the closest proximity. Clearly, there is a resistance to acknowledging the ongoing global pandemic.

In the first wave, the genuine concern at the top about the effect of a general and prolonged lockdown on daily wagers and the economy at large, is what guided the direction of the government response, despite immense pressure from the media and elite classes demanding a complete shut-down of the country. Out of this concern, developed the largest ever emergency cash transfer programme – PKR 144 billion, to address the economic hardship faced by 12 million poor families, with each family receiving PKR 12,000. The government also provided a PKR 1.5 trillion economic stimulus package. These initiatives provided great relief to the needy. Throughout the response

*Record daily cases and deaths are being reported from more and more countries, yet we seem to have developed a belief that Pakistan has become fire-walled to the virus.*

effort, we were guided by a great concern to strike a balance between lives and livelihoods.

Striking this balance is still the key. It can be struck if we make timely decisions and don't procrastinate. A stitch in time saves nine. We should be ready, and move in this direction. Short-term pain would result in long-term gain, like last time. But so far, that doesn't seem to be the approach. Delay would only increase the chance of disaster, and the need for much more drastic measures aimed at containment. In short, what we are avoiding now

will in all likelihood, given the disturbing data, have to be done more widely and for a prolonged period of time, with all the attendant and unintended consequences.

Pakistan had its first reported Covid case on February 26, as opposed to India on January 30, and Iran on February 19. We could have delayed, if not avoided the first case by monitoring and sealing our points of entry, especially airports. Our peak was on June 14, with 6,825 cases reported that day. It took less than four months from the appearance of the first case to reach the peak. In the second wave until now the rise has been slow, but definitive. On August 31, 213 cases a day were registered, the lowest since the June peak. On October 30 we crossed the 1000 per day threshold, and in the next two weeks, that number doubled to more than 2000 cases. On November 22, the number was 2,665. And all this is without any major change in the daily testing numbers.

Clearly then, the numbers are doubling with alarming speed. If this trend continues, and so far there are no indications to suggest it will not, the day we report a record number of cases, like many other countries in second wave, doesn't look like a too-distant event. With this would rise the number of critically ill people, and the health care system will be overwhelmed. The wedding season,

cold weather and our lukewarm interventions are only going to compound this situation.

We lost the initiative we had gained in the beginning in the July to October period by not increasing daily testing. Despite a proclaimed revised testing strategy, implementation remains to be seen. Testing should have started at the tehsil level and filtered down. According to plan, special camps were to be arranged for testing in peri-urban areas and all cases of Influenza-like illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) were to be tested for COVID-19. This was to be done along with the early incorporation of the COVID-19 Antigen Detection Rapid Diagnostic Testing (Ag-RDT). All this would have greatly increased the daily testing numbers which would have allowed the isolation of positives, and resulted in more informed smart lockdowns in areas of concentration. Both these would have resulted in lowering the spread of the virus. But the reality is that despite a lot of deliberation and strategising and despite building a capacity for conducting more than 100k tests per day in Pakistan, we have failed to increase daily tests beyond the 30 and 35k mark over the last six months. This is a serious shortcoming. We need to drill deeper into the reasons why we have not been able to implement our own strategy and take immediate remedial action.

Having led the national effort in the first phase and being part of the core team after the establishment of the NCOC, I have been close enough to be able to synthesise a few key lessons from this experience. The titles of these lessons are: the lack of a legal basis for declaring a national health emergency; addressing the problems posed by the 18th amendment in the health sector, especially during emergencies which demand a coherent national response; the need for a more predictable institutional basis for generating a health emergency response; serious implementation of the 2016 recommendations of the WHO-sponsored Joint External Evaluation of the status of Pakistan readiness to prevent, detect and respond to health threats in line with International Health Regulations (2005); a drastic reform of the Central Health Establishment responsible for health screening and quarantining at 19 Points of Entry in Pakistan; strengthening the



*Pakistan needs to increase the number of daily tests for Covid.*



*Health workers in Abbottabad move the body of a COVID-19 victim.*

field epidemiology and diseases surveillance system; changing the mindset of under-reporting cases; building critical care capacity; bolstering public education against stigmatising patients suffering from various diseases; and strengthening risk-communication. Health emergency preparedness and response must be deliberated upon and invested in when there is no emergency. There is no longer a concept of national security

without health security. Biological threats and outbreaks of old and new diseases will continue and are likely to increase in frequency and lethality.

As the saying goes, there are no mistakes, only lessons, but only if they are taken. Otherwise, mistakes will be repeated. In this case, mistakes are translating into preventable loss of human life and unaccounted misery. The bitter truth is that in the end, we are the choices we make. ■

# HORIZONS



## Victor Doesn't Take All

Biden wins the White House, but Trump's legacy remains entrenched.



**By Huma Baqai**

*The author is an Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi.*



Donald Trump's 2016 electoral victory brought to the fore the underlying complexities of the so-called leader of the free world. Dr Jason Brennan, an American philosopher, called it a victory by the "un-informed," stating "never have educated voters so uniformly rejected a candidate. But never before have the lesser-educated so uniformly supported a candidate."

Trump became the proponent of conservative populism, which post his 2020 hybrid-defeat, is referred to as "Trumpism." Trump's ideology is seen as deeply rooted in US history since the late-19th century, which finally made it to the White House in 2016. The US is largely known for progressivism. Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, sought to tame corporate power, protect workers, assimilate immigrants, provide new social services, expand democracy and, on the global stage, to bring order to a fractious world, usually referred to as post-war liberalism.

Meanwhile, as understood by those who have worked closely with the current US President, the business of state is "what the president believes on any particular moment, on any particular day about any

particular subject." A Republican analyst says, "he could believe he is against climate change on Monday, and Tuesday, he could come back to you and say I am the most ardent believer in climate change, but by Wednesday he could go back to his previous position."

On the ground, America's transition from progressivism to Post-war liberalism, apparently did not have everyone on-board. Post-World War I, Midwestern and western progressives belonging to the populist camp swung hard to the right, retaining in some cases their economic parity, but also resenting the cultural and foreign policy thrust of the US. In his classic work, *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter captures it beautifully, saying "a large part of the Progressive-Populist tradition has turned sour, become illiberal and ill-tempered." The truth of the matter is, liberalism faces its greatest crisis in decades.

Post-mortem, Trumpism, is being identified as populist, nationalistic, charismatic, discounting intellectualism, displaying fascist tendencies, and fabricating the truth. Trump's populist appeal won him 63 million votes in 2016. In 2020, Trump lost, but his vote count jumped to



America's global standing reaches its nadir as Biden takes the reins.

73.7 million, thus the hybrid defeat. The Trump brand, if anything has become more entrenched. Trump has turned out to be more popular than many liberals, pollsters, or media pundits had anticipated. In post-Trump America, both truth and democracy are on the decline.

The actions of Donald Trump have damaged the moral authority of the West. Trump was critical of both, the Bush Republican doctrine of creating awe and fear, and the Obama Democratic doctrine of negotiations and liberal talk, followed by surges and strikes. However, he has not been able to give any direction to US foreign policy. The general perception is, that his inward "America-first" policy has raised serious doubts about America's ability to lead the world. American hegemony is 75 years old and stands seriously challenged by China. The rising

**President-elect Biden is facing historical challenges. He has defeated Trump, but Trumpism lives on.**

competition between the US and China will be the most obvious and notable episode of the post-Trump presidency.

The United States inherited the legitimacy of global leadership, which drew strength from its domestic governance, provision of global public goods and ability and willingness to master and coordi-

nate a global response in times of crisis. The status of the US as a global leader over the past seven decades has been built largely on wealth and power. However, under Trump, it failed the test on all three fronts of wealth, power, and legitimacy. It failed its own people and it failed the world.

The fissures in American society and the challenges to global leadership which surfaced with a vengeance because of Trumpism are colossal. Biden garnered the highest number of votes in US history because of Trumpism, making the 2020 American election a referendum on Trump. President-elect Biden, because of this legacy, is facing historical challenges, some calling them insurmountable. He has defeated Trump, but Trumpism lives on.

On the domestic front, a deadly pandemic, a struggling economy and a deeply divided American public, are only the tip of the iceberg. Biden's success will hinge on finding ways to unite the country and to do that he has to find common ground with the Republicans on Capitol Hill. David Redlawsk, a professor of politics at the University of Delaware, said that "the divisions are deep. I have a hope that we will move on a healing path over time. It will not happen quickly. It will not happen easily."

Biden's Democratic Party is likely to fall short of winning control of the Senate. If his party does not win the key Senate seats, he will be the first newly elected president in more than a century whose party did not gain majority control in both houses of Congress. He could also face challenges within his Democratic Party between those who are moderate and others seeking transformational changes.

On the foreign policy front, the not-so-new world order is the new world disorder, dominated by narrow self-interests. Trump has shown disdain for globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and multilateralism, giving a new definition to American nationalism. The US pulling out of the climate treaty, bypassing the United Nations, alienating NATO and European allies, undermining trans-Atlantic unity, and getting into a trade war with China, are a few instances.

It is not just about restoring US stature and reviving international cooperation. The strike of Trumpism has been lethal.



Domestic turmoil bookends the Trump era.

It has created unholy alliances, strengthened opposition, and most importantly, it has created a distrust of American leadership. This is across the board, from Europe to the Middle East, from the Far East to Russia. And it has also impacted NATO. In the Middle East, the trickiest among all these, the US has long supported unlawful, imperialistic policies like the war on Iraq and conventional US stances on annexation, Israeli settlements, and negotiations. Managing to pull off a balancing act between Palestine and Israel will be Biden's biggest challenge. He cannot go against Israeli interests, but neither can he act like Trump, completely marginalising and abandoning the Palestinians.

The Biden administration will also have to be more sensitive towards the Yemen tragedy and less accommodating of Arab dictators than Trump, and perhaps be firmer on human rights abuses in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. However, any expectation that Biden will work actively against these regimes, would be folly.

Mending bridges with European allies, reigning in Russian expansionism and meddling in the Middle East and

**The United States inherited the legitimacy of global leadership. However, under Trump, it failed its own people and it failed the world.**

Europe, handling a more defiant Turkey and Iran, and an assertive and competitive China, is not going to be a piece of cake. The challenge is not just taking over global leadership, but restoring global order. The crisscross of geopolitics and geo-economics is yet another challenge. China is one of the largest trade partners of both, India and the United States. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is made up of ten Southeast Asian countries is considered as an extension of China's influence in the region and comes on the heels of

the Belt and Road Initiative. The deal excludes the US, which under Trump's presidency withdrew from a rival Asia-Pacific trade pact, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, in 2017. India also chose to stay out of the RCEP. The question is, will Biden de-couple or re-couple with China? Neither is easy.

According to the *New York Times*, the election will not resolve "America's deepest problems," i.e. social crises, a breakdown of political culture, and feelings of exclusion. If Trump continues to play an active political role, this could further complicate Biden's task. Domestic troubles then will warrant his sustained attention. This may not give him the space to do much on the foreign policy front, resulting in no major win. An aggressive China will not make his life easy externally, and a Trump hell bent upon remaining politically active domestically, will keep him occupied with a fire brigade approach at best. Ideally speaking, the focus of the Biden presidency must be on meeting universal challenges, pandemic change, and global poverty. These threats transcend national boundaries and strategic rivalries. Can Biden rise to the challenge? ■



## White Moon on the Rise

Trump's electoral victory in 2016 put white supremacists back in business – and his loss changes nothing

By Ibrahim Sajid Malick

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

**D**onald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign was purposely designed to legitimise white extremist, alt-right groups with crass anti-immigrant, Muslim, liberal, and women rhetoric. Trump embraced “white grievance” politics, and attracted large numbers of white voters, most frequently men, who believed that they had been the victims of racial discrimination. His cabinet constituted of crème de la crème racist America, among others, Stephen Bannon, whose website *Breitbart* has been a critical platform for elevating the so-called “alt-right,” and Stephen Miller, who openly supports white extremists.

Trump's coming to power was, in fact, the culmination of decades-old underground activities of extremist groups.

It started in 1995, with Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols driving a truck filled with 7,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertiliser and nitromethane fuel into the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The death toll: 168, including 19 children in a day-care centre.

The news media automatically assumed that “Middle Eastern terrorists” had probably executed the attack. But by the end of the day, it became clear that domestic, right-wing terrorists were responsible for the mass murder. And since 1995 white supremacists have continued to carry out attacks in America, killing innocent victims to make a political point. In fact, America today faces several



strains of extremism, from ISIS-inspired lone wolves to the digitally-organised alternative right, commonly known as the “alt-right.”

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a leading civil rights organisation dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry: “After Oklahoma, it was no longer sufficient for many American right-wing terrorists to strike at a target of political significance – instead, they reached for higher and higher body counts, reasoning that they had to eclipse McVeigh's attack to win attention.”

Fast forward to October 27, 2018, a 46-year-old white supremacist, Robert Gregory Bowers, entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with several semi-automatic weapons shouting “All Jews must die,” and proceeded to kill 11 worshippers, injuring another 6.

On Valentine's Day this year, 19-year-old Nikolas Jacob Cruz, armed with a semi-automatic rifle, entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and killed 17 students

and teachers. Cruz was described by the media as expressing “far-right, anti-Semitic, homophobic and xenophobic views in a private Instagram group chat.”

Next investigators found “white supremacist material” in the bedroom of 28-year-old Benjamin Morrow, who was killed while assembling a bomb at his Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, apartment on March 5, 2018. One gallon of acetone was discovered in his room.

On October 26, 2018, 56-year-old Cesar Altieri Sayoc Jr., who worked as a pizza delivery driver and lived in a van plastered with pro-Trump decals, was arrested for sending at least 13 bombs via postal mail to prominent Democrats, liberal figures, and the cable news outlet CNN.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, “Sayoc's online activity across Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube over several years reveal a descent into hyper-partisan and conspiratorial thinking, posting stories from far-right websites like Infowars and *Breitbart* and sharing photos of himself at Trump rallies. Sayoc

had a criminal history including fraud, larceny, and a 2002 charge for making a bomb threat against a Florida-based utility company.”

Following these incidents, the Anti-

Defamation League (ADL), an international Jewish non-governmental organisation based in the United States, warned of: “the serious threat of terror from right-wing extremist groups and individuals.”

The Brookings Institution recently published a book by Thomas J. Main, a professor at the Austin W. Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, City University of New York. In the book, *The*

## The Saffronisation of India

India’s secular identity is increasingly a thing of the past

**J**ean Raspail’s 1973 novel, *The Camp of the Saints*, one of the famous texts of modern white extremism, centres around an invasion of Indian refugees on the French coast. In this novel, French society and the military are criticised for not massacring the Indians as they enter France, which leads to a total collapse of Western civilisation. This book has been a central text for white supremacists since its publication.

In today’s India, the characters are different, but what is being played out there is similar to *The Camp of the Saints’* xenophobic script. Modi’s Hindutva India seeks to rehabilitate toxic political notions of racial superiority, stokes a fear of immigrants and minorities to inflame grievances for political ends, and attempts to build an idea of an embattled Hindu majority that has to defend its power by any means necessary. Once the preserve of fringe Hindutva groups, these notions have increasingly infiltrated the mainstream Indian political and cultural narrative, with poisonous results.

The origins of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the mother-ship of the BJP, can be easily traced to colonial India. The RSS emerged through sustained interaction with ideologues in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. After 1947, Hindutva stakeholders played a central role in the violence of nation-building and in creating a majoritarian identity. Yet Hindutva was not really ‘mainstreamed.’ Narendra Modi was catapulted to power in 2014. In his election campaign, Modi campaigned by appealing to recurring themes of a Muslim



‘threat’ to the Hindu majority, playing on Hindu insecurity.

The result is that Hindutva has now become synonymous with Indian nationalism. Hate crimes against religious and ethnic groups, especially Muslims, Dalits, and the Adivasi, have increased in order of magnitude.

In fairness, saffron terror predates Modi’s rule. WikiLeaks documents claim that in 2009 Rahul Gandhi confided to the US Ambassador Timothy Roemer, at a luncheon hosted by the Prime Minister of India at his residence, that the RSS was a “bigger threat” to India than the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. But the frequency of mob lynching has skyrocketed after the BJP’s sweeping electoral victory in the last election.

According to Amnesty International, the Indian government’s data on mob lynching by “cow protection,” vigilantes is “inadequate” because it ignores the gravity of and discriminatory motive behind the crime. Mob lynching of Muslim youths is registered as “rioting,” “unlawful assembly,” or “murder,” under provisions of the Indian Penal Code. India has not released the annual report of the crime, prison, and the lack of transparency, the governments’ failure to preserve data, and the police’s failure to conduct an effective investigation, have

resulted in dozens of perpetrators being acquitted.

In June, a video of the brutal mob killing of Tabrez Ansari, a 24-year-old Muslim labourer in Jharkhand, went viral. It showed him tied to a pole, being beaten by men armed with iron rods and sticks, while his attackers forced him to chant *Jai Sri Ram* (Hail Lord Rama) and *Jai Hanuman* (Hail Hanumana).

Last August, six men charged with the murder of Pehlu Khan, a dairy farmer who was lynched on suspicion of cow smuggling, were acquitted in Rajasthan. The Brahmin judge ruled that the gruesome video which captured the lynching of Pehlu Khan was not admissible evidence. Simultaneously, the police filed a case against the deceased Khan and his two sons for smuggling cows.

Right-wing extremism is also spilling across the border. Pakistan faces the real challenge of destabilisation designed by India’s official terrorist organisation, RAW. Unlike previous provocations, Pakistan’s military restraint cannot be taken for granted if incitement continues. A Pakistani retaliatory strike against terrorist targets on Indian soil could set off a spiral of violent escalation between the nuclear-armed rivals.

And that could prove cataclysmic. ■  
— Ibrahim Sajid Malick

*Trump’s white nationalist acolytes hold a torch-lit rally at the University of Virginia.*



*Rise of the Alt-Right*, Professor Main says: “The alt-right is far more radical and dangerous than the right-wing extremism of past decades. For it is the underlying ideology of the alt-right, rather than its controversial policy positions, that merits concern.” Main continues, “Alt-Rightism is, in essence, a political ideology rather than a movement, constituency, or interest group opposed to free markets, neoliberalism, democracy, and egalitarianism.”

This assertion is validated by several alt-right publications as well. Extreme white nationalist sites like Counter Current and alt-right talk about “metapolitics,” a concept first coined by Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye. It is critical for these groups to change the way people think.

French philosopher Alain de Benoist, leader of the metapolitical school of thought and mind behind the ‘European New Right,’ is frequently quoted by the American alt-right. He has written more than 50 books, including, *The Problem of Democracy* and *Beyond Human Rights*. French journalist and writer Guillaume Faye is also a rage among the American extremists. His books *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-catastrophic Age*, *Why We Fight: A Manifesto of the European Resistance*; and *Convergence*

*Trump embraced “white grievance” politics. His cabinet constituted of crème de la crème racist America.*

*of Catastrophes* are top-rated among the alt-right.

However, unlike Europeans, the American far-right girdle religious ideology and fundamentalist interpretations of holy texts as justification for far-right extremism. For example, Aryan nations promote the idea of racial superiority through the lens of the sacred text. The group states, “God’s creation of Adam marked the placing of the White Race upon this earth. Not all races descend from Adam. Adam is the father of the White Race only... We believe that the true, literal children of the Bible are the twelve tribes of Israel, now scattered

throughout the world and now known as the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Teutonic, Scandinavian, Celtic peoples.”

Investigative journalist David Neiwert, whose book, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right*, says that the ideology of the alt-right is mostly similar to that propagated by the Ku Klux Klan of the past, but agrees with Main that the new radical right-wing groups have benefited from the internet and social media.

Professor Main claims that “this new strain of reactionary thought goes beyond the garden-variety racial prejudice of yore – which certainly was bad enough – to a root-and-branch rejection of American political principles. The alt-right is a form of radical Gnosticism as fundamental in its rejection of the American democratic tradition as the Communist Party line of the 1930s and the most fevered effusions of New Left radicalism of the 1960s were.”

Arie Perliger, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Sciences, US Military Academy at West Point, has a different perspective. In his publication *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America’s Violent Far-Right*, he concludes that “ideology and behaviour are linked and nurture each other in the organisational frameworks of the American violent far-right.” ■



**Sultana Siddiqui**  
President Hum Network

## Wonder Woman

How did a government school student from Hyderabad make it to the top echelons of the entertainment industry?



**By Maheen Usmani**  
*The writer is a journalist and author of **The Mercurial Mr Bhutto and Other Stories.***



Once upon a time in PTV...

**T**he dynamo of the Hum TV network, Sultana Siddiqui, exemplifies Thomas Edison's aphorism: "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." In her book, talent without hard work is akin to dreaming without a goal in mind. With single-minded devotion, she has translated her vision into reality no matter what curveballs life has thrown at her.

In recent years, Sultana's strength has really been put to the test: "If anyone even picks up a sword to slay me, I am not affected. But if it's my family or close friends who turn against me, I am undone. They are my weak spot." She smiles, but there is pain in her eyes.

Hum TV has been embroiled in a takeover bid by Sultana's brother, Jahangir Siddiqui. "It all boils down to his ego," is her blunt assessment. "I loved my brother a lot and still do. I pray to God that He soften his heart. Perhaps it's difficult to accept a strong, independent woman."

Apart from the wear and tear wrought by a family feud, she has faced a vilification campaign orchestrated by a Facebook page, which she promptly reported to the Cyber Crime authorities.

"I have the names and statements of the boys; they were nabbed in 2013," she pulls out papers from a drawer. "Had I pursued the case, those boys would have been in jail! But I let them go." Her eyes flash fire and you glimpse the iron resolve that propelled a government school girl from Hyderabad to the top echelons of the entertainment industry.

Sultana Siddiqui's journey began in Hyderabad. She was one of 10 siblings, but her mother did not differentiate between the sons and daughters, which gave Sultana an independence of spirit and ambition not constricted by gender. "I liked everything that boys did. I didn't understand girly things! Never played with dolls. Instead, I played *gulli danda*, cricket, climbed trees and scaled walls. I felt like I was Tarzan! I used to have falls and scrapes. My mother would be worried, but my father laughed at my antics."

Sultana had friends like Anis Haroon, Mehtab Rashdi and Fehmida Riaz at school, and exceptional teachers, Apa Maryam and Apa Shams. In 1958, when the Empress of Iran, Farah Diba visited

Pakistan, Siddiqui was part of the school entourage chosen to greet her. She also met Queen Elizabeth in Lahore. She attended Girls Guide camps in Murree.

A high achiever, she excelled at everything she set her mind to: theatre, sports, debates, dance, painting. Marriage proposals poured in, but her mother would put them off by saying that her daughter had to graduate first before tying the knot.

Meanwhile, inspired by her brother Mazhar, she decided to take the CSS exam and chose Comparative Religion and Arabic as her subjects for the Bachelor's degree. Why Comparative Religion? Her eyes twinkle, "Because I looked up the subjects for CSS to check which ones you could score the best marks in."

But life had other plans for her. When she was halfway through her Master's degree, her parents arranged her marriage. The in-laws assured her mother that the bride would be allowed to complete her degree and work. But that was not to be. After marriage, the couple moved to Karachi, and Sultana had to not only give



A picture of contentment: Sultana with sons Duraid, Shunaid & Junaid

up her studies, but also say goodbye to all her aspirations to work. "I had to wear a burqa," she says.

As the years flew by, the free spirited girl's feet became mired in cement: "There are men who are attracted by accomplished girls, but once they are married they want to cage them."

Seven years and three children later, Sultana had lost her confidence and her personality had been totally crushed. "But the day I realised that my children were getting adversely affected by this situation, I mustered the courage to walk out. My youngest son was just a year old then."

Fortunately, her family stood by her, especially her brother Mazhar. "He has been with me every step of the way. In order to succeed in a patriarchal society like ours, a woman needs the support of her father, brother or husband. If she has that support, no one can raise a finger against her."

Sultana used to get offers to work for television when she was married, but she was denied permission. It was only in 1974 that she started working with PTV; she threw herself headlong into her career. From a single, subdued mother of three boys under five, Sultana rose to head the Hum TV Empire, which spans broadcasting, content production, online media, film production and distribution, print magazines in fashion and food, and mega events like fashion shows, bridal weeks,

***"I liked everything that boys did. I didn't understand girly things! Never played with dolls. Instead, I played gulli danda, cricket, climbed trees and scaled walls. I felt like I was Tarzan!"***

family festivals and awards shows.

How did she pull it off?

"I wanted to prove myself. I never took a rupee from anyone. I worked 18 hours a day. My brother and brother-in-law encouraged me and the confidence that I had lost was resurrected. Mazhar used to take me to the studios for TV programmes and wait outside until the recording was over."

Sultana asserts that girls are way more brilliant than boys because they are focused and disciplined. "All they need is confidence. But we oppress our girls."

Her advice to girls is, "make yourself

financially independent. When you are economically sound, you have the decision-making power in your hands. To go forward, you will have to stand on your own two feet."

How does she counter the argument that working women make terrible mothers? "People who don't work themselves say this," says Sultana. The children of working mothers are way more brilliant, independent and confident than those of mothers who stay at home. I used to lug my children around with me to work. Look at them now, they are leaders! They are decisive risk-takers, with great instincts."

Sultana began her career as an actor in PTV dramas, but quit only after doing two plays. "One was a romantic play. I was not divorced yet. And I was uncomfortable doing it. Besides I was afraid of what people might say."

She moved on to doing regional programmes in Sindhi so she could finish her work by 5 p.m. and be home with her three boys. While working at PTV, Siddiqui learnt how to fill out a tender, sell ballot boxes, supply heavy machinery to steel mills, book a stall at Shalimar Plaza and buy and sell plots in SITE area. "If I bought a plot for 4 lacs, I sold it for 25 lacs." Sultana does not have a degree in marketing, but she has a sharp eye and a gut instinct when it comes to business. Her sons, who are marketing graduates from foreign universities, consult her before inking any business deals. Her advice: "If you do business with someone, you must trust that person. If there is no trust, there is no relationship. The vibes should be good, whether you are looking for a life partner or a business partner."

As Sultana's career with PTV chugged along, she went on to do music shows with Nazia Hassan, Ali Haider, Abida Parveen and Tina Sani. When posts for play directors were advertised by PTV, she applied and went through a rigorous examination – a written test plus viva. "Now there is nepotism and politics when directors are being selected. Look at the calibre of the present directors."

Sultana went on to direct the phenomenally successful *Marvi* with debutant Ghazal Siddique, first in Sindhi and later in Urdu.

"A woman poses a challenge to people when she becomes successful," says Sultana. "No one bothers with a medio-

cre person. So long as I was doing small programmes for TV nobody cared, but in 1981, when I got a PTV award in the music category, the obstacles began to surface. And when I began producing dramas, many of the big names in TV said that they would not allow me to do plays. "She is a Sindhi, so she should do Sindhi programmes" they said. "At the weekly General Managers' meeting, they tried to put me down. But they could not harm me because I was simply focused on my work."

Sultana went on to win PTV's Silver Jubilee Award for children's programming. She got the idea for an amazing children's programme she had seen in Japan in 1981.

In 1996, she opened her own production house, named Moomal Productions after her daughter-in-law, at her Bath Island residence and in 2000 she resigned from PTV. When private channels started, ARY wanted Sultana to work with them, but her son Duraid, who had returned after completing his studies abroad, convinced her to set up her own channel. And so, in 2003 the Hum journey commenced.

It was the first channel to be listed on the public stock exchange. While looking for shareholders to invest in the channel, Sultana asked her brother Jahangir Siddiqui, among many others, to join them. "JS put in about 6 crores. He said I'm investing this money because I know you, Sultana, you will do it. In return for his 6 crores, we gave him approximately 250 crores, apart from bonuses."

Once news about Sultana's upcoming TV channel broke, she received a 22-page warning letter: do not open a new channel, this is a crocodile-infested field. "I also received calls saying, 'if you give up the idea of this channel, we guarantee that we will buy content from your production house for the next 10 years.'"

The transition from PTV to Hum TV was exciting, exhilarating: "We could take our own decisions now. Duraid wanted 30 percent representation of women in Hum TV. If women are given senior positions, the environment of an organisation certainly improves; people are scared of misbehaving because they know that harassment of women will never be tolerated. At our annual picnics and dinners, I talk to the staff, including drivers, and tell them to be good to their wives so that their kids



Standing tall: With PM Imran Khan and son Duraid Qureshi.



Cut from the same cloth: With former ambassador Maleeha Lodhi and former State Bank governor Dr Shamshad Akhtar.

can grow up with sound values."

Sultana's passion for her work shines through when she talks about *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, a play directed by her after a long break, that became a huge sensation. "I used to scribble notes even in my sleep when it was on air. In the morning, I would find lines written on top of each

other." A light sleeper, she laughs as she says, "We will get enough time to sleep once we finally fall asleep."

One thing she found incomprehensible in all TV plays was that only villains were shown drinking or smoking. "Anyone can smoke or drink, it does not make them a good or a bad person."

The Hum office however, is a smoke-free zone. Anyone who wants to smoke has to step out. "Except for the girls, who can go on the roof; I don't want them to be stared at because they were smoking in a street corner. Women should have the freedom to smoke. So what if Mahira Khan smokes?"

odds are weighted against women, Sultana insists that women should not become the object of pity. "I hate being pitied. We all have problems, but women need to be strong and stop feeling sorry for themselves. *Roti dhoti larkiyoun ko har aik rulata hai. Hum aurat ko roti hi dekhna chahtay hain.*"

### Laurels all the way: Sultana receives awards for assorted shows.



When Hum branched out into news, Sultana insisted that people who appear on Hum talk shows show tolerance for each other's point of view, and that the channel refrain from cluttering the TV screen with tickers. Further, she objected to interviews of rape victims where the faces were not blurred. She wrote letters to PEMRA and now they have started blurring the faces of rape victims. "They should show the pictures of rapists and criminals instead," she suggests.

While it is true that in Pakistan the

How then does she explain all the weepy women in assorted Hum dramas, bemoaning their fate? "But then, don't you see how they take a stand in the end, how they put the men in their place? Look at *Kankar*, *Humsafar*, *Udaari*," she counters.

On another note, what is her take on the runaway success of the Turkish drama series *Ertugrul* and the inability of Pakistani dramas to create such content?

"They expect us to make dramas like *Ertugrul*, but we are not allowed to show even a drop of blood. If we show a hang-

ing, we get a letter of protest. When a Hum serial was titled *Kun Faya Kun*, people went to court. I had to change the name. They say, don't show divorce, extra-marital affairs and digital messaging between boys and girls in TV plays; don't show a flirtatious girl, as it leads to divorce; don't show rape, it encourages more rape cases. Why not? Are we not a reflection of our society?" Isn't this what is being shown in the news, from morning to night?"

Sultana says that there is a need to replace this dual policy with a uniform policy for everyone. "In 1977 we used to self-censor in PTV. Then came Zia-ul-Haq and ruined everything. Even a drowning girl had to have a dupatta covering her head. In a dream sequence, the dupatta had to stay. Even now, many policies are still unclear."

In 2008, Sultana was conferred the President's Award for Pride of Performance in recognition of her exceptional services in the field of arts. In 2020, she won the highest civilian award, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, for outstanding services in the field of media. But she is not one to rest on her laurels.

A back cushion rests on her leather chair, but not once in our three-hour conversation does she recline in her seat. As the hours tick by, she sits on the edge of her chair and leans into life. Her inner child is evident as she talks animatedly of a dizzying array of plans for the months ahead. "We have so much talent but no film academies. So many TV channels, but no training. Nothing that will create jobs. I have offered my services free to the government."

The Karachi Film Society is her brain-child; it comprises distinguished people like Dr Ishrat Hussain and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. "We held film festivals for two years; Indian artistes came and we conducted workshops with them at places like IBA." Sultana received help from the Sindh government, but when she asked people from her community to join, "they said 'wah wah' to my ideas and then disappeared because they thought it was a waste of time; I believe it would be a valuable use of their time!"

Sultana marvels at the talent of kids from Lyari, Korangi and Baldia, who made impressive films with very basic equipment. She is planning a film festival in April or May next year. She says she wants to promote Pakistan's soft im-

age. Hum TV's award ceremonies, which were held abroad, are a case in point. Undertaken at great risk because they entailed huge expenditure and little profit, Sultana reveals that the shows in Dubai, Canada and Houston were a television landmark: "The Canadian Embassy gave us so many visas and were so supportive. The Mayor and Minister for Culture attended and they even had a separate table for us upon arrival at the airport. For the Houston show, the American Embassy gave us Abida Parveen's visa in one day!" However, she points out that "our government should be aiding us in this image-building exercise. After all, we are ambassadors for Pakistan."

What makes Sultana Siddiqui tick?

"Nature. Children. Positivity. I hate negativity. My personality is so strong that I can make a negative person turn positive! Positive thinking has the power to change the direction of our lives."

There is a lightness of being about this multi-tasker, despite her seniority, that prompts me to ask the next question: how old do you feel?

"I don't feel my age. I'm as old as the person I'm sitting with. Only the mirror reminds me that I have wrinkles now or my hair is greying. I pray that I remain healthy."

Does she ever dwell on her ailments?

"Never! Recently, I had a stomach infection for four days; I was shivering and feeling unwell. But the day I discovered that it was not Covid, nor malaria or dengue, I jumped out of bed like a kid!"

Sultana loves meeting people and observing them. "If I am sick, put me in a room with four people and I will recover!" she roars with laughter.

Mother-in-law to three *bahus*, how different is she from the traditional mother-in-law shown in TV plays?

"My friends Khusbakht and Mehtab say, it's good for us that your children got married before ours; we learnt how to be good mothers-in-law from you. My sons' wives are like my daughters. Perhaps my own daughters would not have been as loving as them."

The eternal optimist, Sultana dispenses nuggets of wisdom throughout our conversation. "I tell my sons and my grandchildren that as we grow older, you must praise us. If I am looking good, please do tell me, 'Dadi, you are looking good.' If I speak well, they must compli-



The Hum universe: Inhabited by celebs (Farida Khanum, Abida Parveen, Bushra Ansari) and friends (Mehtab Rashdi, Khushbakht Shujaat).

*"They say, don't show divorce, extra-marital affairs and digital messaging between boys and girls in TV plays. Why not? Are we not a reflection of our society?"*

ment me. At this age we need to hear praise, it does wonders for our health. If I'm sick, they must come and ask me how I am feeling. You should all be doing this for your mothers and grandmothers."

When Sultana was in Class 5, the teacher asked the children to write an

essay on the same old topic: What will you become when you grow up? "I wrote that I will acquire a big plane in which I will travel and see the whole world." The teacher laughed and gave her a present for her prescient essay. An avid traveller, Siddiqui has been to 60 countries and on her bucket list is the desire to see the whole world.

Any life lesson that she would want to impart to her followers?

She fixes me with her unwavering gaze: "*Rukna naheen hai*. Many people stood by me in my toughest times. But in the end, you have to fight your own battles. You may have a battalion behind you, but ultimately, it is your own war, your own struggle. Whenever I have stopped, I have felt the dagger jabbing me in the back. Perhaps this is Allah's way of getting work out of me, He does not let me relax. He wants me to utilise the talent that He has bestowed upon me." ■



# ACADEME

## COVID-19 & Education

## Shaking up the Education Sector

Pakistan's education sector witnessed drastic changes with the COVID-19 crisis and the formulation of a Single National Curriculum



**By Shahnaz Wazir Ali**  
*The writer is a former MNA and the current President of the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto School of Science and Technology (SZABIST).*



**T**wo significant events impacted the education sector in Pakistan in 2020, shaped intense debate and influenced decisions: COVID 19 and the Single National Curriculum (SNC). In the case of COVID-19, the invasion of the corona virus can be squarely placed as an external factor and Pakistan's response, as in other countries, was to rapidly move to lockdowns and closures as a containment strategy.

The pandemic declared in the wake of the deadly new corona virus compelled Pakistan to shut down in February and March 2020 and engage in an unprecedented "war against the virus." This warranted rapid emergency adjustments in all spheres of national life. Cities and towns shuttered down. Schools, colleges, universities, madrassahs and institutes all shut down overnight while administrators and management in public and private sector institutions scrambled to maintain electronic contact. A virtual world opened up and found new entrants, some hesitant new learners and others more savvy. This eerie scene of lockdowns across Pakistan

amplified the role of electronic media. TV screens flashed magnetic news and views to information hungry quarantined millions. Covid closures forced education managers and educators to virtually think on their feet about students and teachers, classes and courses, communication and community, textbooks and condensed syllabi. Suddenly, Pakistan was jolted by its lag and late recognition of the fourth information age revolution. 2020 has been a steep learning curve for some and a slippery slope for many.

Six and a half months closure of schools, colleges and universities is documented as the longest period of 'education deprivation' of the majority of Pakistan's children. Online learning so glibly espoused by policy makers, education bureaucracy and education providers and advocated as the alternate augmented teaching-learning mode has in fact aggravated the socio-economic divide and created a 'digital' apartheid. IT skilled teachers and learners from upper-middle and upper socio-economic strata with access to internet connectivity, iPads, laptops, and smartphones transitioned to on-



Pakistan's schools enter the 'new normal': Federal Education Secretary Farah Hamid Khan visits a primary school to monitor implementation of SOPs.

line learning with relative ease.

Public sector schools, mid to low level fee charging private schools, madrasahs and community schools resorted to manual distribution of homework assignments, social media interface and SMS communication. A totally inadequate 'home learning' environment deterred student learning. This became acutely evident when students returned to school in September 2020. The alternate days of schooling have further deepened the Covid related learning crisis.

As Professor Dr. Adil Najam, Director of the Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of Longer-Range Future, Boston University states, "Pakistan's future will be determined by the decisions that Pakistan and Pakistanis make. Everything else is context." This applies to the Covid closure and its varied consequences in the education sector.

The recent Beaconhouse Conference on the Schools of Tomorrow with a session entitled "Single National Curriculum as the Progressive Regression," is reflective of the debate raging across the country, stoked by two countervailing views. The federal government claims the SNC to be a progressive reform anchored in the notion of social justice, defining it as the instrument that will equalise opportunity, eliminate socio-economic class disparities, promote learning, enhance capabilities, amplify employability and allow for social mobility. Further, the SNC is located in Pakistan's national and international commitment to the Right to Education, which is indisputably linked to increasing access, retention and completion and to quality which translates into student

*The SNC aims to sculpt the multi-cultural identities of millions of students into one national identity. These aspirations are closely tied to the political commitments of the PTI government.*

learning. The SNC presents that "context of learning" through medium of instruction, courses, content, academic and values outcomes. To facilitate learning, the SNC employs national and regional languages as the medium.

These ideological aspirations and expectations of societal transformation through a common, unified curriculum taught to every child are closely tied to and derive from the political commitments of the PTI government. As articulated by Shafqat Mahmood, the Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, the SNC is the vehicle that will level the field between rich and poor and through national/regional/mother tongue instruction enable the muted capabilities and skills of millions of

children to find expression and achievement. This proposition of a common culture of learning has a subtext of promoting a defined set of religious beliefs, values and practices through the twelve-year schooling cycle. It also aims to sculpt the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural identities of millions of students into one national identity through twelve years of Pakistan Studies. SNC proponents point to content inclusion, claiming that it recognises diversity and pluralism.

These objectives and claims are hotly contested by a body of education practitioners, experts and theorists who advance the argument that education should be about knowledge and skills acquisition that enables students to understand the world through the pure prism of science, technology, maths, language, literature, history and the arts. Education experts use education theory templates that describe this debate in terms other than progressive or regressive; they see the ecology of learning as the centrepiece, the relationship of pedagogy to cognitive development and the theory of knowledge and language as the key that unlocks the door to comprehension, critical thinking, inquiry and problem solving.

They believe that more than ever, in this rapidly changing world, our children should receive education content and learning skills comparable to advanced countries. They are wary of burdening education delivery with a religious, social construct and ideology as it would further exacerbate sectarianism and promote certain tendencies already permeating the national fabric. Their espousal of inclusiveness recommends undiluted content recognising Pakistani's pluralism and diversity and its religious minorities.

Even critics of the SNC concede that employing Urdu or mother language tongue in the early grades will facilitate comprehension. Global evidence shows that learning outcomes are optimised when instruction is in the mother tongue. On the other hand the relegation of English to a second language is the spectre that haunts the English speaking elite. To them and a significant section of the middle and upper middle class, "nationalisation of the curriculum" is viewed as a regressive measure that will isolate and disadvantage Pakistan's workforce, which sees English as the passport to a better future. They argue that school-

ing in English and the option of alternate international education systems equip Pakistanis to compete in the global knowledge economy.

Development policy experts explain the SNC is informed by the irrefutable logic of the language ladder. Simply put, it holds that a child learns best in his/her native language and the addition of a second or third language can be successfully taught to all children to actualise and maximise their capabilities. If Pakistan wants that every child should have a sound academic foundation, read, write, count and communicate, then the SNC posits a rational approach of instruction in the national or regional language.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's extensive writings identify the transformative economic, social and personal values of education. He identifies education as the prime agent for developing capability and for emerging from the poverty trap. Sen notes that education deprivation leads to human insecurity, disadvantaged communities and hampers the nation's ability to become part of the global economy. He cites example of Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, which invested heavily in education, ensuring

*Even critics of the SNC concede that employing Urdu or mother language tongue in the early grades will facilitate comprehension. On the other hand the relegation of English to a second language is the spectre that haunts the English speaking elite.*

that a rigorous national curriculum was developed and delivered to all children in a well-resourced environment. These countries have settled the language issue and use learning achievement of students as the gauge for assessing the performance of their education systems.

Periodic efforts to reform and reconstruct public and private sector education provision have floundered on the complexity of the change process. The absence of a strong national consensus behind the reform measures have constrained previous efforts.

A single intervention is on a slippery slope and needs to be buttressed by multiple synchronised measures and interventions. Determinants of the existing parallel systems differ and state interventions need to be designed for the variances. The SNC requires simultaneous attention to assessment and examinations, textbook choice, development and production, teacher training, systems appraisal focused on learning outcomes, efficiency and accountability for results, enrolment and completion rates, financial resources, improved engagement and governance.

Several consultations have been held by federal and provincial governments, private sector and stakeholders to arrive at a national consensus. Though it seems as nebulous to some, the decision to implement the SNC in a phased introduction from the 2021 academic year has been announced. The coming months will determine the readiness and resolve. ■

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# MEDIAMATTERS



## 8,000 Retrenchments and Counting

Is it the PTI government's refusal to clear advertising dues of past governments or the media owners' financial mismanagement and bad intent that is causing the media industry's present crisis?



**By Nasir Malick**  
*The writer is a senior journalist, who has also served as secretary general of the PFUJ.*



**L**ast month, a few workers were asked to report to the Human Resource (HR) Department of Pakistan Herald Publications Limited (PHPL), the parent organisation of the daily, *Dawn*. All of them were the non-journalist staff of the newspaper. Once there, these employees – mostly from the Composing Department – were asked to tender resignations right there and then. Permanent employees of PHPL, all of them refused to resign as they had already been forewarned by the PHPL Employees Union not to resign under management pressure.

The Union was aware of the management's plan, which had already sacked around 40 or more workers from its Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi offices during the last few months.

The PHPL employees were also slapped with a salary cut of 40 percent some two years ago, that has not been restored to this day.

But this is not only the story of *Dawn*. This has been happening elsewhere in the

print and electronic media as well for the last two years. There is hardly any media organisation which has not resorted to retrenchments or imposed forced salary cuts.

With the exception of a few, all television channels, particularly news channels including Geo, are late in paying salaries to their workers by a few to several months. Many television news channels are falling behind in their salary payments by seven to eight months.

And this is not because of the pandemic as the retrenchments and salary cuts of the workers took place way before COVID-19 set in.

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), an umbrella organisation of all the unions of journalists across the country, believes that around 8,000 workers have been laid off, both in the print and electronic media, in the last two years.

"The media workers are going through a roller-coaster ride at the moment," says Naasir Zaidi, Secretary General of the PFUJ, "According to rough estimates that we received from our unions across the country, more than 8,000 people have lost their jobs."

Zaidi holds the government and the owners of the media organisations equally responsible for, what he terms, a "mas-

sacre of workers."

He blames the government for withholding the outstanding advertisement dues of the media industry, amounting to some 2.5 billion rupees, as one cause of the present media crisis. He maintains that the owners used this as an excuse to retrench employees, impose wage cuts and shut down publications, in spite of the fact that now they are regularly being paid their present advertisement dues. "There is a collusion between the government and the media owners on this issue, for their own ulterior motives," claims Zaidi.

Duraid Qureshi, CEO of HUM Network and former Secretary of Pakistan Broadcasting Association (PBA) that represents electronic media owners, however, disagrees that the reduction in revenues was the only cause of the delay in payment of salaries in television channels.

"I can understand retrenchments, pay-cuts and other austerity measures adopted by the media organisations to balance the shortfall in their revenues, but it has nothing to do with delay in the salary payments," says Qureshi. "The salary issue is not related to the recession (in the media industry)," he says. "It is merely financial mismanagement and their [bad] intent."

Economists say that the current

Interview

# “The PM Wants All Dues Cleared”

Raouf Hasan  
Special Assistant to the PM on Information

### What’s your take on retrenchments and salary cuts of employees in the media industry?

Jobs and salaries are internal issues of an organisation, which are decided by them according to their own circumstances and compulsions. Yes, retrenchments and salary cuts are undesirable, but such things happen all over the world. It depends on the context. The ongoing pandemic has hit businesses hard. Sands are shifting and businesses are forced to resort to such extreme measures. I hope and pray that conditions improve... people have job security and the decision of cuts in salaries is reversed.

### Is the government taking any measures to protect workers’ rights?

The PTI government stands committed to the rights of workers. There is always a factor of compassion, whenever decisions are made. As we have seen, even



during the corona virus challenge, when many people were demanding a complete lockdown, Prime Minister Imran kept the interests of workers, especially the daily wage earners, supreme. There was a lot of opposition from Sindh, but eventually the prime minister’s decision of partial lockdown proved right. I am witness to the fact that the PM always keeps the interests of the workers close to his heart. Steps like the Ehsaas Programme and free food for

the poorest of the poor are its manifestation. As far as workers affiliated with the journalism industry are concerned, the Wage Board should be implemented as per the law.

### How do you respond to the media owners charge that the government is creating a financial crisis by holding back advertisement dues?

I have checked on that... there have been six or seven meetings regarding this issue. Prime Minister Imran Khan is aware of the situation and has ordered that all dues be cleared, and it is being done. We are trying to engage further with the industry, but we should be clear about the fact that the issue of delay in the clearance of dues has not been created by this government. We inherited it from the last government, which left unverified bills and many other anomalies. We are trying to fix all this. ■

media crisis is also the result of a mushroom growth of television channels in the country. “In the absence of real industrial growth, how can one expect advertisements from the private sector?” they say. They argue that the advertisement base is the same, but the shareholders have increased manifold, resulting in a reduction in the share of the advertisement pie.

Shakeel Masood, the present Secretary of PBA, is also critical of the government for issuing more licenses to new TV channels when the market is already saturated.

He says that around 80 percent of the channels are still on analogue and only 20 percent are digital. The capacity of the analogue platform, according to him, is of 80 channels but PEMRA has already issued licenses to 126 channels, without enhancing its capacity.

“We have asked the government to stop issuing licenses for the time being until it enhances its capacity, but they are issuing more licenses to increase their own income,” says Masood.

This competition, insiders say, has also forced the owners of the print and electronic media organisations to charge

*Economists say that the current media crisis is also the result of a mushroom growth of television channels... In the absence of industrial growth, how can one expect ads from the private sector?*

much below their officially advertised rates. That is also affecting their revenues.

“It’s a buyer’s market at the moment,” says Masood. “The one who buys air time for us (advertiser), now dictates (the rates of advertisements) and most channels have to accept that.” Even otherwise, he says, the advertising agencies have slashed their rates by 15 to 20 percent over the last two years.

Masood says that the cost of electricity, petrol and the work force have all gone up manifold during the last few years, while revenues have fallen by at least 50 percent. “Media (operational) costs have to be reduced as there is no other option,” he says. According to him, the government is also not ready to cut the “satellite costs,” which, according to him, are very high and a huge burden on channels, given the present financial crisis.

However, the PFUJ says that these are just lame excuses being offered by media owners.

An insider told *Narratives* that last month’s revenue of Geo TV stood at around 300 million rupees, which was one of the highest ever. However, in spite of these improving revenues, the owners are laying off workers and staff from their television channels, as well as from their print media organisations.

PFUJ’s claim is, to a certain extent, supported by Duraid Qureshi and also by Sarmad Ali, the present Secretary of All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), which represents newspaper owners.

“Things have improved since the last two months and (advertising revenues)

are increasing,” says Qureshi. “The consumer companies that had slashed their overall budgets, including advertising budgets, are now doling out advertisements,” he says.

Sarmad Ali agrees: “During the last two months, revenues (of both the print and electronic media) have improved considerably,” he says. “But if we compare the present revenues with 2017-18, they are still short by 25 to 30 percent.”

PBA Secretary Masood claims that business revenues of the TV industry that stood at 45 to 46 billion rupees in fiscal year 2017-18 have dropped to 25 to 26 billion rupees in fiscal year 2019-20. But he agrees that revenues have started improving over the last two months.

“The media was in a desperate situation and costs had to be reduced accordingly,” he says, justifying the retrenchments and pay-cuts. “There was no other option.”

He says that instead of supporting the media industry in these times of crises the government is asking television channels to run 10 percent of their ads for free, such as the COVID-19 awareness campaign. “There is no government support for us like the one given to the real estate and housing sector.”

According to the PFUJ, the media owners are using the crisis only as an excuse to avoid giving print media workers the 8th Wage Board Award, which was announced last year after the owners and media unions reached a consensus on the minimum wages for newspaper employees over the next four years.

“Not a single newspaper, including *Dawn*, *Jang* or *Express Tribune*, has implemented the Wage Board Award, although the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) had signed the Award,” says Zaidi.

The APNS Secretary Sarmad Ali says that newspapers are willing to pay the Wage Board Award but presently they do not have the resources to pay the workers. “Our intention to pay is 100 percent there but the capacity to pay has been reduced.”

Ali says that the reasons for retrenchments, pay-cuts and reduction in newspaper pages were several. Firstly the federal and provincial governments, except Sindh, reduced their advertising budget by 50 percent; this was followed by a recession in the economy due to COVID-19.

The other reasons he quoted are quite interesting. He says that the NAB crack-



Media workers protesting against retrenchments and pay-cuts.

*In spite of improving revenues, the owners are laying off workers and staff from TV channel and print media organisations.*

down on advertising houses and the closure of three to four advertising agencies by them not only scared away the advertisers but also hit the media organisations. “One of the advertising agencies, Midas, which has been closed and its accounts frozen by NAB, owes over one billion rupees to media organisations and we will not be able to recover that money now,” says Ali. “This has also frightened the advertisers.”

Interestingly, Sarmad Ali blames the government’s policy of documenting the economy as another reason for the business crisis. “Pakistan has always had a parallel economy and we should have gone for a documented economy in a phased manner,” he says, adding, “the business houses got scared and stopped investments, particularly in advertising.”

Ali says that the government’s advertisement rates have increased only by 70 percent since 2002, whereas the inflation during this period has risen by more than 350 percent. “In real terms, this is the only industry which is earning much less than it was earning a decade ago.”

Both PBA and APNS believe that if the government agrees to release its outstanding payment of 2.5 billion rupees, the media industry can overcome the crisis.

This payment is on account of advertisements issued by the government during the PPP and PML-N tenures. The PTI government is refusing to make this payment on the grounds that these controversial advertisements were issued during the previous governments and hence they are not obliged to pay the arrears of those governments.

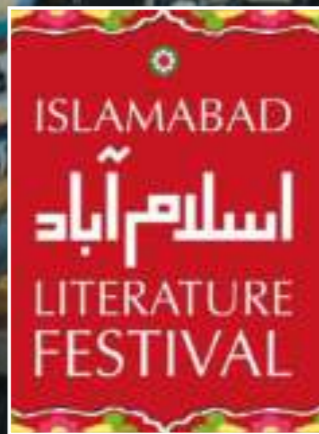
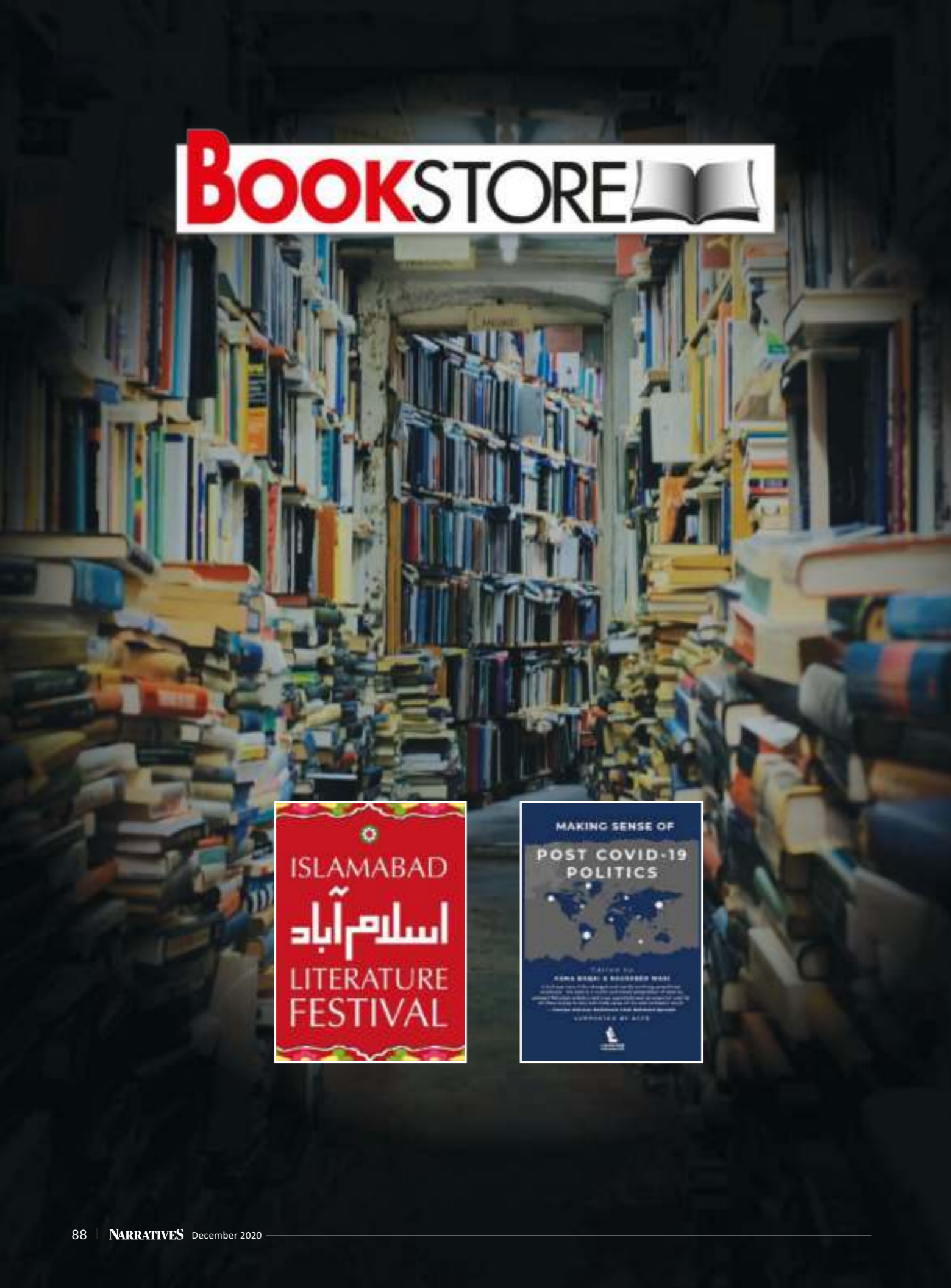
“The government’s plea is illogical,” says Ali. “Can the present government refuse to pay the IMF loans that were taken by previous governments or can it refuse to pay the Independent Power Producers on the grounds that those contracts were signed by previous governments,” argues Ali.

Masood also maintains, that the government is obligated to pay the outstanding arrears of the media industry. “Can the government say that the 100-denomination currency notes printed during the PPP government are unacceptable as a currency today?” he argues.

Critics of the PTI government say that it has squeezed freedom of expression and is using advertisement cuts and withholding the media’s long-standing advertisement dues as a tool to force the media houses to toe their line.

However, the PFUJ says it is determined to continue the fight both for the rights of the media industry workers, as well as freedom of expression, no matter what the consequences. ■

# BOOKSTORE



## Writing in the time of Covid

As the pandemic keeps society homebound, the Islamabad Literature Festival 2020 goes digital



**By Sami Subhani**

*The writer is a staff member.*

**T**hough the point has now been repeated ad-indefinitum, the Covid era has served as an accelerant for the digitisation of our lives. As a host of everyday activities from schooling to business meetings now take place online, a steady internet connection joins face masks and hand sanitisers as an essential component of the COVID-19 survival kit. Less than a month from its scheduled start date, Oxford University Press Pakistan's (OUP) 7th annual Islamabad Literature Festival (ILF) risked becoming yet another unfortunate casualty of the pandemic, struggling to come to grips with the requirements of the 'new normal.'

Inspired by the success of the Karachi Literature Festival (KLF), the ILF was first launched in April 2013, aiming 'to create an intellectual space that can express the diversity and pluralism of Pakistani society.' Though literature remains the main focus, the ILF and its sister festival have risen to become important forums on the national and global issues affecting Pakistan, with journalists, diplomats, politicians and activists appearing alongside novelists, poets and artists to air their work and their views. With such a broad spectrum of participants from both home and abroad and sessions conducted in both Urdu and English, the festi-

vals help foster a dialogue that transcends national, social and class barriers, a rare opportunity in what can at times be a rather insular intellectual landscape. All the more reason that the ILF would have made for a glaring absentee amidst a time that will define both the nation and the world for years to come.

With so much riding on the event and the threat of cancellation ever present, the ILF team members and Advisory Committee fought against time to break from the traditional face-to-face format and build an online infrastructure that could accommodate over 70 speakers and moderators in different cities and countries while not compromising on audience participation. According to OUP's Marketing Director Raheela Baqai, this unexpected change in format involved "working round the clock from 9am to midnight, every day, up to the day of the festival."

Fortunately, the hard work paid off. Not only did the festival proceed but it managed to break new ground along the way, becoming OUP's, and probably Pakistan's, first virtual literary festival. Spread over 8 days, from October 23 to October 30, the festival received over 100,000 views on its live recorded videos and reached over 820,000 people on social media, far more than have ever attended any of the live events. Furthermore, engagement from abroad markedly improved, with noticeable online traffic from the UK, US and India. In

*The festival managed to break new ground, becoming OUP's, and probably Pakistan's, first virtual literary festival.*



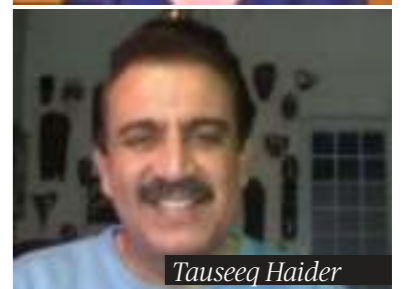
Iftikhar Arif



Amjad Islam Amjad



Arfa Sayeda Zehra



Tauseeq Haider



Ahdaf Soueif



First of its kind; the ILF goes virtual. (From the top left) Mehvash Amin; Salman Tarik Kureshi; Alan Humm; Afshan Shafi; Ilona Yusuf; Momina Mela.

Nowhere was this reflection more penetrating than among the speakers who discussed the future of education in Pakistan. In an indictment of our current education infrastructure, Associate Professor of Economics at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Dr Faisal Bari, observed that “there are 20 odd million children of ages 5 to 16 that are not in school and of those enrolled only around 7 percent make it to university.” In addition, Dr Bari claimed that while many of those who have dropped out of school “would have liked to have second chances in education, our education system does not provide any second chances...this makes for a very rigid system that goes against the idea of equality of opportunity.” In a similar vein, physicist and freelance consultant on education Dr A.H. Nayyar pointed out that most government schools “simply did not have the option of switching to online learning in response to the lockdown, as a result the past 8-10 months have gone to waste for those students dependent on these schools.”

While many of the speakers welcomed the shift to online education as a necessary step to adequately prepare students for the 21st century, it seemed painfully clear that, given the substantial difference in the capacity to adopt online education between private and public schools, the inequities in our education system will probably widen in the years to come. Unless a massive amount of resources are allocated to public sector schools, that being highly unlikely given the toll the lockdown has taken on our economy, Pakistanis may well be more divided along class and social lines than ever before.

With the Karachi Literature Festival slated for the spring of 2021 and the pandemic showing no signs of exiting our lives anytime soon, avoiding repetition and Covid fatigue might be a challenge. However, the ILF 2020 has proved that the OUP team is more than capable of dealing with seemingly insurmountable odds. Additionally, the festival was a showcase of the power of creativity to overcome tragedy, evidenced by the fact that seven books were launched during this festival alone. One hopes that even more talented writers can tap into the same energy and find their creative spark before the upcoming KLF. ■

the opinion of Huma Baqai, one of the speakers at the festival and an Associate Professor at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, it would be preferable for OUP to switch to a “hybrid model” that includes both face-to-face and online components, “given the advantages of having an online presence in terms of accessibility.”

Aptly themed ‘Words in the Time of Lockdown,’ COVID-19’s influence on literature formed a major theme of the 7th ILF. Speaking at the launch of their book *The Stained-Glass Window: Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan*, Sana Munir and Taha Kehar discussed the sheer multiplicity of the experiences that have arisen out of the pandemic, an extension of the pre-existing differences and inequalities of our society. Given the breadth of this spectrum, the pair decided on compiling an anthology consisting of fictionalised versions of different writers’ trials during the pandemic as the most appropriate format for the times. At a time when it is all too tempting to retreat into one’s shell, Kehar and Munir highlighted the cathartic effect the stories had on their writers, helping them come to terms with their circumstances through fiction. This spirit is perhaps best encapsulated in a story written by a 15 year old who survived the virus, who according to Kehar, wrote about her ordeal in an upbeat way, bringing a human touch to her portrayal that is often lacking in mainstream media narratives about Covid.

In contrast to the optimism of Munir and Kehar, writer and literary journal-

*The ILF 2020 has proved that the OUP team is more than capable of dealing with seemingly insurmountable odds.*

ist Muneeza Shamsie presided over a far more sombre panel, entitled ‘In Covid Times: What Do You Read And Write.’ When asked about the future of literature post-Covid, Waqas Khwaja, Author and Professor of English at Agnes Scott College in the US, predicted an increase in novels of the dystopian fiction genre while asserting it would take time for the literary community to fully process the impact of the pandemic on our social fabric. Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif argued that “what we were being made to perceive through the pandemic was the sharp point of a lesson we should have learnt anyway,” drawing attention to how pre-existing social and political quagmires have been accentuated by the pandemic. Soueif felt that the pandemic had given the world an opportunity to reflect and that “the world was taking that opportunity to reflect,” pointing to a growing understanding that “we must find new, more just and more communal ways of living.”

## Perplexing Times

The post-Covid world is aptly analysed in a compilation of scholarly articles



**Making Sense of Post COVID-19 Politics**  
 Edited by: Huma Baqai & Nausheen Wasi  
 Publisher: Lightstone Publishers Ltd.  
 Pages: 133  
 Price: 995/-



**By Maliha Khan**

*The writer is a staff member.*

From our personal lives to geopolitics, we have been living in unprecedented chaos spiralled by an infinitesimal creature – corona virus. During these perplexing times, getting your hands on a book like *Making Sense of Post COVID-19 Politics* is a treat for thousands of readers seeking comprehensive literature on the post-pandemic geo-political and geo-economic scenario, featuring Pakistan as well.

The 133-page book is a timely compilation of work by 12 prominent Pakistani scholars and analysts. Edited by International Relations maestros, Dr. Huma Baqai, and Dr. Nausheen Wasi, the book is a predictive analysis of the post-COVID-19 world.

In its eleven chapters, the manuscript explores wide ranging topics like security threats, ideological politico-economic divide, human security, response mechanism to the pandemic, the Kashmir issue, and Pakistan’s domestic politics vis-à-vis the 18th amendment, with regards to COVID-19 circumstances.

The editors impeccably manage to keep a coherent sequence throughout the eleven chapters. The book takes off with a chapter on historical analysis of world politics since the cold war era. Dr. Nausheen Wasi intelligently draws parallels between the onsets of the COVID-19 pandemic and the politics of radicalisation – as in how both phenomena bore predictable outcomes. The author further makes a solid case against the rise of populist politics and leaders like Donald Trump, which resulted in a delayed and inept response to COVID-19.

Dr. Rabia Akhtar, an eminent scholar from the University of Lahore, carries forward the debate in her derisively-named article *Pandemic and the Geopolitical Dilemma: Battle of the Elephants*. Referring to the two obvious elephants – the US and China – she argues that the pandemic-induced environment favours Beijing’s diplomacy style, thus creating

insecurity and angst in Washington. The world is already witnessing a spike in tensions between the two elephants, as US President Donald Trump has repeatedly termed the corona virus a ‘Chinese virus.’ Dr. Akhtar writes, “With the chorus of censure from the US on China in full swing, one cannot emphasize the repercussions on the conflict-propensity between the two countries.”

Continuing the discussion in a new chapter, Dr. Huma Baqai, and her research associate claim: “The COVID-19 could mark a ‘COVID Moment’ for the United States if it does not rise to meet global expectations.” The authors converge all the facts – China’s revival of the ancient Silk Route, its ‘survivor turned saviour role’ in the corona crisis, and the IMF’s positive projections of its economic growth – to demonstrate how Beijing is superseding Washington as a world leader.

The authors predict that hard power politics and capitalist-exclusive economic models may become irrelevant in the post-COVID-19 era. The chapter ends on a million-dollar question: “Will the West recover, revamp, and continue or will China emerge as an alternative?”

Shedding light on the COVID-19 episode from the lens of globalisation, Shahid Hameed, a Ph.D. scholar at National Defence University, strikes up an interesting debate on how the corona outbreak has changed the ‘globalisation of world politics’ into ‘the world’s politics of globalisation.’ He introduces the concept of ‘controlled globalisation’ for the post-pandemic world politics in order to effectively deal with an invisible enemy like the corona virus in the future.

After wrapping up myriad aspects of controlled globalisation, the book hops onto the subject of market economy versus social ideology through the pen of prominent economist Dr. Kaiser Bengali. Those readers who believe in the cause of socialism would find this chapter worth reading. As the corona crisis mars the world, the au-

thor powerfully advocates against the preventive measures, which are solely driven by capitalist and neo-liberal approaches. In his scathing remarks, especially pertaining to the miserable healthcare system of the US, Bengali writes, “The corona invasion has exposed the abject hollowness of the neo-liberal market economy paradigm.” This particular chapter is extremely rich in content, with its hard-hitting commentary on the ideological political economy divide.

The second half of the book turns out to be quite fast-paced, wherein Dr. Ishrat Afshan Abbasi, a scholar at the University of Sindh, focuses on human security concerns. Under the framework of International Human Rights Law, Abbasi broadly explains how and why certain restrictions on human rights during pandemics are legitimate to counter COVID-19. She has also given a number of suggestions to governments about effectively tackling the pandemic. Keeping up with Abbasi’s notion, Saira Bano Orakzai, an associate chair at Nelson Mandela University, examines the scale of difficulty and challenges for policymakers in the fight against corona virus.

Criticising the WHO’s approaches, she addresses the key point of contention in policymaking: the relevancy of a universal response mechanism to societies like South Asia and the Global South. Orakzai zooms into the example of Pakistan’s unpropitious statecraft and proposes alternative means to mitigate the COVID-19 quandary in developing, poor and low-income countries.

Esteemed historian Dr. Bettina Robotka contributes a chapter on Pakistan’s foreign policy options in the wake of the corona affair. She expertly dissects the changing global power equation from a unipolar towards a multipolar world, owing to the pandemic.

Robotka digs into the Eurasian Idea and effortlessly enlightens a reader on its dynamics. She firmly believes that Pakistan’s foreign policy would also garner many profits



Dr. Bettina Robotka



Dr. Farhan Hanif Siddiqui



Dr. Huma Baqai



Ikram Sehgal

*Esteemed historian Dr. Bettina Robotka believes that Pakistan’s foreign policy would garner many profits from the Eurasian concept. “The political pivot for Pakistan is clearly shifting from overseas relations to regional alliances (China and Russia).”*



Dr. Ishrat Afshan Abbasi



Dr. Kaiser Bengali



Dr. Nausheen Wasi



Dr. Rabia Akhtar

from the Eurasian concept. “The political pivot for Pakistan is clearly shifting from overseas relations to regional alliances (China and Russia),” she writes.

*Making Sense of Post Covid-19 Politics* also encompasses a chapter on Pandemic Response in Kashmir by Sardar Masood Khan. Perhaps the editors included this chapter due to the Kashmir issue’s significance – a flashpoint in South Asian politics. This book painstakingly amplifies the voice of our Kashmiri brethren against the Indian atrocities.

The book rounds off the script by scrutinising Pakistani domestic politics. Dr. Farhan Hanif Siddiqui, an educationist at Quaid-e-Azam University, objectively touches on the 18th Amendment debate stemming from the management of the pandemic by the federal and Sindh governments, respectively.

Ikram Sehgal, Chairman of the Karachi Council on Foreign Relations, stresses that the pandemic’s economic fallout is more dangerous than the medical one. He presents a much needed solution by determining FinTech as a way forward for not only the problems that have surfaced since the pandemic, but to help resolve the long-standing structural financial issues of Pakistan.

*Making Sense of Post Covid-19 Politics* is a book that gives you a bird’s eye view of the global, regional as well as national impact of the pandemic. Though arguments and information were a bit redundant in a few chapters, the book portrays events from history to modern-day politics especially from the perspective of the post-COVID-19 scenario. It is a must read to enhance our understanding of different dimensions of world politics emerging from the COVID-19 catastrophe. Hats off to the editors who brought together Pakistan’s acclaimed academics and analysts to analyse key issues that will shape our future.

This knowledge-laden book will definitely add value to your bookshelf. ■

# Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying What?

## Will Nawaz Sharif's anti-military rhetoric yield any positive Prime Minister?

What started merely as implied criticism – in the twilight of his last tenure as Prime Minister in 2017 – has now burgeoned into a powerful and unflinching narrative. From the safe haven of the UK; Nawaz Sharif has unleashed a verbal assault against Pakistan's esteemed institutions, with the military topping his hit list.



**Ihtasham-ul-Haque**  
Senior journalist and analyst

**O**ne thing is crystal clear: the narrative adopted by Nawaz Sharif is not aimed at winning elections for himself. Rather, his bids are focused on bringing the PML-N and PPP together on a united platform to amend the constitution. With the support of the PPP in parliament, Sharif wants to scrap Article 62 of the constitution to pave his way to public office again. Let's not forget how, in 2010, this alliance effortlessly set the scene for the 18th amendment in the constitution of Pakistan.

Sharif's relentless tirade against the institution of the military is a major tool to further his agenda of creating political chaos. This is something one can comfortably do while sitting miles away in London, and Nawaz Sharif is doing just that – à la the MQM's Altaf Hussain. Though other political parties of the PDM are not toeing his anti-military stance, the public seems to buy some part of his narrative.

People argue that Nawaz Sharif's political career is over, but this is far from the truth. Sharif is still relevant and very influential in the country's political spectrum. Despite not being part of electoral politics, Sharif is still idolised in every nook and cranny of the Punjab – the kingmaker state.

The PTI government's disappointing and incompetent performance is further smoothing the path for Sharif's successful revival as the so-called 'leader of the nation.' Resultantly, so far, Sharif's narrative seems to be working in his favour. However, the courts in Pakistan are the biggest hurdle in his track, considerably stymying the impact of his propaganda.



**Nazir Leghari**  
Senior journalist and analyst

**N**awaz Sharif and his daughter are pushing hard to sell their smear campaign against the military establishment as a revolutionary narrative. As a matter of fact, their narrative is absolutely subjective, targeting only two persons in the institution – Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa and the ISI Chief, Faiz Hameed. Does Sharif want to show that only two persons are running the entire country?

If he really wishes to overhaul the entire system with his ostensible 'vote ko izzat do' [honour the vote] campaign, then hurling a diatribe against two particular individuals is unquestionably not the way to do it.

The political system of any country is a reflection of its social system. As far as our society is concerned, it is divided into a myriad social systems: tribalism, feudalism, capitalism, and so on. Generally, the political ruling establishment wants to maintain the status quo of the social system they have come from.

In this scenario, if Nawaz Sharif truly desires to fix the system by confronting it, he will have to challenge his own social standing as well. Sharif should let go of his mills, firms, and all other money-making ventures abroad and then come back to fight against the ills of the system. And if he is not willing to do so, then his narrative is nothing but an attempt at manipulation, which will soon bite the dust.

## outcomes for his ambition to stage a comeback as fourth-term

In his recent speeches, Sharif has openly named and denounced two individuals from the Pakistan army's top brass. This has not gone down too well even among his supporters and current partners in politics. Narratives asks four senior analysts what they think Nawaz Sharif is aiming to achieve from his mudslinging:



**Imtiaz Gul**  
Senior analyst and author

**T**he future of Nawaz Sharif's narrative is not bright at all. It will die its own death owing to the stark contradictions in his actions and words. Be it Nawaz or his daughter Maryam, their arguments are not synced with their past conduct whatsoever.

After listening to their rants against the military institution, the question arises: Why did they not do anything against the military when they were in power?

If Sharif's narrative really had any factual or moral backing, he should have gone down fighting with the military when he was disposed of as Prime Minister. If he had chosen to stand for his cause at that time, he would have emerged a victor. Instead, he opted to quietly disappear from the political stage.

It was all part of their bigger ploy, which has now been exposed in its entirety. Nawaz was merely waiting to re-emerge at a suitable time and place (London) with a hollow and deceitful narrative. This guileful attitude is a prime indication of his bad faith.

Moreover, if we evaluate major events on a basic level, we would still find Nawaz Sharif a morally corrupt person. He committed a moral crime by not disclosing the salary – received from his son's UAE firm – in his nomination papers. This sole event creates an honest picture of Nawaz's deep-rooted dishonesty.



**Saeed Qazi**  
Journalist and Senior analyst

**T**here's only one word to describe the future of Nawaz Sharif's narrative: bleak.

Nawaz Sharif brazenly forgets the fact that the military helped conceive his political life. He rose to power owing to a military takeover which stripped the 1973 constitution. Now, ironically, Sharif is seeking his political rights from the very constitution that he once facilitated to abolish in his own country.

Since the establishment no longer has Sharif's back, he decided to launch an anti-military harangue to agitate state institutions. And he is now purportedly seeking support from international shores – countries where he has made enormous investments – to pressurise the Pakistani government.

The second option Sharif hoped to cash in on was his roots in the masses. However, as a party, the PML-N failed in mobilising the masses. Then Sharif started to bank on the PDM, hoping to gain some political mileage from it. But so far, the opposition's power show does not seem to have yielded much, perhaps given the public's lack of trust in opposition leaders.

After evaluating these facts, we can strongly contend that the Sharif Dynasty has no future unless there is a significant change in the country's power structure.

Defying Nawaz Sharif's narrative, Shehbaz Sharif did make an attempt to save the Sharif Dynasty through a dialogue with the establishment. However, his indictment in graft cases watered down all such bids. Given this situation, a comeback of the Sharif Dynasty is hard to envisage.