

The Truth International

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Between the devil and the deep sea
Opposition set to launch anti-govt movement

The 'Ghaddar' card has lost its appeal
Ruling Party hit the panic button

Afghan peace sputters amid hope & despair
Taliban welcome US announcement to withdraw troops

Political temperature rises Govt & Opposition heading for showdown



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The ‘Ghaddar’ card has lost its appeal

By M. Ziauddin



THE PAKISTAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (PDM), a conglomerate of 15 or so opposition parties, seems to have, out of the blue, captured the political center stage in the country, thanks largely to Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent interview

to a private TV channel in which he openly branded the Opposition Parties as Indian agents. Making matters even more politically self-destructive were the chorus of PTI spokespersons casting the Opposition in even more libelous terms.

The ruling Party seems to have hit the panic button knowing not how to respond to the defiant speech of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the inaugural session of the PDM other than dubbing it as mutinous. When a government starts accusing the Opposition of being foreign agents, it is actually admitting that it has lost the argument even before the contest had begun.

What the ruling Party seems to have ignored while making use of the ‘Ghaddar’ card, usually employed against the opposition in such situations is, to make it stick you need the political support of the very province that the main opposition Party, the PMLN controls. That is the reason why perhaps the label has failed to produce the desired results.

Clearly, the opposition seems to have decided to bring under further pressure an already faltering government by fully exploiting the general public's suffering induced by the recent all-round price-hike. It has chalked out a series of public meetings it is going to stage in various cities. It is asking the PM to resign; also warned that it would resign en masse from assemblies before the scheduled Senate elections next March.

The main reason why Imran's model of Naya Pakistan has failed to deliver so far has been because it was built around too simplistic assumptions such as, tax collection would double to Rs8 trillion simply because people trusted Imran Khan and therefore would pay their taxes honestly, that

foreign exchange reserves would go up steeply because Imran's well-wishers in foreign countries would start remitting billions of dollars because they trusted him, the annual loss of \$10 billion due to money laundering would stop forthwith because the corrupt rulers would have disappeared as soon as Imran took over the reins of the country, and the siphoned off money amounting to \$200 billion stashed in foreign banks would be brought back the very next day after he is installed in the PM's office; with this money all our foreign debt would be repaid and Pakistan would still be left with \$100 billion; with no more foreign debt to repay and foreign reserves going up by a colossal \$100 billion, the PTI government would be able provide 10 million jobs over five years and construct 5 million housing units for the poor in the same period.

Also the government's performance on the corruption front, when tested against the PTI's own yardsticks seems to have remained too wanting. The Party's declared crusade against corruption has seemingly turned into manufactured moralism. Indeed, rather than focusing on governance PM Imran Khan's government seems to have turned into a vigilante force of moralizers. On the one hand these Khan-led moralizers seem to be trying to inflate their own social and moral standing in the public eye by flaunting their moral virtues on daily basis, while on the other they seem to take carnal pleasure in the public humiliation of their ‘corrupt’ victims. Reminders are voiced almost round the clock by the Party spokespersons promoting Khan as being the cleanest of the clean Pakistanis. That such moralizers as a rule suffer from strong doses of hypocrisy, sanctimoniousness, pomposity, pretension and conformism is not an exaggerated notion.

Yes, of course, one must be extremely wary of those who persecute in the name of principle. But then one cannot condone corruption while criticizing vigilante moralizers. Khan and his party have all the right to investigate and prosecute the corrupt. But laws of the land alone do not have the ability to eliminate corruption. However, many civilized countries have succeeded in curbing corruption, if not eliminating it completely, by establishing a strong parliament, an independent judiciary and a fearless media. Without these social controls no amount of laws and moralizing can curb corruption.

Between the devil and the deep blue sea

Opposition set to launch anti-govt movement, claiming it means business; outcome of PDM campaign largely depends on its handling by rulers and those who matter

By Khalid Wasim

CHANGING THEIR INITIAL PLAN of launching an anti-government campaign from the politically-turbulent Balochistan province, the major opposition parties are all set for their first power show under the banner of the newly-formed Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) on October 16 in Gujranwala, known as the ‘City of Wrestlers’. The move comes at a time when the threat of a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic is looming over the country.

With battle lines already drawn, the country is no doubt heading towards another phase of political confrontation with analysts terming the next three months crucial for the present set-up under the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which is about to complete its half term in government.

According to experts, the outcome of the protest movement largely depends on the public response to the opposition’s call as well as handling of the situation by the government and those who matter. Another factor that will definitely have an impact is the narrative that the opposition leaders will present before the masses in their public meetings.

It will be interesting to see as to what narrative the opposition parties will carry during their campaign. The contents of the speeches will definitely be scrutinized minutely after the recent direct attacks on the establishment by deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif in his addresses from London. Though almost all the opposition leaders from other parties as well as the PML-N are endorsing Mr Sharif’s viewpoint, no one has been seen repeating those words so far.

As for the people of the country, they are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is up to them to decide if they really wish to see the ‘Tabdeeli Sarkar’ completing the remaining 34 months’ of its term and thus allowing it to make their lives more miserable by taking the country’s

economy to an irreversible state or they want to bring back those tested and discarded people who had previously failed to turn Pakistan into a true welfare democratic country despite getting several opportunities.

The third option is to simply watch the events as mere spectators and leave their fate to be decided by the circumstances as they had done mostly in recent history.

The reaction so far from the government circles to the formation of the PDM at the opposition’s September 20 All Parties Conference (APC) and its announcement of a three-phased protest movement culminating with a “decisive” long march to Islamabad in January 2021 clearly evinces that panic has started to penetrate the ruling PTI ranks.

The happenings soon after the APC, starting from the planned disclosure of secret meetings of the opposition leaders with the military leadership to the arrest of Shahbaz Sharif by National Accountability Bureau and registration of a number of treason cases against the opposition members, including deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his son-in-law retired Captain Muhammad Safdar and AJK Prime Minister Farooq Haider, all are seen by the political experts and analysts in the backdrop of the opposition’s announced agitation movement.

There are already reports in the media that the Special Branch has started compiling lists of the active leaders and workers of the opposition parties ahead of their planned public meetings and rallies. These lists can be used if the authorities decide to launch a crackdown and order arrests to prevent the opposition’s agitation.

The police in Gujranwala raided a PML-N corner meeting that was to be addressed by MNA Khurram Dastgir and arrested the city organizer of the party on October 7, thus sending a clear message that it cannot simply afford to give



a free hand to the opposition parties.

It is generally believed that it was after widespread criticism from civil society and legal fraternity as well as from some saner elements within the PTI that the government later decided to disassociate itself from the registration of sedition cases against the opposition members.

During the weekly federal cabinet meeting on October 6, while reviewing the overall political situation, a number of government ministers reportedly expressed their displeasure over the registration of sedition cases against the opposition members and called for ending the culture of dubbing each other as traitor, saying that such a practice had never succeeded in the past.

Interior Minister retired Brig Ijaz Shah told the cabinet that the registration of the FIR against Mr Sharif was a “non-political matter” and it had been filed by an individual. Reportedly, Prime Minister Imran Khan, who had only days before in a TV interview had alleged that Nawaz Sharif was maligning the state institutions at the behest of India, had to clarify that he had nothing to do with the registration of these cases as claimed by the opposition parties.

Only two days before the cabinet meeting, the interior minister had hinted that the government might bar the opposition from staging rallies. He had alleged that the opposition rallies had nothing to do with the betterment of Pakistan or democratic practices but were solely planned around anti-state agenda to create disruption and give room to the external elements to find grounds to damage the country.

However, during the media briefing after the cabinet meeting, Information Minister Shibli Faraz said the government had no plan to block the opposition’s public meetings and rallies.

During the same cabinet meeting, a number of ministers also reportedly called for immediate steps to bring down inflation to prevent the opposition from “exploiting the issue” during its anti-government campaign. Some of the ministers even criticized the “unelected members” of the prime minister’s economic team, saying that it was the elected representatives who had to face the public.

Admitting that the cabinet and the prime minister had expressed concern over the prevailing inflation, the information minister later told reporters that the premier had issued directives for a strategy to bring down prices in order to provide relief to the masses.

Ironically, in the same meeting, the ministers approved the decisions of the Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet taken at its meeting on September 30 that included an increase in gas tariff for specific commercial consumers and passing of fuel adjustment charges to end-consumers of electricity.

While the cabinet members were discussing these issues, thousands of government employees from various parts of the country had swarmed into the heavily guarded Red Zone to stage a sit-in at Constitution Avenue demanding an increase in their salaries and allowances. The call for the protest had been given by the All Pakistan Clerks Association, and it was supported by almost all the trade unions in key government departments.

The main demands of the employees were 100 percent increase in medical allowance and increase in salaries as per the price hike

along with an explanation about the increment and pension policy. The protesters dispersed when a government team headed by Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri assured them that their issues would be resolved by a committee.

On the other hand, by finalizing the PDM’s structure and announcing the schedule of six public meetings in all the four provinces within two weeks after the APC, the opposition parties have clearly indicated that this time they mean business.

By nominating JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman as the PDM president in the first formal meeting of the party heads after the APC, the opposition parties have already proved wrong the apprehensions of some political experts who were expecting infighting among these parties over the distribution of the PDM offices.

Initially, the opposition leaders had announced that the top three offices would be given to the three major parties –PPP, PML-N and JUI-F – on rotational basis, but later while announcing the nomination of Raja Pervez Ashraf and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as the senior vice-president and general secretary, respectively, they stated that the present set-up would continue for an indefinite period.

After Gujranwala, the PDM plans to hold the second public meeting in Karachi on October 18, third in Quetta on October 25, fourth in Peshawar on November 22, fifth in Multan on November 30 and the last one in Lahore on December 13.

Initially, the PDM leaders had announced that they would begin their campaign with a public meeting in Quetta on October 11. Later, on the request of its local leaders, the JUI-F on its own decided to hold the meeting on October 18. The move was opposed by the PPP as it had already announced its plan to hold its own traditional public meeting on the same day to mark the 13th anniversary of the Karsaz tragedy in which hundreds of party workers were killed in a blast at a rally on the occasion of return of Ms Benazir Bhutto to the country. The PPP leaders also suspected the JUI-F’s move in the backdrop of the reports that the “concerned quarters” were not happy with the PDM’s decision to begin their campaign from Balochistan where security forces are still facing insurgency by some nationalists.

Commenting on the development, The Nation in its editorial wrote that “the shifting of the location and date of the first public meeting arouses suspicions of deeper differences within the coalition; choosing to hold the first meeting in Quetta gave a strategic message – shifting the location to Punjab indicates a difference in ideology on how to proceed with the movement.”

Similarly, the PML-N had also already announced its own program to hold a public meeting in Gujranwala on October 16 as part of its ongoing protest campaign against the arrest of party president Shahbaz Sharif. During the steering committee’s meeting on October 3, it was decided that all future events already announced by the component parties would now be held from the PDM’s platform.

The opposition has already given a call to the masses to come out on the streets whereas Prime Minister Imran Khan has warned the nation against a possible spike in Covid-19 cases. The reports regarding imposition of smart and micro lockdowns have also started pouring in from various parts of the country.

Winter of discontent looms as political temperature rises

With both government and opposition giving no quarter, the conflict is set to intensify with the former enjoying establishment's support for the first time; PML-N and PPP see no other option but to beat the war drum

By Arshad Waheed Chaudhry

THIS YEAR THE COLD DECEMBER will have the highest political temperature when all major opposition parties gathering on the platform of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) will be completing their public meetings against the government's policies and gearing up for a long march to Islamabad in a bid to get rid of the PTI-led coalition government in January.

Handing over of the PDM leadership to Maulana Fazlur Rehman has eliminated any flexibility or scope for dialogue. On the other hand, Prime Minister Imran Khan is also not willing to come to the table for talks with the opposition and is continuing in the tone of the leader of the opposition.

Judging by the political landscape, neither side seems to have a conscious, mature, ideological, and conciliatory attitude, but everyone seems to have some opinion. As the proverb says, "when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers".

This elephant fight had started during the second tenure of the PML-N and the reason was to put into practice the long-cherished desire of Nawaz Sharif to become the prime minister for the third

time. Twice earlier this wish was made impossible, this time they were still not ready to relinquish their powers, so the result was same as in the past – Nawaz Sharif was convicted and opted to go into exile. And this time it was about ending the political careers of the big fish; perhaps with the intention to get rid of the politicians who have been hovering over the political horizon for the past four years.

Hence, with the formation of the PDM following the All Parties Conference (APC) held on September 20 and announcement of the seven-point action plan, the drumbeat of the beginning of the political war has started. The aggressive speech made by PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif at the APC also made his intentions very clear – to go for agitation against the ruling powers. It is also a fact that for the last one year, Nawaz Sharif has provided ample opportunity to test his brother Shahbaz Sharif's statement of reconciliation and silenced his daughter Maryam Nawaz, who is known for starting aggressive politics. However, Shahbaz Sharif's efforts could only be fruitful until Nawaz Sharif was escorted to London because on the other hand the terms of not posing any problems for the government till 2023 was not well taken by Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz.





So, the connection broke again and Nawaz Sharif and his daughter once again took up the strategy of resistance. However, his comrades like Shahbaz Sharif and Khawaja Asif are still unable to swallow this pill and hence the former considered it more appropriate to withdraw his bail application from the Lahore High Court and go to jail instead.

Due to the same dilemma in the party, Maryam Nawaz admitted that it is not up to everyone to bear the burden of Nawaz Sharif and his narrative. In the context of Nawaz Sharif's disqualification, his punishment and revocation of bail, they now have no choice but to start a protest movement and since they have nothing to lose now, the bitterness in their tone is increasing with each passing day. If there is any obstacle in the way of their intentions in their party now, they will not accept it at all. That is why Nawaz Sharif himself gave the order to expel the five members of PML-N who met Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar in the CEC meeting while disregarding Khawaja Asif's statement about Asif Zardari and his anger forced Khawaja Asif to apologize.

The biggest challenge for the PML-N now is to keep the party united, to make Nawaz Sharif's statement meaningful and to ensure loyalty of its members. In the current situation, the encouraging aspect for the PML-N is its workers who have the spirit of sacrifice. The duo is using this strength to fight the most challenging battle of their political career. The PPP has also joined hands with PML-N because despite assurances about its leadership, the grip is still tight and the siege against Asif Zardari, and his sister, is being further tightened. Though PPP knows very well that to make opposition agitation drive successful it has to sacrifice government. But now it seems that PPP leadership has made up its mind in this regard. However, after using all the options and not achieving the desired results, the only apparent choice is to walk under the leadership of Maulana Fazlur Rehman, which PPP and PML-N had been resisting since long.

The Senate election in March is an upcoming nightmare for the opposition, especially those with more seats in Parliament, because their silence will destroy them, and government will have majority in both houses of Parliament. The leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the coalition government is overconfident about their priorities and loyalties during

testing times. However, the federal government is still unaware of the notion that politics is heartless, and the Umpire will save its reputation at any cost.

The role that ministers and spokespersons are currently playing in making the government controversial is certainly a matter of concern for the Establishment. On the other hand, the opposition's protests are being fueled by constant rhetoric, and the key players who usually play the role of a mediator have been seen quite upfront recently. Instead of correcting the mistake that has been made to gamble on the same horse, the Establishment now making more errors. Due to which the attention of all opposition parties is towards the Establishment instead of government. What has happened is certainly not a good omen for it as an institution but also extremely detrimental to Pakistan and its security. Given this whole political scenario, one can easily predict that the conflict will intensify with each passing day.

The opposition will show its strength through a joint meeting in Gujranwala on October 18. However, the biggest challenge for the opposition is that contrary to the past, this time the Establishment is supporting the government instead of the opposition. Hence, the arrests of more opposition leaders in the coming days are likely to continue.

No doubt that the governance of the present government and the worst inflation in history has suffocated the life of common man. When both parties' confrontation will reach its pinnacle, the helpless and oppressed public will have the last laugh. The last few years have opened their eyes to this tug-of-war for power and now they must respect their vote.



Tainted Politics: Is Pakistan digressing on the path to electoral democracy?

By Oroba Tasnim Siddiqui

LACK OF CREDIBILITY LIES at the heart of every debate and discussion that one sees amongst the politicians and the parties they represent, yet this is one area where energies and resources of political parties have not been applied with unison and determined to plug the holes that allow discordant voices to turn into a raucous chorus one hears in the aftermath of every election.

As the situation stands, the political parties now take it upon themselves soon after an election to start bashing the whole exercise as “bogus” and “impartial”. The words become brazenly clear in meaning when the losing parties participate in this debate. Often, they go beyond usual denunciation of the elections threatening to stage sit-ins and jam cities and towns if the “wrong” done to them is not “rectified”.

The history of election in Pakistan, be it the election of 1988 held after a gap of 11 years, or the 2008 election which came after a nine-year hiatus following the army takeover led by General Pervez Musharraf, is rife with allegations and counter-allegations of rigging in every stage of polling from the casting of ballot to the counting of it.

Incidentally, the current government is now led by a leader who also refused to accept the elections in 2013 after accusing the winning political party of mass rigging and stealing the elections in many constituencies which led him to coin his popular term, “35 punctures”. It was a small wonder then when the 2018 elections brought the current government in power, the allegations of rigging in the election were repeated by the outgoing ruling party.

A look at the petitions challenging the authenticity of balloting in recent elections shows that following the 2013 elections, 664 petitions were filed, 277 of them before the Election Commission and the rest before the Election Tribunals. However, following the 2018 general elections which saw the losing political parties combine their voices to speak against what they called even more glaring examples of rigging and serious loopholes in the electioneering process, a mere 331 petitions were filed, nearly half the number seen in the previous poll.

In sight of these surprising numbers, it is important to gauge the authenticity of rigging claims and manipulation of polls: whether it is merely a political chant used for vested interests of opposition parties or if it holds any significance at all. A glimpse at the statistics suggest otherwise. For an electoral candidate, rigging leads to a loss of years long investment which is considered unbearable and in case of doubtful results, the individual does not hesitate in filing petition either in the Election Commission or at the Tribunal.

But in case of the 2018 polls, it is shocking to witness that individuals did not partake in this activity despite political leaders thunderously claiming otherwise which begs the question; Was



Imran Khan right all along? Is it just a matter of politically motivated slogans to manipulate proceedings of accountability? A mere distraction to cajole the public into lining up for their eventual reprieve.

Imperative to bring into perspective is S Y Quraishi, former Indian Chief Election Commissioner who was part of the observatory team designated to monitor the General Elections 2018 in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Regarding the polls, he concluded that the elections were conducted through a free, fair and transparent mechanism although minor mishaps resulted not out of some ill-intentioned interests, rather the inexperience and poor training of the polling agents.

While there is no doubt that elections are still marred by irregularities and subjected to a pre-poll bias that extends throughout, it is also pertinent to note that in case of judicial proceedings, much like the decision from the last elections, the commission may end up declaring the election devoid of any sort of systematic rigging. In such a scenario, who will be responsible for the loss of lives and livelihood caused by subsequent protests?

Must history repeat itself before political leaders finally see sense or will they await forceful imposition of subservience from those who must not be named? In such a case, does the prevalent system in Pakistan have the temerity to withhold any such shocks or will we be forced into a primitive timeline which has long been objected to but willfully and wholeheartedly welcomed due to the denigration of systematic democracy and the surrounding intolerance?

For Pakistan and its democratic progression, it is high time that political parties sit together regardless of their prior affiliations and subjective bias, in a bid to reform the electoral process such that it is acceptable for all concerned stakeholders. Yet, the question arises. Is it a matter of constructive criticism for an enhanced polling structure or a mere tactic to subvert attention from the real issues plaguing Pakistan?

Unfortunately, historical analysis speaks poorly of past record and suggests evidence to prove the latter proposition – a feat that Pakistan may not be able to bear in the current circumstances.

Playing the game of thrones in Balochistan

Jam Kamal has managed to hold on to the CM post with shrewd political play –
and support from powerful circles

By Shahzada Zulfiqar

WITH THE FULL SUPPORT OF POWERFUL CIRCLES, Chief Minister Balochistan Jam Kamal Alyani has succeeded in clearing all hurdles his detractors within or outside his Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) created to dislodge him or squeeze favors out of him and even make the 23-member opposition in the house of 64 ineffective. Due to that solid support, his party parliamentarians and coalition partners failed to put him under pressure that rendered a strong opposition unable to create cracks in the ruling coalition for forming another government.

The ruling coalition comprises newly created party BAP (24), PTI (7), ANP (4), Balochistan National Party-Awami (2), Hazara Democratic Party (2), BNP-Ehsan (1), Jamhoori Watan Party (1) while the opposition parties include JUI-F (10), BNP-Mengal (10), PMAP (1), PML-N (1) and individual (1) while one seat fell vacant due to death of JUI-F member Syed Fazal Agha.

Speaker Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo remained the chief minister for a few months after dislodging the PML-N led coalition in December 2017. Sardar Sanaulah Zehri had to step down in order to avoid a no-confidence motion moved by almost all of his party members led by Bizenjo. Bizenjo, who expected to be installed as chief minister in wake of the 2018 general elections, started running from pillar to post seeking the support of “Islamabad circles” for the top slot of the province, but in vain. Instead these circles threw their weight behind Jam Kamal who remained state minister for petroleum in Nawaz Sharif cabinet. Bizenjo, seeing the mood of the powerful circles, had to agree on accepting speakership. In this

entire political game, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, who is a new entrant in the political arena, also used his influence for Bizenjo, but soon realized that his fruitless efforts may offend his mentors instead of securing anything good for him.

Bizenjo, keeping in view his previous experience of dislodging the most powerful Zehri, thought he had done the best service for powerful circles by reducing PML-N from sole majority parliamentary group to a single man i.e. Zehri. Although Zehri was also most loyal to powerful circles, he committed the mistake of co-hosting a public meeting for Maryam Nawaz in Quetta during the peak days of confrontation between Nawaz Sharif and military establishment. Bizenjo doesn't realize that he was used as a tool in the whole game, but thinks that he brought the PML-N led government down through his maneuvering instead of the role of powerful circles in ousting Zehri. He expected chief ministership for five years following the 2018 elections instead of the reward of a few months in top office against his service. He had to remain silent after becoming speaker and waited for an appropriate time to make another attempt to clinch chief ministership.

After 18 months, in January 2020, Speaker Bizenjo announced that Chief Minister Jam Kamal failed to deliver the goods so an in-house change is inevitable, claiming that he enjoys the confidence of not only a majority of his party but also of the opposition. Both the BNP and JUI-F members offered their support if he could prove to have the backing of 10 members of his party or coalition partners. After this open challenge against



Jam Kamal, the members of BAP as well as of the ruling coalition started gauging the situation to see whether the powers that be are behind Bizenjo's move or the purpose is to get an inquiry against him dropped. Only a single member of the party, Sardar Sarfaraz Domki, advisor to the CM on Labor and Manpower, came to the support of Bizenjo. Domki had already tendered his resignation over refusal by the chief minister to assign him the portfolio of fisheries and coastal development. However, Sanjrani extended his support for the move. In the wake of pressure from the powers that be, in a smart move Sanjrani suddenly announced in a late night press conference in Islamabad to bring reconciliation between CM Jam Kamal and Speaker Bizenjo without informing the former. Sanjrani also started lobbying the powerful circles for the top post of the province after the general elections in 2023.

In fact Bizenjo thought Jam Kamal is behind the move of an inquiry ordered into the allegation of substandard work in a public scheme with an estimated cost of over Rs8 billion in his restive constituency Awaran. The military authorities had already conducted an inquiry and found leakage of money from this development project. They view that in their presence the public fund must be spent judiciously on the ground in Awaran otherwise it would bring a bad name to them instead of Bizenjo. On their direction, the provincial government, through Chief Minister Inspection Team (CMIT), initiated an inquiry into the development project which perturbed the Speaker. Foreseeing the findings of the inquiry against him as had happened in an earlier probe by the military authorities, Bizenjo started making a hue and cry claiming that injustice is being done with him as he has been facing terrorists of Balochistan Liberation Front in Awaran but didn't change his loyalties. His silence now indicates that the inquiry may have been dropped probably on his plea that might have convinced the powerful circles.

After tackling Bizenjo, Jam Kamal started facing pressure from other party members over development funds and postings and transfers of police and administrative officials. A group of four Pushtoon MPAs led by provincial minister Noor Mohammad Dummar claimed that Jam Kamal had done injustices with Pushtoon areas of Balochistan regarding development funds in the current fiscal year. However, later in the presence of representatives of powerful authorities, their grievances related to petty issues of day to day affairs.

While seeing other members complaining, three members of Naseerabad Division led by Irrigation Minister Nawabzada Tariq

Magsi, in a meeting with the chief minister, also got their demands of postings and transfers of officials in their districts accepted.

Sardar Saleh Bhotani, who considers himself as an alternate candidate for the chief minister slot, is known for his close relations with the powerful circles. He also tried to muster the support of his party MPAs and coalition partners by holding meetings even with opposition parties and hosting a banquet. However, he gave up his efforts when he found no support from the powerful circles. Being neighbours in Lasbela district, Jam and Bhotani had very cordial relations for decades as political allies. However, since the past few years they have developed differences over interference in each other's constituencies. Jam Kamal, after forming the government, didn't want to include Bhotani in his cabinet, but the powerful circles asked him not only to include him in the list of



ministers but also allot him the lucrative portfolio of local bodies.

Another political rival Sardar Yar Mohammad Rind, the PTT's parliamentary leader, also tried his luck seeking the support of the powerful circles as well as of his party head Prime Minister Imran Khan for chief ministership, but in vain. He was called to Islamabad by the party leadership and appointed advisor to the PM to engage him there. However, after a few months Rind returned to Quetta and the prime minister asked Jam Kamal to accommodate him in the cabinet with a good portfolio. Rind demanded planning and development, but the chief minister offered him the education portfolio, which he had to accept.

Jam Kamal has so far proved himself comparatively a good administrator within the field that the powerful circles allowed him to play on, making education, health, sports and mineral resources his priorities. He faces no imminent danger and is expected to complete his five-year term smoothly.

Political meddling: Punjab reeling from governance crises

Trust deficit, mismatch of expectations of bureaucracy and PTI government, and victimization are resulting in slow working, cautious decision-making and utter chaos



By Qasim Malik

MISMATCH OF EXPECTATIONS of civil bureaucracy and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's government in Punjab has grown with every passing day since the latter assumed power over two years ago, for the sole reason that it could not honor its own narrative built during its opposition days. The result is governance crises emanating from slow working and cautious decision-making, that too with certain safeguards.

The PTI had taken a lofty stance with the slogan “no to corruption and undue political interference in government affairs” with Prime Minister Imran Khan himself stating that no one (including bureaucrats) would be spared if found involved in corruption.

However, consequent arrests of some bureaucrats including those who had retired besides victimization of those complaining about political interference created more fear than confidence in the bureaucracy leading to impasse in decision-making and creating chaos.

Pampered with a feeling of government support to eradicate corruption and undue political pressure of ruling party parliamentarians, two deputy commissioners had mustered up courage to complain against such politicians in writing to the chief secretary but their actions turned into “dreadful dreams”.

Less than a month after the PTI had formed its government in

Punjab, Chakwal Deputy Commissioner Ghulam Saghir Shahid and Rajanpur Deputy Commissioner Allah Ditta Warraich complained against ruling party MNAs for political interference in administrative matters and sought action against them.

Mr Shahid had alleged in his complaint that MNA (NA-64) Sardar Zulfiqar Ali Khan had sent him a list of 17 patwaris and girdawars, seeking their transfer and posting according to his will. The MNA later visited the DC and hurled threats of dire consequences.

Similarly, in the early days of September 2018, Mr Warraich reported political meddling by MNA Sardar Nasrullah Khan Dareshak and his sons MPA Sardar Hasnain Bahadar Dareshak (now minister for livestock and dairy development), Sardar Ali Raza Dareshak (former MPA) and MPA Awais Dareshak. The demand was yet again transfer and postings of various revenue and Border Military Police officials.

The government, however, completely ignored the contents of the complaint and immediately served show-cause notices upon the two deputy commissioners for “violating the chain of command” and tried them under the Punjab Employees Efficiency, Discipline and Accountability (PEEDA) Act 2006.

Mr Shahid says he is still being victimized and has suffered nine punishments so far. Beginning with transfer from deputy commis-

sionership, he says his two years' increments were stopped for two years under the PEEDA Act and his promotion case deferred five times by the Provincial Selection Board during the last two years.

Stating that withholding of promotion is a major punishment as per Supreme Court's ruling, he added that now he has been transferred and posted against an ex-cadre post of secretary Agriculture Commission, which is lying redundant since 2016. "There is no office, no vehicle, no staff, no executive allowance and above all no work," he regretted.

Similarly, former Punjab food secretary Naseem Sadiq had in April this year called the federal government inquiry committee's 'Wheat flour crisis inquiry report' an abortive attempt to save the nexus of the flour mafia and their benefactors by deflecting flour crisis to wheat procurement. He, in his written reply, had sought a judicial inquiry into the matter to reveal the truth.

Mr Sadiq, who was serving as commissioner DG Khan, was made OSD on his own request to defend his position with the optimism that collective conscience of the system and the authorities may prevail.

However, the then chief secretary retired Major Azam Suleman Khan did not forward Mr Sadiq's reply to the federal government and it was later forwarded by incumbent chief secretary Jawwad Rafique Malik. Over four months later, the response to the reply is still awaited.

Most officials say the bureaucracy's confidence was shattered when they saw the PTI government was not putting its weight behind those complaining about political meddling. They also term sidelining of complainant officers as a "tribal mindset" under Chief Minister Usman Buzdar.

"Many are no more complaining in writing and those making verbal complaints to the chief minister's office and yet not getting proper response but transfer letters are taking flight to greener pastures in public sector companies, foreign-funded projects and international organizations," a senior officer regretted.

In order to avoid major financial and risky decision-making in public sector departments, most senior bureaucrats had opted not to be posted in high-budget departments required for doing procurements running in millions and billions of rupees. A former secretary services used to say, "these days small-budget departments are hot cakes for those seeking postings in Punjab".

In November last year, when the bureaucracy was reshuffled on the instructions of Prime Minister Imran Khan, a senior officer commented, "Baray baray bureaucrats ko chhotte chhotte departments sey nikal ker baray departments mein lagaya hai." (senior bureaucrats have been transferred from small-budget departments and posted in big public sector departments requiring serious administrative and financial decision-making).

Prior to this reshuffle, the prime minister had held a meeting with the bureaucracy in Punjab wherein former chief secretary Azam Suleman had told the premier that there was complete trust deficit in bureaucracy and major financial decisions were not being taken. "The country's economy cannot be put on the path of progress without ensuring robust public spending," he had said and added that private sector investments alone could not run the country's economy.

Explaining the bureaucracy's trust deficit, an officer opined that the incumbent government is not even able to distinguish between mistakes or forced mistakes and corruption.

"The governance crises in Punjab is deepening just because the PTI government is yet not understanding that what is trust deficit, mismatch of expectations and why even those officers who were earlier performing well are no more delivering," a senior bureaucrat offered food for thought to those at the helm of affairs.

The officer also explained that the PTI government did not stick to its narrative that the civil bureaucracy was not subservient to the politicians and they should refuse unlawful orders. The PTI should not have taken superior stance and instead created realistic expectations, the officer added.

"The bureaucrats are now vigilantly conscious about 'financial risk' and 'political risk' as no clean bureaucrat wants to be tagged as a supporter of a political party. Officers are now looking for posts, where both these risks are at minimal level," an officer in the chief minister's office told this reporter.

"Either those officers are getting 'prized postings', are aligned with both the PTI and PML-N or have bowed and committed to serve the party's cause with the 'highest bid'," a senior officer lamented and added, "Those getting prized postings are also being exposed within the bureaucrats' community for being corrupt or politically aligned."

Asserting that hard work, robust decision-making and even integrity is not able to save bureaucrats at their positions, an officer commented while referring to the transfer of Punjab local government and community development department secretary Ahmad Javed Qazi to a low-profile Labour Department. Mr Qazi was instrumental in finalizing the Punjab Local Government Act and completing spadework including delimitation of constituencies to hold the all-important upcoming local government elections in Punjab.

Citing an episode of political interference in bureaucrats' postings, an officer in the chief secretary's office stated that a vague report on a news channel that certain commissioners and deputy commissioners were being shuffled had attracted a barrage of phone calls from ruling party parliamentarians urging the chief secretary that the officers posted in their respective constituencies should not be transferred. "This speaks volumes about political interference and incumbent officers' subservience to their political masters," the officer regretted.

Former chief minister Shahbaz Sharif also used to pick-and-choose officers for posts of deputy commissioners in important districts but other non-aligned officers also used to get deputy commissioner postings in a natural turn. "This case is no more. No DC is being posted in a natural turn but on the recommendations from respective districts' PTI parliamentarians," the officer bemoaned.

The prime minister's recent direction that the newly posted DCs and other senior officers would make courtesy calls on the party parliamentarians and leaders has added fuel to the fire and the first casualty is "quality of decision-making" leading to complete governance crises in Punjab, the officer added.

In Memory of a National Tragedy

8th October 2005

“We saw only death and destruction everywhere.”

“I felt like doomsday was being repeated.”

“I still remember the children and their teacher screaming for help but we could not remove those concrete slabs. They died as we watched.”

“We ran out of shrouds and burial space – we used the planks of school desks to cover the bodies.”

“I shouted the names of my children, but there was no reply. I heard other children whimper; mine must have also moaned like that.”

“I try not to think about what happened and how I survived, because when I do, I feel like an immense sadness takes over me and sometimes I break down.”

“I was afraid of going inside the house and sat out in the open until late in the night despite the cold weather.”

“Let this episode jolt us into awareness that it is high time we wake up and take disaster preparedness and response more seriously.”

Survivor recalls the nightmare

Whenever I pass by those buildings, all my friends' faces come to mind with the memories I was able to make with them. It was a strong reminder that life can end in a split second. The people I met at the mosque in the morning for Fajar prayer were all gone. Sometimes, I do ask myself, why did I deserve to live? I had the same lifestyle but I guess God has his own wisdom that he chose me. I guess he gave me the chance to actually make a difference and lead a meaningful life.



Afghan peace sputters amid hope and despair

Taliban welcome Trump’s announcement to withdraw all troops by Christmas, Afghans worry about another civil war as intra-Afghan talks drag on; Pakistan’s role remains key in reconciliation process



By Tahir Khan

THE TALIBAN HAVE QUICKLY welcomed US President Donald Trump’s October 8 announcement to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by Christmas and said they consider it a “positive step” for the implementation of the agreement signed between them and the US.

The Taliban are hopeful Afghanistan could now emerge from four decades of conflict. But the announcement has raised concerns among the war-weary Afghans as they are worried that the country could slip into another civil war if the Taliban and the Afghan government failed to reach an agreement on a future political roadmap before the withdrawal of foreign forces.

The US had agreed in the Doha agreement to quit Afghanistan in 14 months but Trump’s unexpected announcement could be seen as an attempt to get political advantage in the November 3 presidential elections in the United States.

The Afghan war had lost support in America and it was the right time for Trump to make such an announcement despite some opposition to the decision in the US.

A US public survey in September had suggested that two-thirds of Trump’s supporters “strongly” or “some-

what” supported his deal with the Taliban to extricate America from the war, which has entered its 20th year.

Around 60 percent of supporters of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden also backed the historic US-Taliban agreement, according to a poll conducted by New York-based Eurasia Group Foundation.

Hours after Trump’s announcement, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that allies will leave Afghanistan together.

“We decided to go into Afghanistan together, we will make decisions on future adjustments together, and when the time is right, we will leave together,” Stoltenberg said at a news conference after talks with North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev in Brussels, according to reports.

Afghanistan’s top negotiator Dr Abdullah Abdullah, speaking in New Delhi on October 8, said the US withdrawal will have negative consequences for Afghanistan as Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups are active in the region and could pose a threat to Afghanistan and its neighbors. But statements by Abdullah and other Afghans may not convince the Trump administration to change its mind.

Experts on Afghanistan believe the US and its NATO allies could not win the war because of Afghanistan's geographical location and strategic position which is suitable for guerilla warfare and hit-and-run techniques.

Former Afghan defense minister Shahnawaz Tanai argues that the US and NATO partners had committed mistakes like the erstwhile Soviet Union.

“There is no doubt that the US-led coalition of NATO has faced military defeat in Afghanistan. Their invasion was wrong like the former Soviet Union as they had invaded Afghanistan for their own interests,” Tanai told The Truth International this week.

Tanai, who had staged a failed coup against the Communist leader Dr Najeebullah, now leads a political party Da Suleh Ghorzang (The Peace Movement).

Trump's surprise announcement on Twitter is also seen as a clear message to the Afghan warring sides to end the conflict and reach an agreement for the future set-up.

Political envoys of the Taliban and the Afghan government have been involved in intra-Afghan negotiations in Qatar since September 12 to end the war and agree on a new set-up but very slow pace of the process is a source of disappointment for the war-weary Afghans as fighting claims lives of Afghans daily despite the US-Taliban agreement signed in late February.

The Taliban have rejected calls for a ceasefire by Afghans and the international community as they want to keep on exerting pressure on the Afghan government and forces to further strengthen their position on the table.

The senseless war now only kills Afghans as the Taliban and the US-led NATO do not target each other and the US officials insist no foreign soldier has been killed in a Taliban attack since signing of the agreement on February 29.

Trump's announcement, which coincided with the 19th anniversary of US-NATO military invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, was not expected by many in the war-ravaged country and many even argued the US and its allies will not leave in the present chaotic situation.

Afghans have genuine concerns about Trump's declaration as the Taliban and the Afghan government's negotiators failed to agree on principles and procedures for the parleys until October 9. The Taliban want the talks to be based on their agreement with the US but President Ashraf Ghani's team insists Afghan government was not part of the US-Taliban deal and both should hold talks on their own terms.



As the intra-Afghan dialogue faces a stalemate, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad landed in Qatar in the first week of October to try to convince the Taliban and the government team to show flexibility to advance the peace process but could not succeed. He dashed to Pakistan the same day when Trump announced withdrawal of remaining troops and met Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa at the military's headquarters in Rawalpindi. This was Khalilzad's seventh visit to Pakistan this year. That is a strong indication that the US understands Pakistan can use its influence on the Taliban to show flexibility and reduce violence that could lead to a ceasefire. The US envoy was accompanied by Commander NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan General Austin Scott Miller.

A US embassy statement said Ambassador Khalilzad, General Miller and General Bajwa “affirmed the need for a significant reduction in violence in Afghanistan as peace negotiations between the two sides move forward”. The statement had an important point that both sides also discussed a “roadmap that would guide Pakistan-Afghanistan relations after there is a peace agreement”.

Americans believe that tension-free relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are a must for the post-withdrawal situation and that is why the US is working on an agreement between the two uneasy neighbors.

The three-day visit of Dr Abdullah to Pakistan in the last week of September is seen as a major step towards trust building between the two countries. The visit will be followed by Prime Minister Imran Khan's upcoming trip to Kabul.

Abdullah had previously refused to visit Pakistan despite repeated invitations extended to him when he was the chief executive in the former Ghani-led National Unity Government. But now the Afghan leadership has realized that the role of Pakistan is key to the peace process in Afghanistan.

Longest War in US history coming to end

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

AFTER EIGHTEEN YEARS of bloodletting, \$2 trillion defense spending, 3500 troops casualties, 25 percent of troops returning home suffering from mental illnesses of US and coalition forces versus more than 150,000 Afghans killed, several times more injured and maimed, more than 2.5 million displaced persons and Afghanistan in shambles, finally, the morning sun of February 2020 gleamed on the Peace Agreement document between USA and Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan recognized by USA as Taliban. On the same day, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg signed a joint declaration with the Afghan government, represented by President Ashraf Ghani – that commits the Afghans to the upcoming negotiations with the Taliban and to provide Afghanistan with security guarantees as this process unfolds.

My memory drifts back to January 27, 1973, at the Hotel Majestic in Paris, France. Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese Polit bureau member Le Du Thu signed Vietnam Peace accord ending 8 years of longest US war with the communist Vietnam. Alas, it took the US two years to finally give up on South Vietnam on April 30, 1975. After the peace accord in 1973, US backed South Vietnam supported by US bombers entered a bloody civil war with North Vietnam. In those 27 months, 80,000 Vietnamese were sacrificed at the altar of Cold War. Let's pray this time intra-Afghan peace talks demolish the bloody altar of Great Game 2020. On September 12, Intra-Afghan meeting signaled the successful completion of Phase I, i.e., prisoners exchange against Reduction in Violence (RIV) demonstrated by Taliban against Coalition Forces.

This is high time to review the declared and indicated positions of the stakeholders towards the peace agreement and intra-Afghan talks amongst which USA, Taliban, Afghan government, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, Central Asian States, India and Gulf States are of utmost significance. In this particular article, I will discuss some of the actors leaving the rest for subsequent pieces.

USA's vital interest in Afghanistan is to ensure that Afghan territory is never again used as a safe haven from which terrorists can attack USA, its allies as well as USA's vital interests abroad. United States' primary objective is to support a durable political settlement that ends the war and mitigate terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan, especially from Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Lashkar Tayyaba (LeT), Islamic State – Khorasan (Daesh), whom USA perceives as having training bases in Afghanistan. USA's agreement with Taliban is a condition-based, phased withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan in 14 months IF:

- I. Taliban abides by its commitment to prevent the use of Afghan territory by terrorists,
- II. Works to reduce violence, and
- III. Enter into Intra-Afghan negotiations.

Thus, to determine the date and modalities of a comprehensive cease-fire and reach an agreement over the future political road map of Afghanistan.

Taliban got everything that they wanted, securing in its eyes – a US surrender for an absolute minimum in promises. To kick start



Intra-Afghan Peace Talks, USA had to force the Afghan government for the release of the last six Taliban prisoners ignoring the reservations of France and Australia. With the victor mindset, Taliban feel that they are the ones who have to re-establish the Islamic Emirate System which was dismantled eighteen years ago by USA.

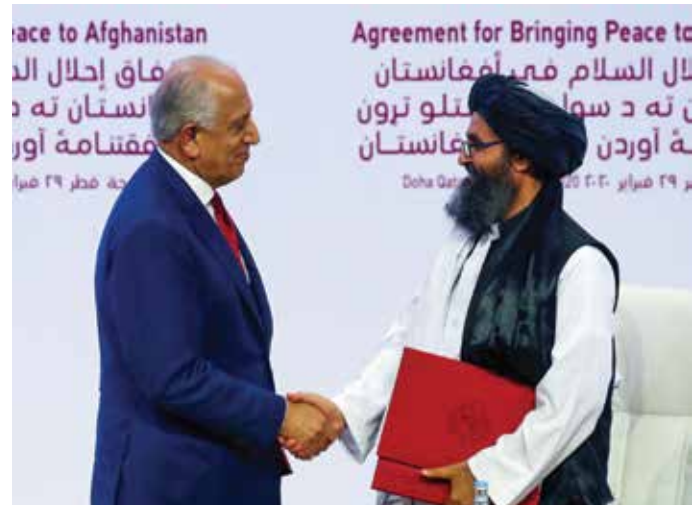
Instead of mentioning Islamic Emirate, they have publically replaced the term Emirate with an Islamic System. This is the main thrust of their demand. They say democracy is not inherently contrary to Islam, but for them, 2004 constitution was dictated by Western powers under the shadow of B-S2 bombers. That constitution caters mainly to western norms and gives insufficient role to religious authorities. According to Taliban, Islamic system has its own definitions and structures. They have indicated that they will be more open than before towards women's rights. They profess that all laws will be derived from Sharia as per which all individuals including women will be granted the rights prescribed.

They see the present Kabul ruling elite as secular, promoting western culture through media resulting in moral corruption in society. They object to the interest-based banking system and hope to implement Hanafi Fiqh (jurisprudence) at state level. Regarding demand for ceasefire, they will not agree to it until significant progress is made in the intra-Afghan peace talks or a formal deal is signed. Before signing the Peace Agreement, Taliban considered Afghan government as a US puppet and an illegitimate administrative power.

Afghan government's primary goal is to achieve peace and security in the war-torn Afghanistan. Hence, ceasefire by Taliban is the most important thing. According to Ashraf Ghani, there is consensus on two fundamental notions. One is the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a sovereign, democratic and united republic, and the other is its citizens. The rights and obligations that bind them together are those of citizenship. The existing constitution encompasses these including Islamic provisions for citizens. The Afghan government peace team holds vastly different views about the role of Islam in state affairs.

- ◆ They want to protect the gains of last two decades regarding individual & women's rights, freedom of expression and electoral democracy.
- ◆ They would be willing to amend the constitution but not abrogate it to be replaced by Sharia based (revised) constitution.
- ◆ Regarding formation of interim government, Ashraf Ghani is unwilling to step down since he considers himself as the elected representative of the people through legitimate electoral process. The Afghan government considered Taliban as terrorists launched by Pakistan, hence to be destroyed to achieve peace.
- ◆ Afghan women do not want to compromise on their right to education, work and political participation.

Pakistan's peace is linked with Afghanistan's peace and stability, hence, the entire region, as stated by the Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi during Abdullah Abdullah's recent visit. Pakistan is facilitating the peace process so that it remains at the



center stage of conflict resolution for regional peace. Pakistan does not want a hasty US withdrawal, resulting in a repeat of 1990s which resulted in power vacuum. Pakistan does not want an unfriendly government in Afghanistan i.e. stakes of India must be neutralized. Pakistan also believes that lasting peace cannot prevail unless major segments of Afghan society are not consulted.

Pakistan is a major beneficiary of successful Afghan peace process. Secure western borders, return of Afghan refugees, financial and commercial connectivity with Central Asia and Russia, CPEC expansion into Afghanistan and Durand line dispute resolution are massive financial and strategic benefits to Pakistan. Taliban dominated future Afghan government will further boost Pakistan's geopolitical importance and strategic strength in the region. If the peace process collapses and Afghanistan slides back into internal strife, Taliban being a dominant military power after America's exit will further give them strength, hence, their dependence on Pakistan will continue. To sum up, war or peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan remains a major beneficiary.



Peace is within reach in Afghanistan. A hasty international withdrawal would be unwise

By Prime Minister Imran Khan



WE HAVE ARRIVED at a rare moment of hope for Afghanistan and for our region. On Sept. 12, delegations from the Afghan government and the Taliban finally sat down in Doha, Qatar, to begin negotiations toward a political settlement that would bring the war in Afghanistan to an end.

With the exception of the resilient Afghans themselves, no people have paid a higher price for the conflict in Afghanistan than the people of Pakistan. Through decades of conflict, Pakistan has dealt with the responsibility of taking care of more than 4 million Afghan refugees. Guns and drugs have also flowed into our country. The wars have disrupted our economic trajectory and radicalized fringes of our own society. The Pakistan I had known growing up in the 1960s and 1970s changed in some deeply unsettling ways.

This experience taught us two important lessons. First, that we were too closely intertwined with Afghanistan by geography, culture and kinship for events in that country not to cast a shadow on Pakistan. We realized Pakistan will not know real peace until our Afghan brothers and sisters are at peace.

We also learned that peace and political stability in Afghanistan could not be imposed from the outside through the use of force. Only an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process,

which recognizes Afghanistan's political realities and diversity, could produce a lasting peace.

So, when President Trump wrote to me in late 2018 to ask for Pakistan's assistance in helping the United States achieve a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan, we had no hesitation in assuring the president that Pakistan would make every effort to facilitate such an outcome — and we did. Thus began arduous rounds of talks between the United States and the Taliban, which culminated in the February U.S.-Taliban peace agreement. This agreement, in turn, has laid the groundwork for talks between the Afghan leadership and the Taliban.

The path we have traveled to get here wasn't easy, but we were able to press on thanks to the courage and flexibility that were on display from all sides. The United States and its allies facilitated the prisoner exchange between Kabul and the Taliban. The government of Afghanistan and the Taliban responded to the Afghan people's yearning for peace.

The intra-Afghan negotiations are likely to be even more difficult, requiring patience and compromise from all sides. Progress could be slow and painstaking; there may even be the occasional deadlock, as Afghans work together for their future. At such times, we would do well to remember that a bloodless deadlock on the

negotiating table is infinitely better than a bloody stalemate on the battlefield.

All those who have invested in the Afghan peace process should resist the temptation for setting unrealistic timelines. A hasty international withdrawal from Afghanistan would be unwise. We should also guard against regional spoilers who are not invested in peace and see instability in Afghanistan as advantageous for their own geopolitical ends.

Pakistan will continue to support the Afghan people in their quest for a unified, independent and sovereign Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbors. Pakistan believes that peace negotiations should not be conducted under coercion and urges all parties to reduce violence. Just as the Afghan government has recognized the Taliban as a political reality, it is hoped that the Taliban would recognize the progress Afghanistan has made.

Like the United States, Pakistan does not want to see Afghanistan become a sanctuary for international terrorism ever again. Since 9/11, more than 80,000 Pakistani security personnel and civilians have laid down their lives in perhaps the largest and most successful fight against terrorism. But Pakistan continues to be the target of attacks launched by externally enabled terrorist groups based in Afghanistan.

These terrorist groups pose a clear and present danger to global peace. We hope the Afghan government will take measures to control ungoverned spaces inside its territory from where terrorist groups are able to plan and carry out attacks against the Afghan people, the international coalition forces stationed in Afghanistan,

and other countries in the region, including Pakistan. Like the United States, we do not want the blood and treasure we have shed in the war against terrorism to be in vain.

It is also time to start planning for the “day after” — how can the world help a postwar Afghanistan transition to sustainable peace? How do we create conditions that will enable the millions of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, and other countries, to return to their homeland with dignity and honor?

My vision for Pakistan prioritizes development and prosperity for my country and our region through connectivity and economic diplomacy. Our recent investments in key economic connectivity projects can be harnessed to complement efforts for regional integration between South and Central Asia. Our initial discussions with the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation on these issues have been encouraging. It is heartening that the United States and Pakistan are of one mind on the importance of a “peace dividend” for ensuring a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

For Pakistan, regional peace and stability remain key to realizing the collective aspirations of our people for a better future. We are committed to multilateral collaboration to achieve this.

The first step toward that peace has been taken in Doha. Not seeing through the Afghanistan peace process or abandoning it for any reason would be a great travesty.

Courtesy *The Washington Post*



Hum Social Media Awards Powered By Facebook

First HUM Social Media Awards Powered by Facebook had captured everyone's interest since the initial announcement by HUM Network.

The winners were gauged by the hundreds of thousands of votes that viewers from across the globe cast for their favourite social media stars.

There were 16 awards were given in six categories naming Entertainment, Music, Fashion, Sports, Television and Digital.





Pak-India relations: Why it's risky to cross the 'red line'

Normalization talks as a policy to avoid military conflict with India is based on consensus reached in late 1990s but over-enthusiasm can have grave consequences for governments



By Umer Farooq

THE ATMOSPHERICS BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN AND INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI were never good. They have never met as prime ministers – the only time they met in 2015 was when Imran Khan was leading a movement against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's government, the central plank of which was to show Modi in a negative light as an enemy of Pakistan. Countless times during his stint as opposition leader, Imran Khan targeted Nawaz Sharif and Modi in the same vein, i.e. conspiring against the interests of Pakistan.

Since coming to power, Imran Khan has accused Modi of being a fascist who has made life difficult for Muslims in India. Modi is no less aggressive in describing Pakistan as the epicenter of terrorism. The outcome is a relationship based on acrimony and antagonism. Since the political leadership of the two countries is engaged in a blame game of allegations and counter-allegations, the chances of improvement in bilateral relations are becoming grim with each passing day.

Contrast to this situation, with the improving atmospherics between Nawaz Sharif and Modi after the former took over power for the third time in 2013. At that time Indian diplomats in Islamabad could be heard whispering at diplomatic functions that

the Pakistani and Indian prime ministers enjoyed a special relationship which would soon result in dramatic improvement in ties between the two countries. Later Modi came unannounced on a visit to the private residence of Nawaz Sharif in Lahore while the latter could be heard saying good things about India.

The basic plank of these improved atmospherics was the understanding that the two governments would go the extra mile to build the trust needed on both sides to tackle the problem of cross-border terrorism. This was interpreted in Pakistan as a betrayal of national interests.

Imran Khan, who at that time was opposition leader, was at the forefront of a campaign to malign Nawaz Sharif as someone who was damaging national interests by entering into dubious friendship with Modi. The slogan "Modi ka jo yar hai, ghadar hai ghadar hai" (whoever is a friend of Modi is a traitor) served as a main plank of Imran Khan's election campaign in the 2018 parliamentary polls, which brought him to power.

Although during the initial months he showed exceptional interest in resuming structured bilateral talks with India, this remained a pipedream in the face of acrimony that existed between the officialdom of the two countries. The hybrid government that came to power made some initial attempts to normalize relations

with India, but this didn't change anything.

Many among Islamabad's insiders and security experts are of the firm opinion that normalizing relations with India in order to avoid a conflict was not a personal policy of Nawaz Sharif. Rather this is based on a consensus reached in late 1990s that the government would always try to use normalization talks as a policy to avoid a major military conflict with India. Successive governments have employed different diplomatic tools to pursue this policy.

Not surprisingly, the political and military leaders tried to pursue the same policy. In an uncharacteristic overture on April 14 this year, Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa laid out an offer of peace talks to India.

"It is our sincere belief that the route to peaceful resolution of Pak-India disputes – including the core issue of Kashmir – runs through comprehensive and meaningful dialogue," he said while addressing the passing-out parade ceremony of Pakistan Military Academy cadets in Kakul.

The general's speech came as a bit of a surprise for political observers in Islamabad. Given the fact that it was a full-fledged policy statement meant to offer peace talks to archrival India, it should have come from a civil government. But very few people were aware that General Bajwa was to embark on a visit to Moscow within two weeks. Even fewer knew that Pakistan was in talks with the Russian Federation for the purchase of state-of-the-art battle tanks, T-90, along with other modern weapons.

Pakistan was facing problems in convincing the Russian military-industrial complex for the sale of military hardware, especially in the face of intense Indian lobbying in the power corridors of Moscow against Pakistan. General Bajwa's speech was meant to convey to his Russian interlocutors that Pakistan was ready to reduce political and military tensions with India but would still be needing military hardware to deal with the difficult task of stabilizing its western border in the face of religious extremism and militancy.

The chief's statement was preceded by a flurry of activity by senior army officials aimed at publicly projecting that the army was not opposed to the idea of peace with India. Regular ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) followed a proposal from the military's General Headquarters that Pakistani and Indian director generals of military operations should meet face to face in an effort to reduce tensions. Similarly, a senior army official posted in Balochistan offered India to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor along with other regional countries.

When the tussle between the military and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif started gathering heat after the Supreme Court's verdict against the latter in July 2017, one of the perceived reasons for the army's top brass chasing the prime minister out of power was his excessive inclination to normalize ties with India. In the words of a senior security analyst, General Bajwa's statement on India was primarily aimed at clearing this perception. "This is a policy statement meant to clarify the army's position that we have nothing against this policy option," says Brigadier (ret'd) Shaukat Qadir.

However, the perception that the army was opposed to talks with India was not without basis. During his last two years in power,



Sharif's relations with the army were in a continuous downward spiral. This was mainly because of two developments. First was the publication of a story in Dawn reporting on the Sharif brothers' reprimand of military men. Nawaz Sharif was seen as trying to please his foreign friends in New Delhi and Washington, and this was a constant source of friction between him and the military. Second was the visit of Indian steel magnate Sajjan Jindal to Pakistan. The army's annoyance at the Jindal and Sharif families' meeting was made known within the power corridors and in the media.

Nawaz Sharif has been advocating better relations between the two countries since 1993. The impression of the army scuttling peace efforts with India was reinforced during the political agitation against his government led by Imran Khan in August 2014. The agitation coincided with heightened tensions along the LoC, forcing Nawaz Sharif to assume an aggressive posture against India.

In the past 10 years, some fluctuations in the army's attitude towards India seem to be personality driven. But military analysts say the variation is because of the changing situation on the western border. During the time of General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the army told the government led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) that talks with India were a necessity in order to avoid a major conflict. "General Kayani was telling the PPP leadership that keep talking with India as the army does not want a major conflict ... but don't get too close to India," a senior official of the Foreign Office once told this scribe.

This was in complete contrast to the army's policy during the tenure of General Raheel Sharif. The situation at the LoC remained tense and political analysts say the army employed its manipulative tools to keep Nawaz Sharif away from the idea of normalizing ties with India. The two Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-led agitations were also seen in that light.

Even if one takes a charitable view, Pakistan's India policy is in a state of utter confusion for the past five years. There is credible evidence to suggest that Nawaz Sharif was chased out of power just because he took the 1990s consensus in officialdom to normalize relations with India too seriously. The officialdom just wants to pursue peace talks for conflict avoidance and doesn't want to go beyond this line. Maybe Nawaz Sharif wanted to cross the red line set by Pakistani officials. The 1990s official consensus seems to have lost its utility in the face of Indian response that it is not ready to resume talks unless the critical problem of cross-border terrorism is tackled seriously.

US Election 2020: Trump's Covid diagnosis latest twist in chaotic campaign

By Syed Humza Imam

IT IS THE LATEST TURN in a bitter election campaign dominated by the pandemic, race relations and the economy. During the first election debate earlier in the week, described as “the political equivalent of a food fight”, Trump had openly mocked Democratic candidate Joe Biden for wearing face masks and questioned his intelligence, saying “there is nothing smart about you, Joe”, though now Biden’s caution around coronavirus seems to have been the smarter approach.

It is too early to gauge the impact of Trump’s Covid-19 illness on his election chances, but speculation is rife on the possible effect on the mood of the American public. Critics argue that the public has consistently given the president low ratings for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, so anything that puts further focus on this issue is potentially damaging for his re-election prospects. Further complicating matters is that many Americans will recall the president’s somewhat cavalier and at times dismissive attitude toward Covid-19, as recently as at the first debate against Biden. While he has, occasionally, stressed the importance of social distancing and taking the virus with a degree of seriousness, he has also invoked questionable science in response to it, and often ushered in unreliable methods of protection, such as using bleach as a disinfectant. He also stated that the virus would disappear “like magic” and attacked state officials who have imposed more aggressive mitigation measures and been slower to reopen businesses and schools than he would have liked.

On the other hand, Trump’s Covid-19 diagnosis may bring about some benefits to his campaign. It is generally the case that the American public tends to rally in support of the president in times of national turmoil. While Trump’s administration will continue to face tough questions about the virus, he and his wife will also be recipients of national sympathy and prayers due to the health ordeal they find themselves in. Joe Biden and the Democrats may feel inclined to engage in a rhetoric of “I told you so” and even celebrate what they see as political karma, but doing so would come with the risk of seeming callous and indifferent to a crisis that has affected the entire nation, not just the Trump family. After Trump’s release from hospital, Biden immediately sent a message to his opponent, “I would ask him to do this: listen to the scientists, support masks”. Upon returning to the White



House, however, Trump immediately removed his mask as he posed for photographs on the Truman balcony, before walking inside, still mask-less, and tweeted “Will be back on the Campaign Trail soon!!! The Fake News only shows the Fake Polls.”

This, perhaps, is in reference to current national polling giving Biden an average lead of 51 per cent to Trump’s 42 per cent. FiveThirtyEight, a leading political analysis blog, says Biden is ‘favoured’ to win the election, while The Economist says he is ‘very likely’ to beat Trump. Despite having a population of 330 million, the US presidential election is likely to be decided by just 5.5 million undecided voters in the seven key battleground states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, North Carolina and Georgia. The US presidential election system is not decided by total votes, but rather by winner-takes-all contests in each of the 50 states and its associated delegates in the electoral college. Of these 50 states, 43 are considered ‘safe’ for either the Republicans or the Democrats, leaving behind the seven undecided ‘swing states’. The 2016 election proved how crucial every vote in these states can be. Against Hillary Clinton, Trump won Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin by a combined total of 107,000 votes, just 0.03 per cent of their population, yet claimed 100 per cent of the electoral delegates on offer by these states. This enabled him to win the presidency despite losing the overall national ballot by nearly 3 million votes. Indeed, as we enter the final month before election day, both the Biden and Trump campaigns are pouring their resources into these states, agreeing that this is “where the election will be won or lost”. Trump’s rigorous campaigning schedule included visiting

each of these states before it was put on indefinite hold upon his diagnosis with Covid-19.

The president does have one significant advantage when it comes to ‘swing states’ in particular his core support demographics are over-represented in these states. White, non-college educated voters, amongst whom Trump is hugely popular, constitute a larger than average proportion of the population in these states, while non-white populations are under-represented when compared to the US as a whole. Additionally, these states have larger elderly populations than in most US states, and in recent times, most older voters have reliably voted Republican.

Joe Biden faces a challenge in how to respond to the events currently unfolding around him. While Trump was hospitalized, he toned down his own political rhetoric and suspended adverts attacking the president. For months beforehand, Biden had kept a low profile to limit his exposure, having been known to be error-prone in the past, leaving the limelight focused on Trump’s perceived poor handling of national crises. A result of this strategy has been Republicans mocking him, including Trump himself, accusing him of “hiding in the basement”. Perhaps Joe Biden is aware that even in the case of him winning the presidency, a large portion of his term will be taken by undoing what Trump has done rather than implementing his own clear vision for the country, starting by ending Trump’s bans on travel from several majority-Muslim countries and easing border restrictions that currently separate children from their parents at the US-Mexican border. *The author is Research Graduate at King’s College London*

Shifting geo-strategic situation in South Asia and CPEC

By Dr Khalid Bajwa



THINGS ARE HEATING UP between China and the United States. With the present prevailing mindset, the relationships between the two countries are likely to worsen in the foreseeable future with intermittent hiatus. The US is leading the charge by pursuing anti-China policies. The US is not only intensifying trade war with China but is also following a policy of containment of China. To achieve this objective, it needs to work on at least two fronts.

To comprehend how China can be contained effectively, one needs to understand the channels that are available to China for reaching out to the world. There are two main routes available to China. One is through the South China sea on the east and the second is China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Unless these channels are plugged, China cannot be encircled.

The US considers that it is in a strong position in the south China sea with its military bases in South Korea, Japan, and Guam along with its allies in the pacific ring. To bolster its strategy to encircle China, the US is forging strategic partnership with India that could help block the Strait of Malacca in tandem with other US military assets in the area as well as disrupt CPEC.

In case of war or increased rivalry between the two, things can become very difficult for China to move around both its strategic

assets and trade goods. Presently, most of China's trade is carried through south China sea under the watchful eyes of the US and its allied forces. Any disruption of these trade routes can incur colossal loss to China's economy shattering its dream of becoming a future economic and military power. China knows its predicament. To avoid increased tensions, and the possibility of a new cold war, it is willing to work under the leadership of US as it has been doing so for the last many decades. This could ensure continuation of inflow of investment and technology to China. China knows that diverting its resources away from economic development could be crippling and will put a break on its journey to become a great economic power. War with US is not an option for China and vice versa. Promoting influence in the world through soft power is the cornerstone of China's policy.

So, if this is the case then what's the problem? The problem is that the US feels its position threatened as the sole super-power, both militarily as well as economically, and therefore naturally resistant to any change in the world order. The US cannot countenance a world lead by China. The US thinks that it is left with only a small window of opportunity to blunt China's influence and economic progress. If it is not stopped now, it would be ever more difficult in future to do so especially once China cross a certain threshold of economic and military power. To achieve this the US is waging trade war with China, limiting Chinese firms' access to American markets, and forging new strategic partnerships in the Middle East, south and South East Asia.

The new China policy of the US perceives Pakistan as a hindrance to its objectives and explains, partly, why US policy makers, in their wisdom, decided to forego Pakistan in favour of India to make its strategic partner. India is conceived as a central plank of the US's policy of encircling China and mitigating the effects of losing Chinese markets. The American policy makers are eying two advantages; access to both labour and commodity

markets of India and the possible use of Indian military assets to physically impede China. The US has found a willing partner in India. The US presented strategic partnership to India as if US is bestowing favour on India and India took it as such, though this is not the case and the sooner India realises this the better, as it will help India to shape its policies better, free of outside influence and save India from bringing these opposing superpowers' war on to its soil. However, instead of doing soul searching and serious analyses, two reasons propelled India to take this bait with erroneous mindset; firstly, its history with Pakistan and China and secondly, Pak-US relationship history. Pakistan has always been America's core ally in the region. The US has played a significant role in building up Pakistan army. Becoming US strategic partner, India thinks, it will be able to wean away US from Pakistan thus making Pakistan weak and vulnerable, therefore, more amenable to tow the policies dictated by the US and indirectly by India. This is an old and erroneous mindset because it does not reflect the changed realities of the region and the world.

India sees it as an opportunity to settle score with China which will also allow it to emerge as a great military, economic and technological power following in the footsteps of China and by replacing China as a manufacturing hub for the world. The recent talk of India to capture and annex Gilgit Baltistan and skirmishes on Chinese Indian Line of Actual Control (LAC) need to be seen not only in the context of Kashmir dispute but also in India's global ambitions and America's containment policy of China. To achieve these objectives India needs to have a powerful navy and capture Gilgit Baltistan to cut off the CPEC. Both these adventures are fraught with grave dangers not only to regional but international peace as well. The military and economic costs could be ruinous and might result in the dismemberment of India itself, thereby crushing the agenda of the RSS extremists. India has better options to both ward off war on its soil as well as reap the benefits without getting involved in the clash of titans.

On Seeking Debt Relief from G-20

By Dr. Ashfaq H. Khan



2020; freezing both principal and interest payment; private creditors were also asked to participate on voluntary basis in debt relief because they are not expected to be a “free rider”. Debt relief has covered around \$ 12 billion in bilateral debt service payments, owed by 76 IDA Countries plus Angola; these countries owed \$3 billion to private creditors (hedge funds, commodity traders, banks, bond holders) and that the recipient countries of the debt relief would not contract new non-concessional loans except those allowed by the IMF and the World Bank during the debt suspension period.

Debt relief is nothing but debt restructuring. It has provided temporary relief to recipient countries. The suspended amount of debt servicing will be repaid over four years, with first year of payment holiday. In other words, the deferred amount is converted into a new financing which will be repaid in four years, with first year as a grace period.

Benefits to Pakistan

Pakistan applied to G-20 for a debt relief; it owed \$ 20.7 billion to 11 members of the G-20, out of which \$1.8 billion (both principal \$1.409 billion and interest \$0.386 billion) would mature during the suspension period. Was this debt relief reasonable for Pakistan? Should Pakistan needed to apply for a debt relief? Did the Economic team of the Prime Minister brief him properly? The number suggest that out of \$1.8 billion payable to 11 members of the G-20, Pakistan was to repay \$613 million to Saudi Arabia and \$309 million to China. Saudi Arabia and China together accounted for \$922 million or more than 50 percent of debt payment during the suspension period. The readers would recall that Pakistan has given a written commitment to the IMF that debt maturing of China and Saudi Arabia would not be repaid during the IMF program period. Pakistan, therefore, was not required to repay \$922 million out of \$1.8 billion anyway. The real benefit of debt relief under the G-20 initiative reduces to \$878 million only.

Is this the amount for which the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister had to appeal to the international community? Was there any reputational loss to Pakistan? In my opinion the answer is yes. A country of 220 million, with nuclear and missile power, standing in league with Ethiopia, Chad and DR Congo, already classified as debt distressed countries even before the onslaught of Pandemic. Like Pakistan these three debt distressed countries of Africa also received debt relief. In my opinion, the Prime Minister and foreign minister were not properly briefed by their economic team. Pakistan did not do its homework properly and also did not play its card well. With top Pakistani leadership (PM & FM) at the forefront, Pakistan would have had done far better than \$900 million in debt relief. Let me explain this point with the help of a table which presents the structure of Pakistan’s external debt and liabilities.

WHILE THE WORLD ECONOMY was already experiencing a synchronized downturn to the weakest in a decade—owing to the US- China Trade War, Brexit uncertainty over Europe and beyond, Technology War (5G) and the rising geopolitical tension—the outbreak of the pandemic has added fuel to the fire and totally devastated major economies of the world. The poor countries had to face unprecedented loss to their economies. While economic devastation of the poor countries has caused major set-back to their tax revenues, their expenditures on health and social protection surged beyond imagination. Accordingly, these poor countries have faced serious constraints in honoring their debt service obligations.

Prime Minister Imran Khan was the first leader who appealed to the rich and the powerful countries to provide debt relief to the poor countries. He also invited the Secretary General UN to work with him in advancing the case of debt relief for the poor countries. At the same time, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi also talked to many of his counterparts of the rich and powerful countries for launching the debt relief initiative.

The voice of Pakistani leaderships was heard by the international community. The heads of the World Bank and the IMF requested the leadership of the G-20 countries in early April 2020 for Debt Standstill for the poorest countries. On April 15, 2020, the G-20 economies announced a debt repayment freeze for 77 IDA eligible countries, (mostly African) including Pakistan as well.

The salient features of the debt relief included a time-bound suspension of debt repayment to bilateral creditors starting from May 01 and ending in December

Structure of Pakistan's External Debt + Liabilities

Items	2018-19		2019-20 (end March)	
	Billion \$	Share (%)	Billion \$	Share (%)
A. Public External Debt	83.9	79.0	86.4	78.5
A.1 Govt. External Debt	67.8	63.8	70.1	63.7
A.12 Bilateral Debt	23.9	22.5	24.2	22.0
A.13 Multilateral Debt	28.6	26.9	30.0	27.3
A.14 Commercial Loan & Bonds	14.8	13.9	14.6	13.0
A.15 Others	-	-	1.3	1.2
A.2 IMF Debt	5.6	5.3	6.4	5.8
A.3 FE Liabilities	10.5	9.9	9.9	9.0
B. Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs)	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.2
C. Banking Sector Debt	4.7	4.4	4.7	4.3
D. Private Sector Debt	10.4	9.8	11.2	10.2
E. Inter-Company Debt	3.3	3.1	4.3	3.9
F. Total External Debt + Liabilities	106.3	100.0	110.0	100.0

Source: State Bank of Pakistan

A cursory look at the table is sufficient to see that bilateral debt only accounts for 22 percent (or \$24.2 billion) of our total external debt and liabilities. Multilateral debt along with IMF debt, commercial loan, bonds, and foreign exchange liabilities amounting to \$60.9 billion or 55.4 percent of the total external debt and liabilities have emerged as a serious challenge for Pakistan. Instead of securing only bilateral debt relief from the international community, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister should have suggested for a Comprehensive Debt Relief Initiative (CDRI) where all the three major creditors (bilateral, multilateral and private creditors) should have contributed to make the debt relief a meaningful initiative. I am fully aware of the fact that the multilateral financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank, ADB are known as "Preferred Creditors" and that their loans are not rescheduled or restructured in normal circumstances. But post-Pandemic situation is an extra-ordinary development which require extra-ordinary measures at the global level.

I am also aware of the fact that seeking debt relief, in general, and seeking it from the private creditor, in particular, would result into downgrading of the sovereign's credit rating with possible exclusion of the country from the international debt credit market. It is for this threat that only 41 out of 77 eligible countries have applied for debt relief so far.

Once again, this is not a normal situation and the world, in general, and the poor countries, in particular, are facing extraordinary resource crunch. The issue of downgrading of credit rating may be taken up with the Institute of International Finance (IIF) who is coordinating the response from private creditors. Seeking debt relief, in general, and from private creditors, in particular, should not be considered as a default and hence should not face a credit

downgrade risk. The IIF could have assured the poor countries that seeking debt relief from private creditors would not result in downgrading their credit ratings.

It is a fact that G-20 debt relief has been a major first step towards alleviating liquidity crunch of the poor countries. The relief created fiscal space for the recipient countries which enabled them to spend heavily on improving health facilities and providing social protection. Given the scale of economic devastation caused by the Pandemic to poor countries, the temporary debt standstill would not be sufficient to cater the needs of resources that will be required to revive their economies and ensuring their investment towards the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, a Comprehensive Debt Relief Initiative (CDRI), spanning over 3 to 5 years, is urgently required.

Through this article, I would urge the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan to take the lead once again. They may like to talk to their counterparts in important capitals and to the UN Secretary General for CDRI. To the best of my knowledge, Prime Minister would get the support of not only the Secretary General of the UN but more than 300 parliamentarians from around the world including Sen. Bernie Sanders, Rep. Ilhan Omar, and Jeremy Corbyn.

Why CDRI?

The G-20 debt relief initiative was an excellent first step in the right direction; it provided temporary relief to the poorest countries, enhanced their fiscal space and enabled them to address acute social, medical and economic challenges caused by the COVID-19. The Pandemic has caused economic devastation to the poorest countries and it may take 3 to 5 years to come back to the Pre-COVID-19 situation. It is in this background that the international community must work towards a medium-to-long term (3 to 5 years) debt relief program to relive pressure of debt servicing of the poor countries. The resources, so saved, will be diverted towards strengthening health facilities, social protection, reviving their economies, preventing more people falling below the poverty line and ensuring investment towards SDGs. If international community do not move toward CDRI, there is a strong likelihood that the Pandemic could cause a protracted debt crisis for many developing countries, including Pakistan. Debt risks of developing countries were already high even before the pandemic, these risks are simply materializing now. A full standstill on all debt servicing for developing countries is an absolute necessity to prevent a full blown debt crisis.

How to Proceed for CDRI?

The current debt relief initiative of the G-20 was restricted to bilateral creditors only and private creditors were asked to voluntarily participate. G-20 did mention that for a relatively better off countries like Pakistan, bilateral debt relief would only cover a fraction of the resources required to fight COVID-19. Under the CDRI, everyone (bilateral, multilaterals and private creditors) will have to contribute. The multilaterals will have to take the lead. In fact, low income and poor countries owe equally to multilaterals. Only by asking bilateral to offer debt relief or even debt forgiveness with private creditors participating voluntarily would not work. Debt of the multilateral Institutions including the IMF and commercial Banks should be included in the CDRI along with bilateral.

Blanket debt relief may not work because many countries may take the advantage of the COVID-19 situation to mask their policy weaknesses. A case by case approach will be needed to address the problems of the poorest and low income countries. Let this initiative of dealing with individual countries be given to the experts of the IMF, WB and IIF working in tandem with the country experts nominated by the individual country.

It is absolutely clear that a “one shoe fit for all” policy, as pursued by the Bretton Woods Institutions, in general, and the IMF, in particular, for the last four decades will not work. The policy instruments like tight monetary policy (raising discount rate), tight fiscal policy, currency devaluation in the name of market determined exchange rate and raising utility prices have lost its charm after the Greece Debt crisis of 2010. Such policies have harmed the economies much more than they benefited. The outcome of such policies has been slowing economic growth, rising unemployment and poverty, and drowning the country into debt. Such dated policies will simply negate the very spirit of CDRI. The three institutions (IMF, WB and IIF) would work closely with country experts nominated by the respective governments.

The three institutions working with country experts may consider

for debt swap arrangements as part of the CDRI. Such debt swap arrangement may take the shape of i) debt-for-Covid-19 swap; ii) debt for education and health spending swap; iii) debt-for-SMEs investment swap; iv) debt for SDGs spending swap; v) debt for environment/green swap. Depending upon the amount saved from debt relief, each country can select any or all of the swap arrangements to utilize the money based on their requirements.

Pakistani Prime Minister and Foreign Minister may take the lead for the CDRI and talk to their respective counterparts of the important G-20 countries and the UN Secretary General. The CDRI, if implemented, will provide great relief to the poorest and low income countries; it will enable them to spend money on improving health facilities, providing social protection, investing in SDGs and reviving and strengthening economic activities in their respective countries. Boosting the demand of the poorest and the low income countries will benefit the rich and powerful countries in terms of strengthening their economies. This is nothing but a ‘Win Win’ for all. The bottom line is that there cannot be economic recovery in developing countries without a comprehensive Debt Relief. The developing countries cannot be protected from a full blown debt crisis with catastrophic consequences without a comprehensive debt relief.



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COPHC making prosperous Gwadar a reality

By Azka Gouher

CHINA OVERSEAS PORTS Holding Company has initiated projects in various sectors ranging from education, health, environment, freshwater supply to employment, poverty alleviation as well as harnessing a healthy relationship between the two countries. In 2015, the China Overseas Ports Holding Company (COPHC) collaborated with the local government to establish a school on a tract of 752 square meters of land donated by Shair Mohammad, a 65 year old local. Upon the same line, the China Foundation for Peace and Development (CFPD) donated USD 400,000 to construct China-Pakistan Government Primary School in Gwadar. The project was initiated in November 2015 and completed the following year in September.

The school was welcomed by an enthusiastic local population with over 500 students. The Chinese Embassy has particularly shown great attention towards the maintenance of this school and since 2017, the Embassy has funded its overall cost of construction along with an ‘Ambassador Scholarship’ for the improvement of teaching staff and school facilities. Local government authorities too have lent monetary and management support for the upgradation and sustainability of the school.

Chairman of COPHC, Mr Zhang Baozhong who is currently serving as the honorary President of the school has been closely participating in the daily management of the school. Furthermore, the company has donated school buses, uniforms, teaching supplies whilst contributing to teacher development programs by sending the faculty to China for further education.

These rapid developments were made possible due to collaboration between the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, Local Government in Gwadar, CFPD, COPHC and local communities. This school is envisioned to be the model for education in Gwadar and is part of the larger goal to improve education, medical conditions and poverty eradication in line with public welfare projects under CPEC.

Along with education, COPHC is amongst the first few donors to the special public welfare fund ‘Silk Road Humanity Fund’ as provision for land support in lieu of the construction of China-Pakistan Emergency Corridor. Similarly, China-Pakistan Fraternity Emergency Care Center was granted land of 3,000 square meter with functions such as medical and emergency treatment as well as small surgeries. Under this project, the end of August reported treatment of 4,500 patients along with free medical check up of students, staff of Gwadar Port Authority, Gwadar Free Zone Company Ltd. and Gwadar International Terminal Company Ltd.

Moreover, COPHC has contributed to providing supply of freshwater to the people of Gwadar and has signed an agreement with the local government in May 2018 for the supply of 300,000 gallons of desalinated water daily – which has been expanded to 1.5 million daily gallons in agreement with China Port Authority. COPHC has not held back but has also contributed massively in generating employment opportunities. It has not only created thousands of jobs for locals but has also raised fiscal revenue for Pakistan.



To cater to Gwadar’s dry and hot climate, COPHC has maintained the implementation of green and sustainable construction processes, recycled sewage waste, adopted irrigation technology, engaged in landscaping, energy saving and improvement in saline-alkaline desert soil. Under this project, a greening project of over 100,000 square meters was built, which became a local attraction.

On the other hand, COPHC has also been working towards alleviating poverty and signed a Poverty Relief Agreement in 2018 with Gwadar Regional Council to help 14 families in improving their living standards through a specialized recruitment and purchase service with adherence to the concept, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”.

With a vision to harness mutual respect and trust between the two sides, COPHC is committed to spreading positive energy, creating a people-to-people bond, and strengthening connectivity between the people of Pakistan and China – a lasting memoir of friendship between the two nations.



Has FBR takes slow lane in Mansha family's London hotel case?

Tax authority attaches family's bank accounts on court orders, fails to attach properties; court directs investigation of further offences including money laundering in St James's Hotel and Club case

By A Muqet Waqas

FEDERAL BOARD OF REVENUE is reluctant to implement orders of Special Court for Customs and Taxation has directed to investigate country's richest person Mian Mansha in offences of money laundering, false statement in verification, evasion of tax, furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income and wealth and acquiring assets from the proceeds of crime. Court also ordered to attach the properties and bank accounts of Mian Mansha family in the St James's Hotel and Club case. Order was issued in February 2020.

Order was issued when FBR approached the court and stated that Mian Muhammad Mansha and his family have failed to provide the money trail or explanation for sources of income large enough to build assets in London.

"It seems FBR has compromised this high-profile case since no complaint of money laundering has been filed in court against Mian Mansha and his family," a source privy to the matter said. This is despite the fact that "FBR has established that Mian Mansha and his family laundered money to buy properties in London". He further added that six months had passed with no progress with regard to filing of the case.

FBR official, on condition of anonymity said that bank accounts of the Mansha family had been attached and further investigation was ongoing. "FBR could not attach the family's properties as it requires many legal agreements to be followed and involvement of Foreign Office to proceed further in the case," he stated while requesting anonymity.

He mentioned that attempts were made to influence the case – even at the level of chairman FBR office – but to no avail.

Another official informed TTI that despite the power dynamics, FBR investigation of such high-profile cases was transparent and free from external pressures. "I have told Prime Minister Imran Khan that we will go after every big fish, come what may," he said.

The FBR had pleaded in court that there was strong possibility that money was transferred overseas by declaring it a loan from foreign entities, which led to investigation under Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 after the court's permission. This probe has established beyond doubt that members of the Mansha family have fabricated layers of deception and spread the transaction over several jurisdictions to make the source of funding obscure.



The authorities are still awaiting information regarding \$22 million loan from Avendale Enterprises Ltd from the British Virgin Islands. However, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the other entity in British Virgin Islands is a paper company, hence the whole transaction of loan facility needs to be probed ab initio.

According to FBR, the accused pleaded during the proceedings of concerned tax office and investigation conducted by Directorate General of Intelligence and Investigation Islamabad that the investment for the purchase of St James's Hotel and Club was supported by debt and equity. Following the comprised loan document of \$42 million, there is a need for fresh investigation. This inquiry was conducted after credible information regarding hefty investment by the Mansha family in November 2010 was received.

The Mansha family incorporated M/s Sea Capital Ltd in October 2010 in the UK with the sole purpose to purchase St James's Hotel and Club. The directors of the company are two Pakistani residents, Mr Hassan Mansha and Ms Iqraa Mansha.

Further facts revealed during the earlier inquires show that Sea Capital Ltd is a subsidiary of M/s Residentia Holdings Pvt Ltd located in Singapore. The Singapore entity owns 100% shares of Sea Capital Ltd. The shares of Residentia Holdings Pvt Ltd are in turn wholly owned by three individuals – Mr Umar Mansha, Mr Hassan Mansha and Ms Ammil Raza Mansha, residents of Pakistan.

The Pakistani directors of RHOP have stated in their response to the queries of the Directorate General of Intelligence and Investigation and during assessment proceedings that the hotel's acquisition was made indirectly through the nonresidents' companies for commercial reasons.

The cases of the three directors were selected for audit by the Large Taxpayers Unit Lahore under Section 177 of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001 by the Commissioner Inland Revenue Lahore vide notice dated 26/04/2017 for being the beneficial owners of the investment in purchase of the hotel. The audit proceedings were covered by probing sources of investment for the acquisition of St James's Hotel and Club by the Mansha family. The taxpayers were required to explain and substantiate their claims of short-term loan of \$4.743 million, long-term loan of \$42 million and show-cause notice.

The taxpayers responded that the hotel's acquisition was made possible through a mix of debt and equity, however details of debt and loans were not provided to the Large Taxpayers Unit.

During the course of these proceedings, information regarding the loan arrangement was received from the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS) through FBR's International Taxes Wing, which was shared with Large Taxpayers Unit Lahore and the same was considered during the assessment proceedings. The tax officer conducting the audit accepted the plea of the accused regarding the loans based on copies of the loan agreements received from IRAS and did not draw any negative interference.

The Mansha family stated that the long-term loans were arranged by Residentia Holdings Pte Ltd. Avendale Enterprises Ltd arranged a loan of \$22 million through British Virgin Islands while Easy Investment Ltd arranged a loan of \$20 million through Guernsey.



In October 2018, the FBR again approached the IRAS through its International Taxes Wing to confirm the information regarding the loan arrangement. The IRAS informed in December that no data was available in their record and information was sought from the taxpayer company Residentia Holdings Pte Ltd which, in turn, has requisitioned the record from its Pakistani representatives.

The documents pertaining to debt and loan arrangement were provided to IRAS while the International Taxes Wing requested the respective competent authorities of Guernsey and British Virgin Islands to verify the documents of loan agreements as forwarded by the Singapore authority. The Revenue Services of the States of Guernsey confirmed that no entity with the name and title of Easy Investment Ltd was ever incorporated in Guernsey.

FBR says this information renders the whole transaction suspicious and raises key question regarding the veracity of the claims of the Mansha family, beneficial owners of the Residentia Holdings Pte Ltd loan agreement.

The analyses of wealth statements of the Pakistani directors and shareholders of Residentia Holdings Pte Ltd shows that huge amounts were debited from these accounts during the same period as that of acquisition of St James's Hotel and Club. For thorough investigation of this case, it is significant that relevant bank accounts' statements be acquired to trace any outward remittances by the taxpayers in addition to their initial investment in shares of Residentia Holdings Pte Ltd.

Syed Nadeem Rizvi, the spokesperson for FBR, said the case is sub judice so it is inappropriate to comment at this stage.

Mian Mansha was approached to present his point of view but no response could be recorded.

Gas crisis looming large on consumers as winter approaches

By Khalique Ahmad



IT WAS AN UNUSUAL September when gas companies faced drop in gas pressure, particularly in Sui Northern Gas Limited pipeline network that serves Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Such conditions normally erupt in peak winter – December and January – as residential gas consumption increase due to space heating and geysers.

This may be an early warning about the higher than usual shortages in upcoming winter months unless robust demand-supply mechanism is put in place with maximum induction of imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).

While a couple of faster than expected depletions in existing gas fields in Sindh and closure of some other fields due to an ongoing feud between the gas companies and influential private parties was one of the key reasons, the situation exposed the underlying adhocism in the energy supply.

The bigger short in the arm came in the form of the policy decision to divert to Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL) for increased power generation by K-Electric substantial LNG quantities arranged by SNGPL for Punjab, Sindh and as result SSGCL have so far been opposed to LNG offtake for being quite expensive when compared to local gas produced in Sindh.

For quite some time, the SNGPL have been providing about 55-60 million cubic feet per day (MMCFD) of LNG to SSGCL network but this was suddenly compelled to surrender about 200 MMCFD to jack up KE's power generation. It took time for the system to build pressure in SSGCL network despite the feed-in point so close at Port Qasim, the linepack pressure in SNGPL suffered the most.

The gas companies have already been facing the brunt of unreliable demand-supply projections in the power sector and this year is no exception. The upcoming drop in temperatures and resultant shrinking demand in power sector is going to aggravate the situation as majority of the plants would have to be closed down and LNG based power plants moving out of economic merit order.

Normally the gas shortage in December increases to 600-700mmcf and over 900mmcf in January in the North (SNGPL network) due to higher demand in residential sector that may go even higher given reduced supplies in SSGCL network as well. That would mean diversion of even higher LNG quantities into the residential network where more than 90pc domestic consumers are charged less than Rs200 per unit (million British Thermal Unit) of gas compared to LNG's last year average of about Rs1500 per unit.

This price differential has already created an overall gas sector circular debt of around Rs200bn. The diversion of LNG to residential and commercial consumers has resulted in un-recovered receivables of Rs75bn alone in the SNGPL accounts over the past two years.

The petroleum division has warned that unless addressed through RLNG tariff, the LNG injection into domestic sector would increase these receivables by Rs40bn this season, challenging the viability of the gas companies. It has been advocating the weighted average cost of gas (WACOG) as the only solution going forward which means the entire gas pricing should be on the basis of an average of domestic gas price and imported LNG.

The government is currently in the process of issuing policy guidelines to Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) to allow SNGPL to recover these costs. The RLNG and indigenous gas pricing were ring-fenced in PML-N government but the sale of RLNG had been provided by SNGPL to the domestic and commercial consumers in winter months under political compulsions. The cost difference between the two – local gas and RLNG – had developed an un-recovered expenditure of Rs73.85bn between July 2018 and April 2020.

The government has now decided in principle that SNGPL needs to be compensated through gradual recovery of Rs74bn over two-three years. The export sectors, fertilizer and domestic sectors were already on subsidized rates, hence the additional burden would shift to general industry, CNG and power plants where it would translate into electricity tariff.

However, the recent decision to relieve three LNG-based power plants in Punjab from guaranteed purchase of at least 66pc of imported LNG to make them attractive for privatisation would have adverse impact on LNG supply chain, particularly in SNGPL network. The petroleum division has protested over the decision and has demanded the government to provide subsidy to SNGPL which had back-to-back agreements with Pakistan State Oil, Pakistan LNG and Qatargas for 100 percent purchase of imported LNG.

Upon government orders, the PSO and Pakistan LNG Limited (PLL) had signed contracts for 800mmcf, with 500mmcf of this being with Qatargas. All contracts in the LNG trade are on a 100 percent Take or Pay basis; even spot cargoes, once ordered are Take or Pay. These agreements were signed to complete the supply chain for the four RLNG power projects in the public sector with each having a maximum need of 185mmcf gas at full capacity.

Despite the fact that the supply side is 100 percent Take or Pay, and these firm contracts were signed for these four RLNG power plants, while other users were to be supplied LNG from additional purchases on spot, when the time came to sign the

Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), the Power Division insisted that it could not sign 100 percent Take or Pay given its operational constraints.

The resulting compromise was that the first three power projects which were signed earlier on, had PPAs with 66 percent Take or Pay, with diversion rights on the part of Power Division, and a commitment for each plant to make price differential payment if it does not take at least 66 percent Take or Pay and the gas supplier has to sell the RLNG at a local gas prices. This resulted in the remaining 34 percent risk of Take or Pay being shifted to SNGPL (and by extension to PSO) for the first three plants.

As if this was not enough, when the agreements were to be signed for the fourth power plant at Trimmu, Power Division refused to sign the agreements on the similar precedents of three plants despite clear Cabinet decisions. After going to Cabinet several times, the Petroleum Division was forced to take the entire Take or Pay exposure on this plant, whereby there is no Take or Pay in the GSA on a long-term basis.

As a result of these decisions, while Petroleum Division companies were directed to sign 800mmcf of contracts with 100 percent Take or Pay to support the installation of these four power plants, it only has approximately 366mmcf of Firm Take or Pay commitments in the GSAs, thereby forcing PSO and PLL to take 55pc of Take or Pay exposure for no fault of their own.

In order to minimize this uncovered exposure of the RLNG contracted for Trimmu plant, PLL is in the process to sell this gas to Karachi Electric on a firm supply basis for three years.

If entire volume that is to become surplus in 2022 is diverted to domestic sector which is generally short supply, the impact would be Rs86bn per year on gas tariff or SNGPL accounts.

Experts believed that both SNGPL and SSGC have to pull-up their socks to make sure that gas shortage will remain at manageable level in the upcoming winter.



میرا پاکستان، میرا گھر



Under the vision of the Government of Pakistan to provide affordable housing to millions of Pakistanis, National Bank of Pakistan shall extend low cost housing finance plans through its mortgage products.

Through this ground-breaking initiative we are committed to build a prosperous future for the Nation.

Details will be announced shortly.



Pakistan's Real Estate Sector and its Unsupervised Regulation

By Muhammad Ahsan Malik

THE REAL ESTATE SECTOR constitutes a sizeable proportion of any country's economy. Pakistan's real estate sector, alone, can generate immense revenue for the country — eventually, solving all the economic woes of approximately 22 million population. No other sector attracts as much foreign investment in the country as real estate. Pakistani expatriates find it safer to buy a property because it offers them a secure and profitable investment.

Amid such times, when the world economy is in recession, there is a dire need of assisting the real estate sector for boosting economic activity in the country. Prime Minister Imran Khan's construction package, despite being a flagship project has failed to kick start the construction sector due to lack of incentives for the struggling real estate sector.

Another important step that I render to be of utmost importance is the creation of one of a kind 'Real Estate Regulatory Authority' (RERA) for the protection of the interests of sellers, purchasers, and realtors'. The consumer often suffers when the projects they have invested their hard-earned money in, do not execute on time or fail to meet the standards or the model shown at the time of inauguration is nothing but a lie. We do not have any platform yet in our country where such grievances could be addressed, and the protection of interests ensured. We must understand that the real estate sector can ignite the process of industrialization in a country marred by a lack of revenue and economic growth.

RERA, among other issues, could help resolve realtors' complaints of not being paid the service charges (commission) by the sellers or buyers. We need to keep in mind that there are more than one million realtors currently working across Pakistan without being registered with RERA, how will the government protect their interests? A smart line of action is to immediately make a committee that should be announced for a fresh draft of RERA.

Realtors/Estate agents are recognized around the world as highly professional individuals. In foreign countries, they are respected in their communities and treated with honour and dignity, at par with other professionals. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, the agents who are working as the representatives of the sale and purchase of a property, are neither supported by the state nor the media voice their concerns.

Even though, a RERA bill was introduced in the Senate on 21st August 2017, it never actualized. The purpose of having a Real Estate Regulatory Authority, as per the bill was: "For the regulation and promotion of the real estate sector and to ensure the sale of a property, as the case may be, or sale of real estate project, efficiently and transparently and to protect the interest of consumers in the real estate sector and to establish an adjudicating mechanism for speedy dispute redressal."

Although the objectives outlined in this RERA Bill, 2017 were noble, it failed to earn the support of the very sector it was drafted for. The primary reason for such a shocking response from realtors was that the foremost stakeholders were not consulted when the draft was being made. It is pertinent to question that how can civil servants, politicians, economists, and chartered accountants draft a bill for the real estate sector without consulting the primary stakeholders?

However, this is not one such example of incompetence and negligence on part of the government. If a foreign client in the real estate sector comes to our office and reveal different rates of various departments (DC, FBR, and market), they blame us for the discrepancy.

Hence, DC rates should be created transparently, not by someone who is sitting comfortably in his office determining the rates for the areas, without even assessing the on-ground situation. Rates defined with such little knowledge and facts will always remain questionable. DCs must always consult the respective real



estate associations of the area before determining the rates.

To avoid unnecessary confusion and uncertainty, my suggestion here is to set the DC rates at the lowest value of the property. This will no doubt accelerate investment from overseas Pakistanis who consider it absurd to declare in papers a false value of their property. Once an investor-friendly climate is created, it will outset all the attached sectors of the economy.

Another suggestion for the incumbent government to set into motion the wheels of the economy, especially after a financially disastrous lockdown would be to include all the societies established and currently developing, into the Prime Minister's Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme Project (NPHDA); a flagship project of the PTI government. Under the NPHDA, the government should decrease the mark-up rate to 2-3% from the current 5% for 5 Marla plot. These measures combined with the applicability of such rates all over Pakistan would help generate economic activity in the country.

I would like to express my utmost desire that the PTI government will pay heed to the proposals of a patriot citizen of this country whose only intention is to see the country treading on a path towards industrialization and development.

The writer is the General Secretary (RECA)-DHA Islamabad-Rawalpindi, VP (Punjab)-Federation of Realtors (FOR) Pakistan, and Deputy Convener- FPCCI (For Real Estate Sector- Islamabad).

Drug addicts in Pakistan increasing because of govt apathy



By Mishaal Ashraf

DRUG USE HAS BECOME a severe problem not only in Pakistan, but all around the world. In Pakistan, there are currently more than six million drug users, and out of these, four million are drug addicts, according to a survey conducted in 2013. Sadly enough, this number keeps on growing, and as of right now, there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

Research indicates that most of the drug users belong from the lower income class, which means they do not have access to high quality or even medium level education. Awareness and literacy are indirectly proportional to the people who use drugs. If people do not have access to good schools and education system, they cannot gauge the disadvantages of using drugs. The only effects they can measure and respond to is by looking at the example of their peers.

Few people out of a community are smart and intelligent enough to not indulge in these activities because they have seen how drugs have affected their peers, but not everyone is of the same mindset. Moreover, drug users are not aware of the effects that it can have on their health. The

addicts seeking help are oblivious to the resources available.

Another factor attributed to the increased number of users is the ease of access. Various documentaries show that children as young as seven years of age can easily get their hands on cigarettes, marijuana, cannabis etc. in the street. The drug dealers can be found at random corners with ease. Without sufficient recreational activities, kids are bound to resort to such idiocies.

Furthermore, with lack of government funding, resources for the anti-narcotics agencies, it has become increasingly difficult to curb this growing trend. There are hardly any rehabilitation centers by the government. According to the United Nations (UN), less than 1% of the Pakistanis have access to rehabilitation centers, and that too are owned privately. This is another reason why addicts hesitate in getting help because it is expensive.

Referring to Philippines, the police have been able to ward off drug use with effective imposition of the rule of law. The police forces were given adequate funds, resources, trainings with a special emphasis

on reducing corruption, only then the forces were able to achieve their goals.

However, we must keep in mind that Philippines erupted in rebellion following a strict imposition of rule of law. To counter the drug problem in Pakistan, the primary responsibility lies with the government. The only solution is to engage in large scale awareness, improve literacy levels, fight off corruption in police institutions, and allocate adequate funding and training in this sector. The government must also build enough rehabilitation centers to help out those in dire need of help but are unable to seek reprieve due to financial constraints.



The Great Dean Jones

By Ali Abdullah



DEAN MARVYN JONES also known as Deano was born in 1961 in Coburg, Australia. Jones joined the Carlton Club in his teenage, where Barney, his father was already recognized as a skilled all-rounder. Along with his two younger brothers, he learned cricket while in school, and was largely influenced by Keith Stackpole, the former opening batsman of Australia. In his early career, Jones played for Victoria in the year 1981-82. He was also selected for the West Indies tour of 1984, but had to drop out due to an injury. The years 1984-1992 saw him enjoy a glorious career, with 52 test matches, scoring more than 3630 runs with an average of 46.55, including eleven centuries.

He is most noted for his third test match against India in Chennai, during which, he was suffering from dehydration and vomiting, and yet managed to score an impressive 210. This became one of the epic test innings in Australian cricket history, and for Jones, a landmark moment in his career. His batting was characterised by his nimble footwork against both pace and spin, quick running between wickets, and willingness to take risks. In 2019, Jones was inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame.

Dean has played more than 164 one-day international matches, scoring 6068 runs, including 7 centuries, 46 half centuries, and sporting an average run rate of 44.61. He played a significant role in the 1987 World Cup.

Unfortunately, though, while he was at the peak of his career in 1992-93, he was dropped from the test matches, probably due to some personal issues with Bob Simpson, the then coach of the team. However, he continued playing one-day matches for a couple of more years.

During his cricketing career, Dean Jones came to be known for his aggressive batting style, particularly against fast pacers. He also ran with lightening speed between the wickets, and set new standards for fielding stunts. Deano played his last ODI in 1994 against South Africa and after that he was not selected in the national team. Jones contin-

ued playing domestic cricket for 4 years and then announced retirement from all formats.

Dean Jones decided to be a cricket coach and commentator after his retirement from cricket. He coached a couple of T20 league teams including Karachi Kings and Islamabad United (PSL). In October 2017, Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) appointed Jones as the interim head coach for Afghanistan intercontinental cup fixture against Hong Kong. Jones also wrote a book called 'The Sydney Morning'. He received the nickname "Professor Deano" after giving a pitch report for a television show by dressing up as a professor prior to the group stage match of the Asia Cup 2004 between India and Sri Lanka on 18 July 2004. He eventually emerged as one of the most prominent broadcasters in cricket and was known for his work as commentator with Indian Premier League select dugout show on Star Sports. He also served as a summariser for BBC's test match special. During his later part of commentary career, he voiced his opinions on reviving international cricket in Pakistan following the tragedy in 2009.

Despite his abundant talent as a cricketer, Jones's strong personality and tendency to speak his mind sometimes resulted in friction and conflict with teammates, other players and selectors. An example is an incident on 16 January 1993 during the first one-day final of the 1992 world series against West Indies at the Sydney Cricket Ground, when he asked paceman to remove the wristband he was wearing on his bowling arm. Riled by this request, Ambrose went on to take 5/32 for the match. He followed this up in the remaining two games of the Test series with a 10-wicket haul in Adelaide and then a famous spell of 7 for 1 in Perth to help the West Indies retain the trophy. Writing about the incident over 20 years later, Jones reflected that, at the time, Jones was furious after coach Bob Simpson announced the team for the upcoming Test in Adelaide and was again left out.

Dean Jones died on 24th September 2020 in India as he was a part of the commentary panel for Indian Premier League. He was 59 years old and cardiac arrest caused his death.

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Entertainment and Trending

By Amna Shoaib

PEMRA issues regulatory notice to Pakistan’s Broadcasting and Advertising Agencies

PEMRA issued a notice for advertising & broadcasting agencies regarding the nature of their content which seems irrelevant to the selling products, that is, tea or biscuit commercials do not need dancing to be sold. Further adding that the content visuals go against our cultural and religious norms too. PEMRA issued a statement saying, “All stakeholders are further advised to stop the rampant use of themes/content which does not correspond with the nature of the products.” The advisory also stated that the satellite television channel to have their advertisements reviewed by the ‘PEMRA In-house Monitoring Committee’ which considers what is acceptable for our consumers as well as our culture. According to Muhammad Ali Khan, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, the visuals of young boys and girls dancing together often seen in our commercials have ‘damaging effects on the youth.’ He believes it is ‘anti-Islamic’ and thus misleading the youth.



Sharmeen Obaid Chanoi co-directs Hollywood’s ‘Ms. Marvel’



Sharmeen Obaid Chanoi is not only the first filmmaker in Pakistan to get an Oscar twice but is now also the first Pakistani Hollywood co-director, for an upcoming film, Ms. Marvel. Joining hands with Adil El Ardi, Bilal Fallah, and Mera Menon, Sharmeen is set for not just co-directing just any other Marvel movie, but a series, introducing the first-ever Muslim Superhero, Ms. Marvel. According to Hollywood reporters, “Ms. Marvel hails from head writer Bisha K. Ali and centers on Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American teen introduced in the comics in 2012. The New Jersey-based hero broke ground as Marvel’s first Muslim character to star in her own title, and she will become Marvel Studios’ first onscreen Muslim hero.”

Rihanna apologizes for using Islamic Hadith during Savage X Fenty fashion show

Fenty is an International beauty brand founded by Rihanna, worldwide famous singer. On a recent lingerie fashion show by Fenty, a song, Doom sung by Coucou Chloe played which had Islamic hadith in Arabic. Within 24 hours, the clips of the lingerie models walking to an Islamic Hadith went viral on social media as a sign of disrespect and islamophobia agenda that the singer and her team immediately apologized to the Muslim community saying that it was “irresponsible, yet an honest and careless mistake.” As far as the singer Coucou Chloe herself is concerned, she said that she was not aware that she had incorporated a sacred Islamic text in her song. The public however is not buying her casual explanation since back in 2013, a quite ‘bold’ photo-shoot for her album in a mosque in Abu Dhabi received similar backlash.



Fair and lovely changes name to glow and lovely



Unilever has decided to change the ‘Fair and Lovely’ beauty cream to ‘Glow and Lovely’. The product which gained popularity as a skin whitening cream is now simply a skincare cream after facing global backlash for a racist brand motive. The recent Black Lives Matter movement alongside bringing attention to many crucial issues, dawned attention towards fairness creams upon which many fairness creams, including Johnson & Johnson and PepsiCo decided to alter their brand image. Unilever’s ‘Fair and Lovely’ dominate the market followed by Loreal and P&G (Procter and Gamble). Sunny Jain, president of Unilever’s beauty and personal care division says “We recognize that the use of the words ‘fair’, ‘white’, and ‘light’ suggest a singular ideal of beauty that we don’t think is right, and we want to address this”.

Cuties banned by Netflix

After hundreds and thousands of petitions lodged against Netflix's upcoming French film, *Cuties*, centered around a group of eleven-year-old girls who twerk to win a dance competition, Netflix apologized for the nature of the content and banned the release on its platform. The petitions lodged against the film addressed multiple issues; islamophobia and pedophilia being the focus. Not just the petition, but there was an online campaign which accused the movie of sexualizing 11-year-old girls to gain views via pedophiles. Whereas the remaining 50% of the public says that it is misleading, impersonating a false image of Islam by showing an underage girl Amy from a traditional Senegalese Muslim background in a hijab to which many Muslims argue to be a false portrayal showing Islam as oppressive since the hijab is to be taken on reaching puberty and then to have her achieve her goal, she's to take off her hijab and twerk. Even though the masses were against it, the film, initially titled *Mignonnes*, received a jury award on its premiere at Sundance Film Festival.

Netflix apologized to the public not just for the film itself but its poster showing little girls with fancy undergarments, saying,

"We're deeply sorry for the inappropriate artwork that we used for *Mignonnes/Cuties*. It was not OK, nor was it representative of this French film which won an award at Sundance. We've now updated the pictures and description."



Pakistan blocks famous Social Media App TikTok over 'Indecent' content



Chinese Social Media app TikTok has been blocked by Pakistan's Telecommunications Authority (PTA) on Friday for failing to filter out the immoral and indecent content. The app has remained quite popular amongst the younger generation and as per an analytics firm, it had been installed over 43 million times in Pakistan. That makes Pakistan the 12th largest market for the company.

The ban is the result of the company's in compliance to Pakistani government's concerns. PTA has confirmed that they will review their decision subjected to a satisfactory mechanism by TikTok. Recently, the app was blocked in India; its largest market and is facing a threat of being banned in the United States and reconsideration in countries like Australia.

Five dating apps, including Tinder and Grinder, were also blocked by the PTA in the last month. Over these bans, Pakistani digital rights activists believe that these decisions undermine the government's dream of a Digital Pakistan.

COVID Passport Technology to be Introduced

The Pandemic did not only acquit us with new precautionary measures or make us implement the necessary cleanliness and hygiene practices which we never took as seriously before, it has also gotten us a passport of its own, that is, to travel interstate or internationally, we have to have a COVID passport that ensures we are virus-free owing to the risk one infected person has on a huge proportion of a population without the vaccination which is yet to come. The passport is an immunity passport or can be considered as an immunity certificate which offers digital proof via QR code of a person being COVID free.

Other COVID technology includes social distancing tools such as 'Contact Tracing apps' to know which person was the source of infection. These apps come with privacy concerns but also with a hope of lifting the quarantine rules or making them flexible because clearly a large proportion of masses, regardless of their financial situation or occupation have trouble staying at home for different reasons.



How 'special boy' Auggie cope up with realities of life

WONDER TELLS A STORY OF A TEN-YEAR OLD BOY AUGGIE who is an ordinary boy in many ways. He rides a bike and likes playing video games. But Auggie has deformities of the face and looks very different from other children. Auggie has never been to school because he spent a lot of time in hospital. His mother teaches him at home, but now he's ten and she thinks he should go to school.

At first, Auggie doesn't want to go. He worries that other students will look at him and say horrible things. But then he visits a school with his mum, he likes the head teacher and decides to go. Auggie's first year at school has good times and bad times. Auggie makes some good friends but other children are horrible to him. At the end of the year, Auggie goes on a school trip and a frightening event changes things completely.

The main themes of the book are that friendship helps you in many ways, appearance does not matter rather your capabilities do, and nothing is more important than family

because your family will always support you. It is a very sweet, heartwarming story which leaves you with a mix of emotions. It is very well written and flows really nicely.

By the end of the novel, we see a much more confident and social Auggie. Auggie has developed close friendships with Summer and Jack and is generally liked by his classmates. He has learned how to navigate the challenges, embracing forgiveness, and grace necessary in adolescent friendships. Auggie is able to stand up for himself and even gets up in front of the entire school to accept an award.

The writer tells you how to deal with people who appear to be different. It has a wonderful message about tolerance, respect, acceptance and understanding. She creates such a normal, relatable character from a boy living with such an extraordinary physical disorder. I would recommend this book to children above 9 because they won't understand the themes of it and also because there is bullying in it.



Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf

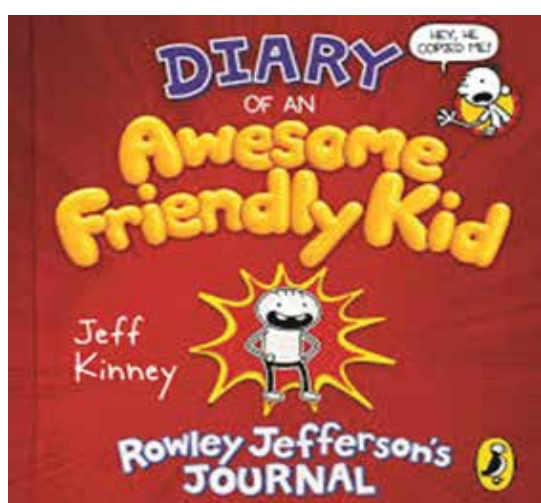
Author: R.J. Palacio

ISBN: 978-0-5525-6597-4

Publisher: Corgi Children's

Pages: 310

Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid



Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf

Author: Jeff Kinney

ISBN: 978-1-4328-6634-1

Publisher: Amulet Books, Puffin Books

Pages: 217

DIARY OF AN AWESOME FRIENDLY KID is a book written by Jeff Kinney. This is Rowley Jefferson's journal. He decides to start one as his best friend Greg also writes it. Rowley told Greg about it who asserts that Rowley should write a biography about him instead. So, Rowley reformats his journal into funny tales of the two of them.

The writer of the book is trying to teach children about kindness, and caring for everyone, all in a fun way. This book is very thrilling, creepy, and interesting at the same time. It gives positive messages and has positive role models and presentations.

Rowley employs some good study methods like practice tests, songs to remember concepts, and knowing when to bail on your friend who does not want to study so you can get work

done. Lessons about common friendship problems are presented, like how to find out that you are being taken advantage of or lied to about something and not standing up for yourself.

We get only glimpses of Rowley expressing himself, through his joy in doing well in school and his superhero character who wants to spread kindness. He slowly realizes that Greg lies to him and does not always treat him well, but he rarely sticks up for himself.

This book is great for kids because it gives positive messages. Even when things start to go downhill, he always finds a way to cheer himself up, but this might be a little scary for little children so I recommend this book for children above 7.

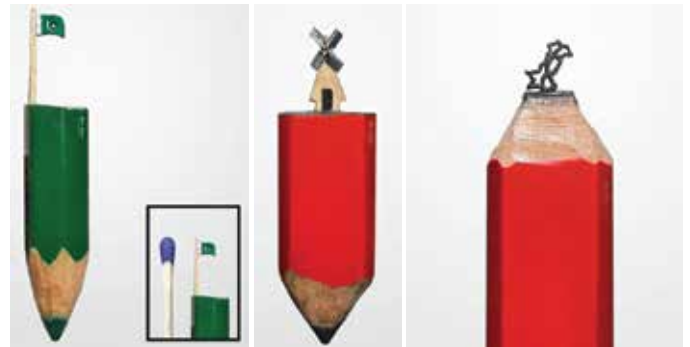
Ahsan defied odds to become record breaking miniature artist

Ahsan Qayyum is a miniature artist who has beaten an Indian's record to become the Guinness World Record holder. He made 75 links from lead pencils in contest with the record held by an Indian who made 58. According to Ahsan, he has had his eyes on the record since 2014 when the Youth Festival was held in Punjab. However, because of his work commitment with a shoe factory, he was unable to get leave for the event.

Ahsan has not had it easy. A few days before his FA exams, his mother passed away and he was unable to appear in the examinations. His father too was diagnosed with acute diabetes and there was nothing left but to bid farewell to academics as he travelled to Lahore for a job in a shoe factory at a menial wage of Rs. 7000.

Working long hours in the scorching Lahore heat without even a fan was tiresome. Right before his exams, his father suffered from a cardiac arrest and he was unable to appear once again.

Instead of letting tragedy define him, he decided to reflect and found interest in fine arts. A difficult combination of labor, studies and struggling to make ends meet, Ahsan was finally able to get the diploma that he had dreamt of. He feels that losing heart is equivalent to death and thinking big is the only way to succeed. However, acting small when necessary is equally important. -OTS



Pakistani footballer shines in philanthropy



Hailing from a remote village in Pakistan's Chitral valley, Karishma Ali, after her remarkable performance at football game, is now making exemplary efforts for betterment of her hometown which is adversely stricken by coronavirus and consequent financial stress.

Karishma is a 23-old football enthusiast who has played at national and international level. Last year she was named among Forbes' '30 Under 30' in Asia. She represented Pakistan at the Jubilee Games in Dubai, and her team was the first women's team from Pakistan to participate in the AFL International Cup. Ali is also the founder of the Chitral Women's Sports Club. After garnering heaps of praises for her bravery and the knack for football, a detailed feature report by US news channel has now covered Ali for her selfless philanthropy work in her hometown.

Pakistani Mehmosh Raza defeats Scottish Murrie in Bahrain

Bullied as a young child in the United Kingdom for being different and then, back in Pakistan, having experienced a burning tribal house by the Taliban twice, Mehmosh Raza overcame all challenges to be ranked 20th out of 164 in the active China Pro Featherweights as well as 21st out of 176 in the active Asia Southeast Pro Featherweights.

On 1st October 2020, MMA fighter, Mehmosh Raza from Pakistan also known as 'The Renegade' defeated Scottish Calum Murrie in a split decision in Bahrain. Mehmosh claimed victory in a featherweight bout over Calum, who is formerly the Taekwondo champion and dominated the Mixed Martial Arts avenue. With this victory, Mehmosh's ranking has improved to 10-4 in the MMA circuit.



ووٹرز کا

قومی دن



میرا ووٹ - میری پہچان

ووٹ کا استعمال، جمہوریت کا استحکام



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