THE COMPLETE MAGAZINE FOR THE REGION

JUNE 2019

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EVEN AFTER NINE MONTHS DELIVERY IS AN ISSUE!

It was the PTI itself that created unreasonable expectations for its first nine months in power. Will the Party be able to deliver now?

INDIA
Scarred Elections

SRI LANKA
Beneath the Surface

BANGLADESH
Culture of Impunity

SPECIAL FEATURE
Pakistan Budget 2019-20

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The Lows and Lows

Elected on the promise of investment, growth and social welfare, the PTI government has so far appeared to be a failure.

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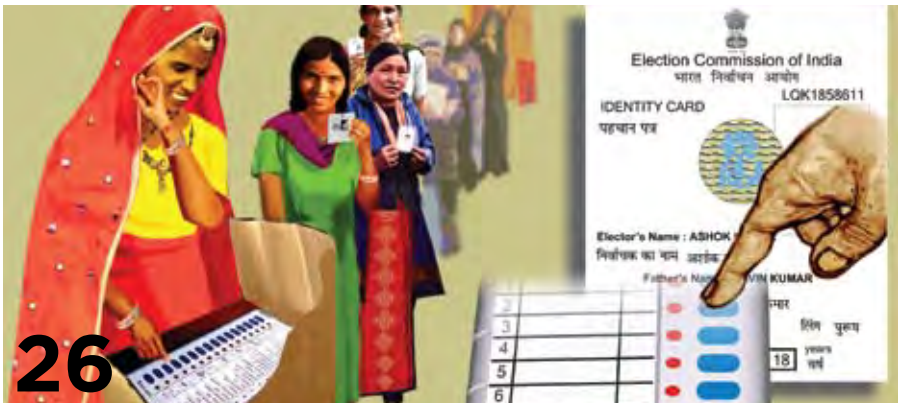

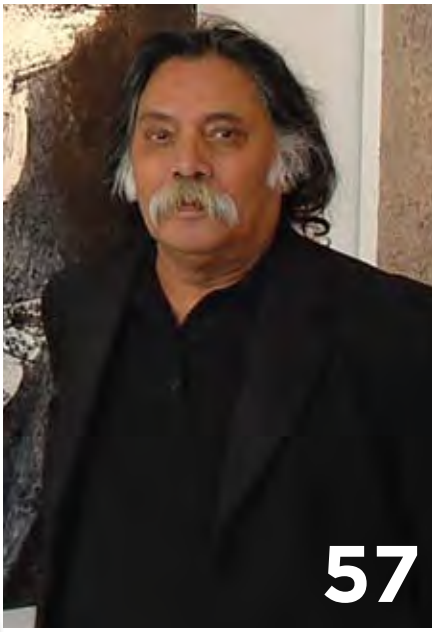

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“A people that elect corrupt politicians, imposters, thieves and traitors are not victims… but accomplices”

– George Orwell

SOCIETY FOR GLOBAL
MODERATION

STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE, INTERFAITH HARMONY AND DEMOCRACY

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Modi's Golden Opportunity

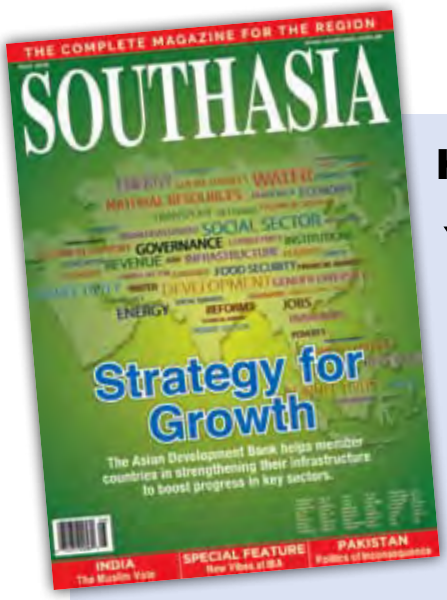
Now that Narendra Modi has returned for the second time as Prime Minister of India with a heavy mandate, what does this spell for India, for the region and the world? There is no doubt that Modi has developed into a very strong politician of national standing who has led India over the past decade with great success despite his right wing politics. Before that, as chief minister of the state of Gujarat, he was equally effective and it was his understanding and control of Indian politics that propelled him to the position of superiority that he enjoys today. He has made the Bharata Janata Party a reality of Indian politics that the Congress Party of the Nehrus always looked down upon. To them, India was the Congress Party and vice versa. In their mind, no other political manifestation could replace the magic and charisma of the Congress Party and that even in its fourth generation (that of Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi), the Congress Party would be a force to be reckoned with against the BJP. It is interesting to see that such thinking has been turned on its head by Modi's landslide victory and the saga of the Nehru dynasty has come grinding to a close.

Narendra Modi and the BJP have appeared on the world horizon with a fresh outlook. True, that the BJP is a champion of rightwing politics and that, in many ways, its world view is skewered and lopsided. All the atrocities that Modi and the BJP have wreaked on the minorities of India, especially the Muslims, have not stood them in a good light, but they have succeeded in building a place for Modi as a world leader and India as a world power. After all, while Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat, he was not granted permission to travel to the USA as he was deemed a butcher of humanity. Today, he is a most respected international personality and the world is ready to accept him with open arms. Perhaps, this is an opportunity that Narendra Modi must capitalize on to rise above his previously narrow band of thinking and expand his horizons to do what other leaders have not succeeded in doing before him. As in the words of William Shakespeare, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." It is said that former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was all for a workable solution of the long-festering Kashmir problem and the way retired diplomats describe it, he and former President Pervez Musharraf were only a few days away from reaching a deal. It was only then that things started going bitter for Musharraf in Pakistan and he became too preoccupied with his domestic political problems. At that point, he seems to have lost interest in solving the Kashmir issue and it was again put on the backburner.

In recent times, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that it would be easier for him to speak to a strong leadership in India regarding the Kashmir problem as well as other issues. It was being expected that India may get a hung parliament following the 2019 elections and it would again be difficult for Pakistan to negotiate issues with the next Indian government. Whether it is fortunate or unfortunate, but a strong, single-minded government has now come into power in India. It is a rightist government that follows the Hindutva philosophy but if India looks towards carving for itself a distinct position as a true world power, it must rise above its tunnel-vision thinking and exploit this opportunity to emerge as a major country that lives in peace with its neighbours and with the rest of the world.

If the leadership in Pakistan is willing to talk peace with India, then all that remains in the equation is the role of the other side. It is India that must now emerge from the ashes of history and take initiatives from the position of strength that it has built for itself. India also has the option of keep growing its economic and military strength and trampling every other nation in the region under its feet. If that happens, it will always be an uneasy path for India and the country will never succeed in achieving permanent regional peace nor become the superpower that it dreams to be. But if India chooses to live amicably with its neighbours, especially Pakistan, and stops bullying them, there is all the hope that South Asia will have the opportunity to progress on lines of the rest of the developing world and that the fifth of humanity that exists in this part of the world will have the same opportunities to grow and prosper. In the end, it all depends on Narendra Modi's view of the world from his new position of strength. S

Syed Jawaid Iqbal
Editor in Chief



HARD-HITTING

Your last month's cover story on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was hard-hitting. All the writers talked about the loopholes of Pakistan's economy. Two articles that were insightful for me were the Income Growth sans Human Development and The Development Recipe. Pakistan is a nation that has had bad governance for too long. In all these years of foreign aid, loans and deals, Pakistan's progress had been more or less at a snail's pace. It's high time the people wake-up from their slumber. They should stop celebrating and fooling people in the name of deceased political leaders and old victories. Pakistan needs to invest in its economy, health and social sciences to target a stable and prosperous tomorrow. The people have suffered for nearly 40 years or maybe more and now all that is left is the fallacy of a new dawn. Pakistan has incompetent politicians. What it needs are real leaders.

Mohsin Aly,
Lahore, Pakistan.

LIFE AT IBA

It gives me immense pleasure to express my gratitude for the kind of work SouthAsia magazine is doing. I can't thank it enough for covering the prestigious institution IBA in the magazine's 'Special Feature' section in its May 2019 issue. Being a current student of IBA, it felt great to see the informative articles written by some of the leading personalities from the institution. Dr. Farrukh Iqbal rightly portrayed what IBA actually does to empower its students, while Dr. Ishrat Hussain's interview upgraded our knowledge, not to exclude the interesting observations shared by the IBA's alumni who talked about their wonderful experiences at the country's leading business institution.

Amna Ilyas,
Karachi, Pakistan.

PRINT IS RELIABLE

Electronic media is expanding at a high speed but I still feel that print media has more credibility as the news is complete, accurate and thoroughly checked by a number of reporters and editors. The news that comes through electronic media is transmitted very quickly and so it often lacks the complete information required to make a good news story. Also, the facts stated in the news sometimes come out as totally wrong. There are still people who prefer reading newspapers in the morning while having tea or breakfast rather than watching the news on television or viewing it online.

Bilal Zaheer,
Quetta, Pakistan.

A SOCIAL EVIL

Street begging is a nuisance. Begging is considered a social evil in the civilized world, but it has become a well-organized profession in our country. We are always greeted by a bunch of beggars in such public places as bus stops, shopping centres, street corners, mosques, etc. Unfortunately, in our society, giving alms is believed to be a part of religion. The most painful thing is that most beggars can earn a living themselves, but they find it easier to live on other people's hard-earned money. To make things worse,

they even encourage their children to follow the same practice. Thus, this so-called charity leads to so many other social evils. I urge the concerned authorities to put an end to this social scourge by declaring it an illegal activity.

Saleha Fatima,
Karachi, Pakistan.

GENDER DIVERSITY

There have been many debates on how we stereotype a man and a woman. From a long time, we witnessed how women were taught to adjust and compromise to a male-centric world but gone are those days. Now, where on the one hand, women are acquiring almost 50% jobs in the corporate sector and balancing both their jobs and home very well, men are cooking, doing the laundry and taking care of the kids along with doing wonders at the workplace. That's how we all want to see men and women complementing each other. We all have heard 'in unity there is strength'. Just imagine how much our nation would prosper if we followed this dictum at home as well.

Sana Sayyad,
New Delhi, India.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Changes in the technological world have made our life much easier than it was many years back but with ease comes difficulty. Starting the day with instant coffee to ending it with ready-to-cook foods, do we still believe that we have a healthy lifestyle? Several studies have shown that consuming too much instant food can lead to various diseases but instead of doing something about it, we continue to resort to having instant food. Gadgets have ruined the childhoods of children as they are now more into spending hours with these gadgets instead of their own family.

Archibald Andrews,
Edinburgh, Scotland.

NEW RECORD

A Nepali girl Bandana has set a new Guinness World Record by dancing non-stop for 126 hours (over 5 days) in a long dancing marathon - a record previously held by an Indian girl. The 18 year old took on the challenge to promote Nepalese music and culture.

Kiran Chowdhury,
Dhaka, Bangladesh.

STRESSFUL KARACHI

I miss the clean wide roads of Karachi. The sides of the roads are blocked with debris and the waste blocks major traffic arteries. The government starts projects that severely disturb traffic. Nearly 70% of Karachi is getting an infrastructural change. I agree that underpasses will help ease traffic on the roads but if the major roads are blocked due to work on underpasses and there is debris and over flowing gutters, how will people commute? People already cannot meet their time schedules and things are getting very difficult for them. I hope there is some way out of this.

Sadia Bano,
Karachi, Pakistan.

COMEBACK!

Meera has always managed to be on TV, be it her shifting to the US or her numerous scandals and marriages. This time she is in the news for her role in the coming film 'Baaji'. According to the cast and crew of the film, Meera turned out to be a phenomenal actress. She will be seen in a new avatar in the film. Everyone is waiting for Meera. Maybe this is the comeback she had been waiting for.

Izma Rasheed,
Faisalabad,
Pakistan.

"Poverty and deprivation leads to frustration, making the masses vulnerable to exploitation by extremist organizations."
– Pervez Musharraf, former President of Pakistan.

"A leader who is worried about his power will only work to serve his self-interest."
– Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

"India remains firmly committed to peace, but in case the need arises, we will use all our might to protect the nation's sovereignty."
– Ram Nath Kovind, President of India.

"There will be no mercy for those involved in sexual harassment if necessary, tougher laws will be enacted."
– Sheikh Hasina Wajid, Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

"Resigning at a time like this would be act of cowardice. I will not resort to act of cowardice."
– Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka.

"America is trying to decrease our foreign reserves, so we have to increase our hard currency income and cut our currency expenditures."
– Hassan Rouhani, President of Iran.

"If the Taliban are fully ready for a ceasefire, then we can talk about the technical details."
– Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan.

"The government is committed to regulating and streamlining the labour relations."
- KP Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal.

"We are all a little bit hippy, a little bohemian. We take that from the culture we knew, from the 70s and the 80s."
- Nicolas Maduro, President of Venezuela.

"My veil doesn't define that I am not modern. I should be judged on the basis of my personality, not my face."
- Bushra Bibi, Pakistan First Lady.

"We are principally responsible for our future regardless of external factors."
– Javed Jabbar, Pakistani Scholar.

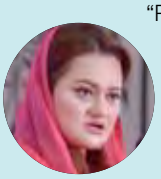
"I have been part of the PML-N for a long time. I do politics of honour not of power." ***– Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, former Interior Minister of Pakistan.***

"Simply observing a problem doesn't mean anything, unless you own it as a problem."
– Dr. Adeeb Hasan Rizvi, renal transplant surgeon.

"Whenever I have seen injustice, against people, communities or places of historical significance - it has deeply bothered me."
- Arif Hassan, Pakistani architect.

"Adaptation after all is essential, ignoring the impacts of climate change is no longer a luxury that any country can afford, least of all, Pakistan."
- Adil Najam, Dean of Frederick S. Pardee School, Boston University.

"Petrol is costly, gas and electricity are too, because the minister himself is from the IMF."
-Marium Aurangzeb, PML-N spokesperson.



"Records are meant to be broken."
– Shahid Afridi, Pakistan's former cricketer.

"I will strive to work even harder to develop football within Bhutan and make sure it reaches every corner of our country."
– Ugen Tsechup Dorji, President of Bhutan Football Federation.

"The best way to guarantee a loss is to quit."
- Morgan Freeman, American actor.

"When other little girls wanted to be ballet dancers I kind of wanted to be a vampire."
-Angelina Jolie, American actress.

Small Man

Shahid Afridi's autobiography Game Changer is rather controversial. He has brought out many skeletons. He has described Waqar Younis as a mediocre captain and a terrible coach and Javed Miandad a small man. The Pakistan Cricket Board too gets a beating. Gautam Gambhir retorted to Afridi's statements and called him a 'hilarious man.' With much finger pointing, people are accusing Shahid Afridi of being a micro-controller himself as he has written in the book that his daughters will not be allowed to play out-door sports. A small man?

Rags to Riches

A Pakistani waiter working in a small cafe in Rawalpindi knew nothing about the TV series "Game of Thrones" — or its anti-hero Peter Dinklage.

But now, 26-year-old Rozi Khan has customers asking to have selfies taken with him and fields constant questions about his uncanny resemblance to Dinklage. The American actor plays Tyrion Lannister, a witty and wily nobleman, in the series.

Khan has a similar look, haircut and beard as Dinklage. Rozi Khan confesses that he likes his newfound popularity and that he has hopes the resemblance could help pull him out of a life of poverty — and maybe even take him to Hollywood.

Atif Aslam Plays On

In the aftermath of Pulwama, Atif Aslam and his songs were banned from India. That's the treatment that many other Pakistani artistes also got. Atif Aslam later disclosed that Indian fans made T-Series restore his songs. Apparently, the Indian music label lost over a million subscribers after they removed Atif Aslam's 'Baarishein' from their YouTube channel. The ban is still on in India,

but not Atif Aslam's 'Baarishein'. Perhaps Mr. Modi should think up another antic.

Controversy Continues

Imran Khan and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari never get tired of going after each other. Following Imran's 'Bilawal sahiba' quip, the PPP leader has shared an old video of Abdul Sattar Edhi exposing Imran Khan and his facilitators. In the interview, the

late Edhi confesses that a group visited him during the government of Benazir Bhutto and tried to convince and threaten him to do things for them and cover them up. Among the group were Imran Khan and late Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul. In a subsequent statement, Imran Khan admitted to the claim and the controversary is becoming denser.

No politics for Fatima

Fatima Bhutto the granddaughter of late Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto has come out with a new book, The Runaways. The theme of the book is radicalisation, alienation and belongingness. It is obvious that Fatima Bhutto is not interested in petty PPP politics and is more into literary pursuits.

Says The New York Times Book Review about her new book, 'It's clear that there is an ambitious literary mind at work... Bhutto's talent is evident, exciting.' The Mail on Sunday writes, 'Bhutto is a gifted and compelling writer, economically and poetically summoning up this beautiful mountainous backwater'. And in the opinion of BBC Radio 4, 'The Runaways' is 'Incredibly ambitious, extremely powerful and moving'. Fatima Bhutto studied at Columbia University and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Her work has appeared in The Daily Beast, New Statesman, and other publications. She was a featured panelist at the 2010 Daily Beast Women in the World Summit and has been featured on NPRs Morning Edition, CNN and in the pages of Marie Claire. She currently lives in Karachi.

AMONG TIME 100

Every year, the editors of TIME recognize the 100 most influential people in the world.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and Prince Muhammad bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi are among those featured by the magazine in 2019.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has written a piece on Jacinda Ardern's leadership. He says that she has sent a powerful message around the world about shared values — and that New Zealand will always protect and celebrate diversity and openness. He says Londoners stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Christchurch.

Journalist Ahmed Rashid writes on Imran Khan. He says the man in charge (of Pakistan) is the closest it has to a rock star. Rashid says Imran Khan is driven by fierce ambition. He can be cold and calculating but he still generates the broadest hope among young and old that he can turn Pakistan around.

Writing about Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan, Middle East analyst Ryan Bohl says in Abu Dhabi, Mohamed bin Zayed, calls the real shots. He says MbZ attended the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and is a long-term thinker; the firm belief that the benefits outweigh the costs compels him onward.S

CHINA CAREER FAIR IN MALAYSIA

For the first time, the China Enterprises Association in Cenam, Malaysia, held a career fair for Malaysian graduates. The Career Fair was jointly organised by the

Kong Zi Institute Universiti Malaya (KZIUM). It was aimed at providing a specialised recruitment channel and communication platform for Chinese enterprises and Malaysian graduates.

In over 45 years of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China, the two countries have been promoting win-win economic cooperation which has brought benefits to both countries. Now it will help in the country's economic diversification, adapt to local cultures, promote community cohesion and inject new thinking into businesses for sustainable development.

NO RULES FOR WRITING

Writing is the most appropriate way of expressing trauma and complications, says Indian writer Arundhati Roy. She says, "I will be the last one to make rules for writing in terms of impression and style."

She was speaking on her novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness while addressing a conference at the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) through Skype.

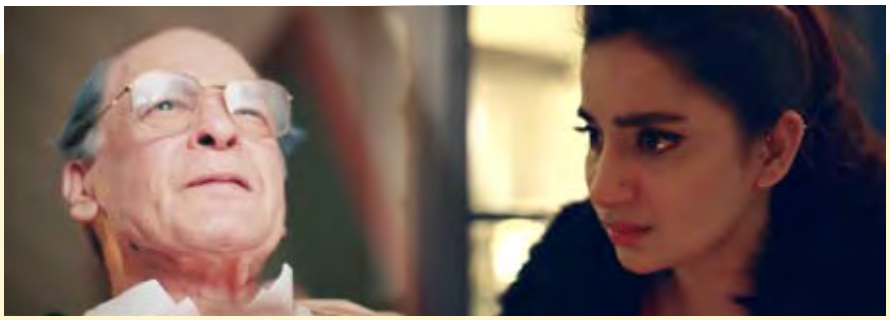
The conference, 'Getting our Bearings Right: Literature, Society and Prosperity' was organized by the university's English Department in collaboration with its Iqbal Institute for Research and Dialogue.

"I have always quarrelled with this word 'activist'. I think it's a very new word and I don't know when it was born but it is recent. I don't want to have a second profession added to writing," she said.

To a question about the place and city in the novel, she said, "It's a book that doesn't pretend to universalize anything or conceptualize anything. It's a book of great detail about a place."

When asked about her fiction and non-fiction works, she said: "I don't actually see my fiction and non-fiction as extensions of each other. This novel has been 10 years in the writing but I think in the 20 years between The God of Small Things and now, I have travelled and been involved with so many things that are happening and written about them at length."

The speakers at the conference called for devising a comprehensive policy on the adoption of the national language and recommended establishing translation centres in universities.S



'Nanu Aur Main' Headed for DFW

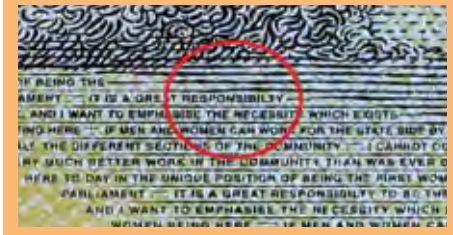
Directed by Ali Sohail Jaura and written and shot by Muhammad Belaal Imran, 'Nanu Aur Main' features Saboor as Erum who is raised by her grandfather (Qavi) after the death of her parents. When Erum leaves to study abroad, the two keep in touch with letters initially until she gets wrapped up in her new life. However, one day she receives a letter from Nanu that forces her to realise that it's time for her to return home.

Director Jaura says that the film is now being shown at the Dallas-based DFW South Asian Film Festival, which he describes as one of the largest South Asian fests in North America. Many high-profile Pakistani and Indian films, like Mehreen Jabbar's 'Lala Begum' and Iram Haq's 'What Will People Say', which was Norway's entry for the Oscars, were shown there last year.

Nanu Aur Main has previously been shown at many other international festivals, including India's Kolkata Short Film Festival 2018, Arthouse Asia 2019, Bangalore Short Film Festival 2018, Tasveer South Asian Film Festival 2018 and Vancouver South Asian Film Festival 2018 in North America. In Europe, it's been screened at Largo Film Awards 2018 in Switzerland and Filmstrip International Film Festival 2018 in Romania. The film is available on iflix.

Devil's in the Detail

Australia's new $50 note has been discovered with a typo. The yellow and green note, which is worth around US$35, has Edith Cowan – the first woman to serve in Australia's parliament – on one side of the bill. It also features micro text from her first-ever speech to the Western Australian parliament, which is where the typo occurs.



The text says: "It is a great responsibilty [sic] to be the only woman here, and I want to emphasise the necessity which exists for other women being here." The text missed an 'i' in the word responsibility; the word occurred three times on the note.

The error was spotted by an eagle-eyed listener of Australian radio station Triple M, who sent a zoomed-in picture of the note to the radio station. Some 400 million notes had already been printed by then with the typo and 46 million were in circulation.

The Reserve Bank of Australia took notice and issued a statement saying that they were aware of it and the spelling would be corrected at the next print run. How convenient!

REZA BAQIR SBP GOVERNOR

Dr Reza Baqir of the International Monetary Fund has been appointed Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. An Aitchison College alumnus, Dr Baqir earned his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, in Economics and has worked with the IMF for the last 16 years. He has been the chief of the IMF's Debt Policy Division and worked on IMF policies on external debt sustainability and restructuring of member countries. He has also helped designed debt and fiscal policies for crisis-hit countries like Greece and Ukraine. Before the IMF, Dr Baqir worked at the World Bank, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Union Bank of Switzerland.

He will be the second IMF staffer to head the central bank. Before him, Dr Mohammad Yaqub of the IMF headed the State Bank from 1993 to 1999.

AASIA FREE AT LAST

The complicated case of blasphemy allegations on a woman called Aasia has come to a close. Aasia was trapped in a controversial case of blasphemy in 2009. She was sentenced to death by hanging in 2010. But due to insufficient evidence, in 2018 she was acquitted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Aasia was not allowed to leave Pakistan until the review of the case. Now the Foreign Office has formally confirmed that Aasia had been acquitted by the Supreme Court and had already left Pakistan safely. It is still not known where she is living at the moment.

ALL THINGS GIRLY

Tanzila Khan, a motivational speaker and author, recently launched an app called Girly Things. The app is an answer to the needs of many women in Pakistan. The simple yet effective app delivers sanitary pads at your doorstep. The idea of launching the app came to her when she encountered an incident where she had the money but due to her disability (she uses a wheelchair) she couldn't go to a shop and get the sanitary pads. Girly Things PK won the 2018 Summit Award. The app has a category called Urgency Kit which is fully functional in Lahore at the moment. The Help button is a thoughtful addition that enables location tracking if you press it and an urgency kit is sent out at the location immediately. There are other interesting features included in the app which is free and is available on both iOS and Android.S

DANTE VERSUS HUMANS

Journalist Dante of Pakistan writes and publishes an all-inclusive report within a few seconds on stocks traded at the Pakistan Stock Exchange after the market's closure. Dante is a robot journalist who is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) news writing bot that can prepare stories out of samples. The robot can generate a 400 words story on quantitative and business-related topics. It is the brainchild of Anis Uddin Sheikh who wrote the initial code and later joined forces with Khurram Schehzad, Faisal Sherjan and Imran Ahmed Khan. Together, they founded baseH Technologies that has since developed, in addition to Dante, an AI financial analyst called AlpFin for research houses and brokerages as well as RoboSocial, an AI social media manager. Journalism is more than just writing though. Editorial policy, stance on major issues and sensitivity to the situation are all integral to the profession. Can a computer code do all that? S

PAKISTAN OUT OF THREAT LIST

The USA has removed Pakistan's name from the National Security Threat list. The step was taken by the US's counsel of foreign affairs. The National Security Threat lists those countries which according to US think tanks are a threat to its national security. It is the first time that Pakistan is not included in the National Security Threat List.

Mir Most Successful Spinner

Former Pakistan Women's Cricket captain Sana Mir became the highest wicket-taking spinner in women's cricket when she dismissed Sune Luus of South Africa in the ODI series. She now has 147 wickets in 118 ODIs.

After the 2nd ODI, she was tied with West Indian Anisa Mohammed and Australia's Lisa Sthalekar. She started the series 5 short of the record. She was the player of the match in the 1st ODI, handing Pakistan a victory with a four-wicket haul.

She is currently ranked 3rd in ODI rankings. However, a move upwards is expected thanks to her performance in the South Africa ODI series.S

SAJAL'S 'MOM' MASSIVE IN CHINA

Sajal Aly and Adnan Siddiqui's Indian film Mom has been successfully released in China. The film also features late Indian actress Sridevi and Nawazuddin Siddiqui. It was released in 38,500 screens in China on May 10.

Produced by Boney Kapoor, Mom centres on the harrowing experiences of a girl, played by Sajal, who was brutally gang-raped by her spoilt schoolmates, and how her stepmother played by Sridevi, with whom she had a troubled relationship, sought justice for her.

BULBULAY AGAIN!

For whatever unknown reasons, the comedy serial Bulbulay is a popular TV show in Pakistan. It is now returning with another season. The old cast is still there - Mahmood Aslam, Nabeel, Ayesha Omer and Hina Dilpazeer. The new script also has members of a family whose socially awkward antics will have audiences in stitches. Hopefully, the show this time will have refreshing comedy and will not be an indication of the viewers' low IQ.

New Disney Plans

James Cameron's film 'Avatar', has a new release date. Initially scheduled to come out in December 2020, it has been moved to 2023, 2025 and 2027, respectively.

Avatar came out for the first time in 2009 and grossed 2.8 billion dollars, a world record. However, Disney wants to achieve a new record as it has earned 2.2 billion dollars in just two weeks. Disney has also dated eight marvel films in the coming three and a half years. For now, Disney is gearing to make money in summer with releases like Lion King, Toy Story 4 and Aladdin.

DIGITALIZING RESEARCH

GroupM, the world's largest advertising media billing company, has introduced an Online Panel called Digital Online Study. It is a revolutionary concept in comparison to traditional field research. DigiM is the first of its kind online study that provides comprehensive insights into the drivers of online behaviour of the rapidly increasing digital users of urban Pakistan. It is a dynamic data source that can gauge ongoing month-on-month trends. Through DigiM any events altering online behaviour can be captured giving invaluable insights when devising a brand's online strategy.

SHABBAR ZAIDI NOW HEADS FBR

Syed Shabbar Zaidi, a partner in A.F. Ferguson, has been made the new chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). He is the third person from the private sector to hold the post. Mr. Zaidi is a professional with long experience dealing with some of the largest businesses in the country for decades. He brings in a wealth of experience and knowledge about the tricks of the trade that are commonly used in tax evasion.

BLOCK on Show

In the beginning of May, an exhibition of traditional brand furniture BLOCK was held in Karachi. The two day exhibition displayed unique designs. The exhibition was open for all, with creative creations included stools, tables, lamps, rugs, decorative items, shelves and much more. Brands like Sanfarina Design Studio, Sol Foods, East West Connections, Changez Basir, Naq'sh and Paimona among others received appreciation and admiration from art lovers, interior designers and architects.

Wateen Telecom Gets New CEO

Adil Rasheed has been appointed CEO of Wateen Telecom. He replaces Rizwan Tiwana who has resigned for personal reasons.

Mr. Rashid brings over two decades of experience in driving sales, business development, strategy and market performance as a business and operations leader in the technology sector. He has a diversified local and international experience from working with leading global telecom and IT infrastructure, software and service providers in various business and sales management roles. He holds a degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.

Prior to this, he has worked with PTCL, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and Nokia Networks in Canada and with Nokia Networks and NCR/Teradata in Pakistan.

SUSEN IN ZAMZAMA

SUSEN, the international handbags, shoes, sunglasses and other accessories brand has opened an outlet at Zamzama in Karachi. The event was heavily attended. Says Omer Raees, CEO Susen Pakistan, "We are thrilled that we have got a good response."

The brand was founded in 2003 in the United Arab Emirates; it offers affordable prices, stylish and unique designs and creative colour combinations. It is one of the most popular brands in the Middle East.

PROOF IS IN THE EATING

'Baituti' restaurant has been started by four Lebanese in Karachi. They have brought in their own authentic recipes from their homeland.

The restaurant is located in Clifton's Block 4 near Deli. Its ground floor has an old school vibe which the owners say is to resemble what the average home looks like in Lebanon. The top floor has a more modern look. As for the cuisine, perhaps they believe that the 'proof of the pudding is in the eating!"

BENEFITS OF 5G

There is an ongoing debate in the ICT industry about whether there is an opportunity for a pre-mium consumer offering based on 5G's extra capabilities.

Ericsson ConsumerLab reiterates that consumers expect 5G to provide relief from urban network congestion. There is a report that dispels the ICT industry myth that consumers are unwilling to pay a premium on 5G. Current 4G usage patterns are not indicative of future usage behaviours. Video consumption is set to rise with 5G. Consumers expect to not only stream video in higher resolutions but also use immersive video formats such as Augmented reality (AR) and Virtual reality (VR). One in five smartphone users' data usage could reach more than 200GB per month on a 5G device by 2025.

Ericsson ConsumerLab has drawn up a consumer roadmap of use cases involving 31 different applications and services. The roadmap is divided into six use-case categories, namely: entertainment and media; enhanced mobile broadband; gaming and AR/VR applications; smart home and fixed wireless access; automotive and transportation; and shopping and immersive communications. Consumers clearly state that they think smartphones are unlikely to be the sole solution for 5G.

Pakistani Plays Broadcast in Saudi Arabia

The 1987 famous television series Dhoop Kinare will be broadcast in Saudi Arabia. Pakistani TV serials Tanhaiyaan and Dhoop Kinare were selected by PTV earlier for broadcast in Saudi Arabia this year. This is the first time that Pakistan Television is subtitling a Pakistani drama into Arabic for Saudi viewers. Pakistan's former Minister of Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry had earlier this year expressed Pakistan's interest in participating in Saudi Arabia's cultural revival through sharing the skills and capabilities of Pakistani actors, directors and other artistes.

Online Registration for Audit Firms

The Audit Oversight Board has introduced an online audit registration firm system. This is an extension of a signed memorandum of understanding between AOB and Security Exchange Commission of Pakistan to cooperate on an effective oversight of the auditing profession and regulation of corporate entities. Through this system, the audit firms will be able to provide the required information by filling an online registration form instead of sending papers back and forth. Registration of audit firms is a core function of audit regulators internationally. Currently, there are 102 audit firms with 312 audit partners registered with Audit Oversight Board.

Erin Flaxman Chief Growth Officer at Havas

Havas Media Group has appointed Erin Flaxman, an industry veteran with 20-plus years of experience, to the role of Global Chief Growth Officer. Ms Flaxman has been charged with delivering new business best practices for the Media Group, as well as furthering the network's commitment to meaningful media. Based in New York, she will report to Havas Media Group Global CEO Peter Mears.

Working with new business teams around the globe, Ms Flaxman will focus on sharing best practices, tools, and expertise across key markets to support closer integration and collaboration. In line with Havas Group's 'Village model', Ms Flaxman will work closely with Havas Creative and Havas Health & You to continue to bring prospective and current clients the best-integrated and innovative solutions for their businesses.

POLLUTED EVEREST

Commercial mountaineering has polluted the pristine Mount Everest. In a recent clean-up drive by the Nepal government nearly three tonnes of garbage was collected in the first two weeks. Mt. Everest is now described as the world's highest rubbish dump. From fluorescent tents to human excrement, all kinds of stuff litters the well-trodden route to the 29,029 feet high summit. More trash has been brought down by an army helicopter to Kathmandu. The trash has deformed the look of the mountain.

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THE LOWS AND LOWS

Much of the earlier hope about major change and good governance from PTI has vanished. But Imran Khan has time on his side and there is still hope that he will get over the infighting and incompetence.

BY DR. NIAZ MURTAZA

On the campaign trial, the PTI had promised major Tabdeeli. Thus, the party itself had created high hopes for its first months in power. Now that the PTI has been in power for nine months, it is time to judge how it has fared in office. Even though bringing about lasting outcomes take years, one can still judge its initial performance by using a realistic framework focused on the causal chain of incremental change. The quality of outcomes that a party achieves depends on the quality of its governance and the quality of that in turn depends on the quality of its cabinet team. While it is too early to judge PTI on outcomes, it is not too early to judge its team and the quality of its governance to-date.

With regard to the team, not only opponents and neutral analysts, the PTI itself has judged it as weak by making such major changes in the team and the vice-captain (the finance minister) in just eight months. Its critics had being highlighting the problems related to competence and integrity in the PTI cabinet (dis)appointments for long. There were too many new faces with too little experience or competence while so many of those with experience had done poorly in previous eras and had dubious integrity. But these concerns have not gone away despite the major changes made as many of the ones not replaced and the new faces suffer from the same issues. Thus, many have doubts whether even the new cabinet will perform much better. It still remains inefficient and rife with internal rifts.

There is also the issue of the captain himself. There is little doubt about his honesty but many question his competence for this job compared with great leaders like Mahathir, Erdogan and Lee, who had years of governmental experience and demonstrable competence before they became PM though some of them were not necessarily honest. Thus, top leader competence is more critical than honesty in practice. Also, despite being honest, Imran has shown a tendency to ignore corruption within his own team. Top leaders have to work through their cabinets, which in turn must work through the bureaucracy, which must deal with society to produce outcomes. As a social scientist, I have long been skeptical that Imran's honesty alone could negate the drag of his own incompetence and inexperience, and the dishonesty and incompetence of so many in his party, bureaucracy and society to produce major change.

The problems with the captain and the team have directly affected the quality of its governance in the first nine months. The main areas of governance are a) meeting people's basic needs directly in areas like food, water, security, etc. b) managing the economy to help people meet their needs from the private sector c) domestic politics vis-à-vis ties with party members, allies, opposition and, in Pakistan's case, uniquely with powerful state institutions and d) foreign relations. The main functions of governance to produce outcomes in these governance areas are a) legislation b) policy/strategy c) projects d) on-going service delivery and e) institutional reform to help them do better in these areas and functions.

No legislation has yet been passed in the National Assembly. Policy-wise, PTI's main challenge after gaining power was to deal with an economy nose-diving due to PML-N's policies, especially Dar's. But the long delay in finalizing the IMF deal increased the economic uncertainty and situation. Major structural policy/ measures on taxes, exports, industry, etc. are still awaited. Meanwhile, the PTI has also had to take many unpopular decisions to reverse the impact of the questionable PML-N policies, e.g., devaluation, energy and interest rate hikes and reduction in development budget. While these measures were inescapable, they have slowed down the economy, increased inflation and unemployment and impacted people's ability to meet their basic needs. The very few overall policies or measures unfurled for basic needs, e.g. housing and poverty alleviation policies and dam donation drives have been unconvincing. There is little evidence of improved service delivery in any area and in fact there is seemingly a paralysis in Punjab with respect to every-day work. Institutional reform is in disarray with

There is also the issue of the captain himself. There is little doubt about his honesty but many question his competence for this job compared with great leaders like Mahathir, Erdogan and Lee.

retreats on Punjab police reform, a controversial local government reform and on-going ad-hoc interference in bureaucracy, like under PML-N.

Politically, its ties with allies are uneasy and very poor with the opposition, media and civil society. This has created political uncertainty to match the economic uncertainty. The PTI's excessive focus on the accountability of opposition leaders is making the process controversial. Many are invoking the PTI's own earlier rallying call that accountability must start at the top with the PM and ruling party. They are questioning why the many cases against the PM and PTI leaders from its five years rule in KP are not moving equally rapidly. There have been some positive outcomes in foreign ties, e.g., with Saudi Arabia, UAE and USA. This has temporarily helped avoid default via bailouts and may lead to foreign investment in the future. But ties with China are in a drift and there has been a slowdown in CPEC momentum.

Thus, much of the earlier hope about major change and good governance from PTI has vanished and there is doubt about whether the PTI can even match the PPP and PML-N. This loss of trust is the biggest issue facing the PTI. But clearly, it has time on its side, with four years left to deliver. However, the tough economic situation which is likely to persist for 2 to 3 years may constrain its ability to deliver change. More crucially, to win back the trust, it will quickly have to fix the major problems in its team and unfurl convincing policies and projects. Otherwise, tabdeeli will remain a distant dream. S

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UPHILL ROAD

Although Imran Khan's political savvy put him at an advantage as he began his term, a debt crisis and a fierce political opposition have largely prevented him from implementing his agenda. He has yet to deliver on any of his ambitious campaign promises.

BY DR. MOONIS AHMAR

Following the July 2018 general elections, the party which promised a 'New Pakistan' based on the 'Madina' type of welfare state, came to power. Founded 23 years ago in April 1996 by the former captain of the Pakistan Cricket Team Imran Khan, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) was not taken seriously by many political analysts as they considered the program and manifesto of PTI, which called for reforming the society and state institutions of the country, to be too idealistic. From gaining a single seat in the National Assembly during the October 2002 general elections to 35 seats in the May 2013 elections, PTI emerged as the single largest party in the July 2018 elections. Imran Khan's vision to transform Pakistan as an Islamic welfare state was tested when his party came to power in August 2018.

Ten months down the road, expectations and aspirations of the majority of people of Pakistan from PTI and Prime Minister Imran Khan seem to have been shattered. Enormous increase in the prices of essential commodities, namely fuel and electricity, along with a sharp decline in the value of the Pakistani rupee, will not only augment inflation and unemployment but will also deepen the level of anger, antagonism, frustration, chaos and disorder in society. Perhaps, the high-ups are unable to redeem the ramifica-

tions of the impending economic meltdown and crisis in governance but those who have an insight in Pakistan's political, economic, societal and security dynamics are mindful of the looming disaster if the situation is not brought under control soon. And the situation cannot be regulated or managed by change of guard at the Finance Ministry or the Governor of the State Bank and Chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) but wise and prudent policies of the government to enforce strict financial discipline and order, along with accountability, can salvage the country from a predictable economic collapse.

PTI's uphill road to reforms needs to be examined from three angles. First, the loss of control of the PTI government to manage the economy and governance is a stark reality. Reforming the society along the lines of a Madina-style Islamic welfare state is not possible when contradictions mark the approach and act of the PTI leadership. Saying one thing and doing another reflects the inconsistent mindset of the Prime Minister which is taking a toll on the country's economy, politics and governance. The loss of credibility because of ineptness, incompetence and inefficiency of the PTI-led government because of poor performance in the last ten months is augmenting domestic crises and external challenges. Reforming the society and state institutions requires political will, determination, enormous sacrifices, perseverance, prudence, courage, planning and vision on the part of those who are responsible for governing the country. Despite tall claims made by Imran Khan, there is no dent in the VVIP culture, corruption, nepotism and incompetence which reflects confusion and poor decision-making by the so-called decision-makers.

Pakistan's economic predicament is deepening with each passing day because of the huge foreign and domestic debt which is now around 100% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Major state institutions like the PIA, Steel Mills, Railways and Pakistan Post have an accumulated debt of 1 trillion rupees. Excessive external and internal borrowing to run the country along with a sharp increase in the prices of fuel, electricity and gas will further overburden the purchasing power of the common man.

Second, 80% of the income generated by the FBR is consumed to pay the interest on debts and meet defence expenditures while only 20 percent is left to run the country's administration and carry out developmental programs. Furthermore, since the 18th amendment, the federal government needs to provide every year around 2 trillion rupees to the provinces as royalty of resources generated. The trade gap has marginally reduced to 25 billion dollars. The pressure on foreign exchange reserves is mounting with each passing day as the government needs to make necessary payments to international and domestic lending agencies. The IMF has warned that in the coming two years, Pakistan will have to make debt repayments to the tune of $27 billion. Alternate arrangements to provide some space to the dwindling foreign exchange reserves by borrowing 5 billion dollars from Saudi Arabia, U.A.E and China are unable to make a difference as the reserves are artificially kept and are not even sufficient to meet imports for three months. Desperate measures to enhance foreign exchange reserves, tax collection, reduce imports and increase remittances require coordinated efforts of the Federal Ministries of Finance and Commerce and the FBR.

With more than 200 million people and existential conflicts with India and Afghanistan, Pakistan since its inception till today is vulnerable to external threats and domestic challenges originating from foreign involvement. The PTI Chairman, before coming to power, had claimed that he will ensure doubling of taxes from 4 to 8 trillion rupees but in the ten year, there has been no qualitative difference in tax collection.

Third, the actual vision and program of Imran Khan for reforming state and societal institutions doesn't match with ground realities. Most of the people around the Prime Minister possess little commitment about what the Prime Minister is talking about. They are with him for their own interests, perks and positions and their lifestyle is not short of any VVIP culture. How can one expect them to adopt a simple way of life as was done in the 'Madina'-type state when they are unable to change and to create an example of simplicity?

Were the PTI and its Chairman not aware of the grave economic situation and, if they were, why did they claimed that a qualitative change will take place in the first 100 days? The former Finance Minister Asad Umer, who was tipped to take over that portfolio even before the PTI government was formed, was confident that he will surely manage the economic predicament of Pakistan as he was well-prepared to take up such a gigantic task. And then what happened? Within eight months, Asad Umer was shown the door and the blame of devaluation of the rupee versus dollar was placed on the State Bank. The PTI's policy of not accepting its responsibilities and putting the blame on the previous regimes is the most unwise and unprofessional way of doing things. As a result, one can observe total chaos and crisis in the economy and governance.

The way out for the PTI government to prevent further deterioration in the country's economy is not that easy and can only be done by taking immediate damage control measures. First, 100% austerity needs to be implemented by those who possess wealth, authority and power. And austerity means their lifestyle needs to be simple as was the case of the last Prophet (PBUH) that when he died, his family did not have enough money to arrange his funeral. Living beyond means creates a situation for the country to live on the dole with its infrastructure mortgaged by the IMF, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other multilateral agencies - a sure recipe for disaster. Second, paying of taxes on income which is earned by those who are doing business, consultancy, educational business and so forth, is the need of the hour. According to estimates, tax evasion in Pakistan hits several hundred billion rupees and, as stated by the Prime Minister, powerful 'mafias' sitting in the bureaucracy are in connivance with those who don't want to pay taxes.

If the new Chairman of the FBR can cause a 'miracle' and double the tax collection in the coming financial year, one can expect some improvement in the country's economy. Conserving resources particularly financial, water and food, will also go a long way in creating some economic space along with eradicating corruption the culture of this country which gives least priority to proper work ethics, integrity, merit and accountability. If Prime Minister Imran Khan wants his country to be a 'Madina' type welfare state, he will have to create an example by relinquishing his mansion in Bani Gala and shifting to some lower or lower middle-class locality so that he can have a proper idea about how the majority of the people of his country live. S

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FUTURE UNKNOWN

Imran Khan is used to taking on challenges. This time it is the future of Pakistan and the captain is ready to again bring glories to his nation.

BY S.R.H. HASHMI

Former president Gen Pervez Musharraf, though not an authority on such matters, when asked about Imran Khan said words to the effect that apart from cricket, the gentleman really didn't know much. While it was too much of a simplification, the remark did have some truth in it. After all, while recounting his achievements, until quite recently, Imran mostly talked about cricket, and of course the Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital.

While bringing costly cancer treatment within the reach of the poor was no easy task, it is not a one-off thing in the world. After all, in our own country, Addul Sattar Edhi, a very ordinary person, having little education and absolutely no prior foreign exposure, managed to establish and run Edhi Foundation which does humanitarian work on a scale much larger than what Imran Khan has done.

I am not trying to belittle Imran Khan's achievements but merely pointing out that he is not some sort of Superman and that we should not expect impossible feats from him and additionally, Imran Khan should not overrate himself and promise miracles.

It is for this reason that it took him two decades to make a place for himself in the political field.

Even now, his success has not come about solely on account of his personal qualities but mainly because people had became thoroughly disillusioned with the ruling parties, the PML-N and the PPP, whose leaders are now being chased by the National Accountability Bureau for their astronomical corruption. The track record of these two parties in terms of governance is equally dismal.

Another factor has been in Imran Khan's favour. This is a time when the major parties, the PML-N and PPP, have become known not for much else but corruption, and of the extreme type, with the second generation like Maryam, Hamza and Bilawal, aspiring to take over from their fathers with equal gusto. It is at this time that Imran Khan has appeared on the horizon as an honest man. Since his sons are abroad with their divorced mother, there is little possibility of their coming to Pakistan and participating in politics. That means succession in the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf will be on merit. Imran Khan has the kind of perseverance which has enabled him to wait for so long for the opportunity.

However, simple honesty and perseverance are not enough to run a country. He has got to learn the ropes fast, which he seems to be doing. His statements now show considerable improvement and he has already started taking strong, corrective action in many areas.

His honesty, friendly style and personal warmth have impressed leaders around the globe which has brought Pakistan out of isolation and saved it from imminent bankruptcy. While the country may not be quite out of the woods yet, things definitely seem to be improving. Considering the mess that the PML-N and PPP have landed the country in, recovery won't be easy and would necessitate taking some tough measures in order to survive. That is the reason why the nation should be prepared to face hard times until the corrective measures start bearing fruit.

The Pakistan Peoples Party never fails to take credit for the 18th Amendment through which power was devolved from the centre to provinces. However, the masses would be benefitted only if power were to be devolved further down to the grass-roots level. Instead of doing that, in the larger provinces of Punjab and Sindh, the provincial governments clawed back even the powers that a military dictator had given to the local governments. Moreover, in the race to grab more power, and the finances that go with those powers, some functions which could be best handled at the federal level were also devolved. All this has to be corrected. In fact, the PTI government has already legislated to introduce a comprehensive local government system in Punjab and Khyber Pankhtunkhwa, much against the machinations of the opposition parties.

Imran Khan also seems prepared to take bold decisions like bringing in Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh in place of Asad Umar as the top member of his finance team. The decision would not have been easy but he took it all the same in the interest of the country and the nation, which means that he will not stay beholden to loyalists, come what may, and would make changes whenever the situation demands. The Governor of the

State Bank was also changed and so was the FBR chairman.

Imran Khan has nothing to fear from the combined assault of the opposition parties. A bunch of thoroughly discredited politicians, who can stoop down to being coordinated by an even more discredited religio-political personality. However, it is good to see that Imran Khan is avoiding creating unnecessary difficulties for himself. He could do even better by controlling his tongue and tone. Calling Bilawal 'Sahiba' was definitely in poor taste and totally unworthy of his status.

The majority of Pakistanis prefer Imran Khan to the discredited politicians of the PML-N and PPP, but he should not take their support for granted. Even though the massive inflation that the masses are now experiencing is not due to Imran's fault but because of theft, robbery and bad governance by the former politicians, it has come during his tenure with little chance of reversal anytime soon.

Imran Khan should not push his luck too far. He must avoid creating needless controversies like the rumoured introduction of a presidential form of government. Parliamentary democracy could perhaps be a better choice but it suffers from many defects which must be removed. After all, Imran Khan is no Tayyip Erdogan. He has the chance of a lifetime to put Pakistan back on rails. It would be a shame if he were to lose it. S

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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Imran Khan aims to eliminate poverty in Pakistan, to improve the health and education system and to put his country on the path of economic recovery. His promise is that of 'change'. But the promise seems to be nowhere near fruition and life for the common man is going from bad to worse.

BY S.G. JILANEE

Pakistan needs to cultivate self-respect and must rise above the humiliation that it is likely to face should it make one wrong move. The pity is that it is happening during Imran Khan's tenure as Prime Minister – the man who abhorred going to the IMF or any other world financial institution, if his pre-election rhetoric is to be believed.

Pakistan has, once again, gone to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan; this time for a "bail-out package" of US$ 6-8 million, over a three-year period. However, though this is not the first time for Pakistan to approach the IMF --- it has been there several times in the past --- but the situation this time is somewhat different. Now it is a punching bag between the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the IMF. Pakistan has to make all efforts to come out of the

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FATF grey list. Unless FATF clears Pakistan, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will not extend any bailout package to wiggle the country out of its economic quagmire. Therefore, Pakistan is left with no option but to take all the actions required by FATF. After FATF is satisfied, the Trump Administration will give IMF the green signal to sign the loan programme with Pakistan.

Official sources in Pakistan describe the situation as "alarming for the country, which direly needs the Fund's assistance to stabilize itself and bring itself out of the appalling economic situation."

Perhaps Imran Khan never thought that things would go in this direction but it seems he has no other choice. Dr Khaqan Hasan Najeeb, spokesman for the Finance Ministry, has denied that the IMF has linked its loan programme with prior clearance from the FATF. He was said to be hopeful about substantial progress on vital issues which the Fund had been raising.

Nonetheless, there were apprehensions that the IMF would not treat the PTI government as it had treated the Nawaz government. The Fund gave 15 waivers to the Nawaz government, but this time the Fund, under the influence of the Trump government, may not extend similar relief to the PTI government. This is something that Imran Khan certainly does not like and he would not approach the IMF, were it not for the serious economic exigencies that the country faces.

Under prior actions, the government has already devalued the Pak rupee by 36 percent in its parity to the US dollar. Besides,the power and gas tariff has already been increased substantially but more economic miseries will further hit the masses after the deal with the IMF comes into effect. As it is, the inflation levels are spinning to an all-time high and the political opposition is taking full advantage of the prevailing situation – something which is of their doing – particulary that of the outgoing Nawaz government and the Zardari government before it.

Pakistan is at present on the FATF grey list and, in this context, it is a foregone conclusion that the Fund would carefully evaluate the Pakistan government's amnesty scheme designed to generate additional revenues for the current fiscal year (with the objective of containing the budget deficit). Amnesty schemes were always a no-no for Imran Khan but he again has no alternative left. The gains of an amnesty scheme are also uncertain. The current scheme is premised on the general perception that a sizeable portion of tax-evaded funds and consequent money laundering activities are vested in/carried out by politically exposed persons and public servants/recipients of salaries and perks from the exchequer. If a chance is given to such persons to avail an amnesty scheme, they will decide to pay a political cost of legalizing their illegally gained wealth. Even then, the new scheme would have as limited a success as the old one. The PTI too would incur a heavy political cost by extending such an opportunity. Its leadership would rightly be seen to have broken its promise to the people and abandoned its major plank of bringing the corrupt to book and recovering ill-gotten wealth.

The situation indeed raises the mother of all questions: why is Pakistan the only South Asian country to borrow again and again from the IMF?

A second round of further adjustments as part of the 2019-20 budget along with an additional revenue effort could satisfy the IMF. But this is not the first time for Pakistan to approach the IMF for a loan and nor would it be the last. A few years on and it is a safe bet that Pakistan would be there once again. However, by now, Pakistani officials have become used to dealing with the IMF.

In June, the FATF will submit its report. Chances are it will be favourable for Pakistan and pave the way for the loan to be granted. The agreement will be signed and a few more exchanges will take place meanwhile between the lender and the borrower in Washington and Islamabad. At the end of the day, after Pakistan has fulfilled all the conditions imposed by the Fund, the agreement will be signed and the government of Pakistan will draw a sigh of relief. All will be hunky dory, except that the cost of living will rise and the miseries of the masses will increase. Pakistan's former finance minister, Asad Omar has been the first casualty of the deal. The issue should not be allowed to rest there because it is not a sudden unforeseen fiscal calamity that has driven the country to borrow from the IMF. It is almost routine for Pakistan to make such borrowings ever so often.

The situation, indeed raises the mother of all questions: why is Pakistan the only South Asian country to borrow again and again from the IMF? Why not Nepal or Bangladesh, for instance? Pakistan did get heavy doles from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Perhaps that was out of zakat money. It also received compensation from the USA for services rendered. When the government has not started any new development project, where does all the money go? Why cannot Pakistan manage its economy and its fiscal affairs? Why can't it live within its means? What happened to the much-hyped message of khudi, preached by Iqbal – something in which Imran Khan is a great believer?

China offers a great example of perseverance in adversity. During the Great Famine of 1959-61, "some 30 million" people died there due to starvation. A simple request and America would have opened the floodgates of food. But, China did not ask, because the US did not recognize China. It was a question of self-esteem. China had it; Pakistan does not have it.

Pakistan presents the risible picture of a "bankrupt" country bristling with nukes. There are people in the country who swear by its security and prosperity. Perhaps they could explain the paradox of why the Chief Justice of Pakistan had to launch a fund in order to collect public donations for building dams, while the government is borrowing from the IMF for "other" purposes? S

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NEW DELHI

SCARRED ELECTIONS

India may have a water-tight code of conduct for the elections but the candidates hardly pay attention to it and even major leaders say and do everything that violates the code.

BY DR MUHAMMAD ALI EHSAN

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is considered a very capable body that has so far managed 16 General Elections since India's independence from the British rule. Hillary Clinton referred to the Indian electoral commission as a 'global gold standard'. And why not, because the ECI indulges at each election in the biggest democratic exercise on earth. Whether they are state elections or the general elections, the ECI is always on the move. In the current general elections in India, some 900 million people are eligible to vote which is almost 4 times more people than the entire population of Pakistan. Managing the exercise itself is a colossal task and those who engage in it have huge responsibilities on their shoulders.

The enormity of the exercise can be judged from the fact that over 11 million election officials are deployed to over one million polling stations all around India. However, it is not the managing and overseeing the conduct of the elections that is the only important activity. Equally important is to 'administer fair and free elections' and to do that the ECI framed a Model Code of Conduct (MCC) – a set of guidelines that the candidates and the political parties have to follow. The code requires that candidates cannot invoke religion and caste in campaigning and cannot exceed a limit on electioneering expenditures. It also requires that new schemes and programmes cannot be announced by the government after the MCC comes into force.

Already hundreds of complaints have been lodged of violations with the ECI and one is forced to think 'is it possible for the ECI to prevent the candidates and the political parties from bending the laid down MCC rules'? Already there are voices being raised that the ECI is biased towards the ruling government and its party, the BJP. 'Hate speech' against the minorities is a fashion with many far right candidates and it is an extremely difficult proposition to guard against this method of politics that many candidates use to invoke public emotions and feelings to draw the majority vote.

To say that the ECI suffers from the crisis of credibility would not be wrong but before that, it is more a crisis of capability than credibility because the enormity of the task is testing the ECI's will. One cannot

challenge the requirements of the code of conduct but it is its enforcement or lack of enforcement that makes a mockery of the very reason that the code came into existence. Contestants want a level playing field, principles that should guide the behaviour of all contestants and an environment to conduct a fair and healthy election campaign which is devoid of any conflicts or political clashes. But it is the party in power that needs to lay down the standards and unfortunately that never happens. Whether it is utilizing delaying tactics to conduct state elections and use that time to churn out more schemes and projects for the electorate or combine official visits with the electioneering, some of the methods that are used by the candidates of the party in power are very difficult to officially condemn.

Prime Minister Modi has already asked the voters in a rally at Maharashtra's Latur to dedicate their votes to the 'brave men who carried out the air strikes in Pakistan's Balakot'. This is a gross violation of the ECI's laid down rule of preventing political parties from using the defence forces and their achievements as part of their election campaigning. Similarly, Rahul Gandhi of the Congress Party has said the 'government has enacted a new rule under which tribals could be shot'.

These leaders have indulged in the violation of the code of conduct but there are thousands of candidates doing this with impunity every day. According to a report, there are 70 members of the Indian parliament and state legislators against whom hate speech cases are pending. Also, according to ECI data 'candidates that use hate speech against the minorities in electioneering are three times more likely to be successful in the contested elections as against those who don't use hate speech'.

There were initial reports of the Indian downed aircraft pilot's photograph being used on the candidates' electioneering banners. Even Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (the biggest constituency of Indian elections which sends about 80 legislatures to the Indian Parliament) referred to the Indian Army as 'Modi ki Sena' (Modi's Army). However, in this case the ECI did impose a temporary ban on the UP Chief Minister. Yet the major leaders are the trend-setters and code violations are a norm, not an exception.

Cash and ill-gotten and black money is also used with impunity in the Indian elections. The election expenditure cap this year for each candidate is $100,000 (Rs 7 million) yet the actual expenditures reach $800,00 (Rs 55 million). The ECI, it is said, cannot take action because 'it does not have an investigation unit to prove it'. The whole debate whittles down to one point – why create rules and establish a code of conduct when they cannot be enforced? S

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PANIPAT

SHAMELESS ACQUITTALS

The Samjhauta Express acquittals were described by Pakistan as a "travesty of justice" that reflected the Indian policy of promoting and protecting Hindu terrorists.

BY MERIAM SABIH

Passengers aboard the Samjhauta Express on February 18, 2007 couldn't have imagined what horrors awaited them. Sixty eight innocent souls lost their lives en route from Delhi to Lahore in a devastating terror attack. Undetonated explosives were found in suitcases alongside bottles full of fuel and chemicals showing that the intent was to kill many more. Most of the dead were Pakistani nationals, among them many women and children, who burned beyond recognition. Ironically the train that was targeted was referred to as the 'friendship train', its very name meaning compromise and reconciliation.

The terrorists wanted to instill fear and damage the delicate relations between the neighbouring India and Pakistan.

Tensions rose once again after more than 40 Indian security personnel were killed in a terror attack in Pulwama in Indian Occupied Kashmir, just days before the Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Pakistan. This led to an unprecedented "pre-emptive" air strike by India on February 26 inside Pakistani territory. The Samjhauta Express, or friendship train, was again halted just as was the case after the Indian Parliament bombing in 2002.

On March 3, the Samjhauta Express resumed operations soon after Pakistan released Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman in a goodwill gesture. Amidst the unrest that could have easily spiralled out of control, there remained glimmers of hope. The social media was abuzz with those on both sides of the border calling for restraint and peace. Many in India also saw it as deliberate escalation by the Modi government ahead of the Indian elections.

Then there was another major setback. On March 29, all four of the accused in the Samjhauta train bombing were acquitted by an Indian court. The special NIA court admitted it was with great "pain and anguish" that they have decided the acquittals, citing that the NIA (National Investigation Agency) failed miserably to establish their guilt. Special NIA judge Jagdeep Singh even went so far as to say, "the best evidence was withheld" by the prosecution. The Pakistan foreign office issued a statement calling the acquittals "a travesty of justice" and pointed to the hypocrisy of the Indian government in protecting extremists on its own soil.

Some in Pakistan see the Samjhauta Express terror attack as an example of a false flag operation. First, the Lashkar-e-Taiba was blamed and later the Hindu extremist group Abhinav Bharat was implicated by the Indian investigative agencies. Swami Aseemanand, a Hindu extremist monk, had been accused and also acquitted in the past of the Mecca Masjid blast as well as regarding an attack on a sufi shrine which was also first attributed to the Lashkar-e-Taiba. He has been acquitted of all charges in the Samjhauta Express terror attack despite making statements admitting to the crimes that he later retracted. Still others in India are seeing the acquittals as a blow to the "saffron extremists" or "Hindutva terror" theory.

Pakistan remains skeptical of India and its intentions. India remains equally, if not more, skeptical of Pakistan. India has long wanted Pakistan to take action against Masood Azhar, leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammad, the group which is said to have claimed responsibility for the Pulwama attack. On May 1, Azhar was designated as a global terrorist by the United Nations Security Council after China lifted its objections. Modi also warned at a rally the same day that more was to come and further called for Pakistan's "complete isolation."

Surprisingly Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was more hopeful about a resolution of the Kashmir issue after re-election of the Modi government, as the Congress Party could have been reluctant to act due to right wing extremists. He may be wrong. Under the Congress Party government, important developments linking right wing Hindu extremists came to light in the Samjhauta Express attack despite them being accused of smearing the Hindu community.

Both Pakistan and India must ask themselves: should those spreading hate and terror not be held to account?

Both countries must ask themselves: should those spreading hate and terror not be held to account? While pleasing its right wing constituents is the Modi government unwilling to take action against terror suspects on its own soil? Why did the NIA fail so miserably to provide crucial evidence and call upon important witnesses? These are important questions that need answers. Indeed the largest democracy in the world should make sure justice is done and should also 'be seen to be done'. The fueling of unrest and divide are not helpful to either side. The two countries also have much to benefit economically if they use their resources for the betterment of their people rather than to escalate matters militarily.

Justice should also not be politically tainted. When Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called for better relations between the two neighbouring countries he was chastised by opponents in Pakistan. The Dawn leaks controversy started when the former Prime Minister mentioned in an interview that terrorists should be held accountable, including in cases of cross-border terrorism, and that militia groups are still active in Pakistan. This led to media muzzling, calls of treason, and a sharp rise in civil-military tensions which became dangerous for Pakistan's fragile democracy.

In an interview to the New York Times, Prime Minister Imran Khan told reporters in Islamabad, that militias operating within Pakistan are no longer needed and vowed to take action against them, even admitting Pakistan helped create them. This must not simply be window dressing but results must be seen. The international community has become increasingly frustrated with Pakistan and India has only used this to its advantage.

In light of the New Zealand attacks, an important lesson was demonstrated through good leadership and action, not merely words that terrorism will not win. Fellow citizens in New Zealand protected each another irrespective of religion or political standing. Laws were passed against assault weapons and solidarity was shown to highlight the concerns of humanity.

It is increasingly important for two nuclear neighbours like India and Pakistan to do the same when acts of terror occur on their soil. Justice must prevail. The terrorists should not be allowed to cause further divide on either side or get away with spreading terror. In fact, such incidents should be a reason to move forward diplomatically rather than to step back. S

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Back to Democracy

MALÉ

Nasheed has returned and is now set to take over the leadership of the legislature in the Maldives. He has promised to turn the country into a parliamentary democracy by scrapping the executive presidential system.

BY S. MUBASHIR NOOR

Project democracy received a new lease of life in the small state of Maldives after the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by exiled former president Mohamed Nasheed, surged to a super-majority win in the recent parliamentary polls.

Consequently, for the first time in the country's history, a political party will be able to govern without the crutches of a coalition.

Yet, not too long ago, MDP leaders were on the hit-list of former president Abdulla Yameen whose Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) was embarrassingly routed in April's national vote.

Today, the MDP controls both the legislature and the executive after party candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's stunning victory over Yameen in last year's presidential election.

In addition to transparency and accountability in governance, a key feature of the self-described "golden yellow dawn" that Nasheed promises Maldivians, is switching to a parliamentary system of governance from the presidential-style rule that exists today.

He insists this change is imperative to guard the country against future dictators like PPM founder Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who ruled the Maldives with an iron fist for three decades.

Sensing opposition resistance, Nasheed has also assured all political stakeholders that the MDP will not force such a paradigm shift on them. Once consensus is reached in parliament, he says the motion will be put before citizens in the shape of a national referendum to let them have the final say.

There is also the probability that Nasheed's other key electoral planks, specifically broad judicial reforms and outlawing party defection, will be challenged by those within his party and in parliament.

Maldives' chief justice has already spoken out against the plan, labeling it a plot to render the judiciary "powerless" to achieve a "political purpose."

In the lead-up to polls, the MDP's anti-incumbency message which roundly thumped Yameen for racking up enormous Chinese debt and patronizing the corrupt, resonated with voters even as the right-leaning PPM aggressively played the religion card, warning Islam's special position in the constitution would be threatened if the secularist MDP won.

Nevertheless, while Nasheed's contention that a parliamentary system where the prime minister holds the key levers of power and the presidency is merely a ceremonial post is not without merit. There are pros and cons.

A parliamentary system undoubtedly strengthens the checks and balances necessary to prevent abuse of power. Accordingly, each branch of government, i.e. the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, can veto attempts by any other branch to exceed its constitutionally-defined authority.

Given Maldives' checkered past with strongmen both civilian and military, a clear separation of powers would, in theory, prevent their return, or at the very least limit their ability to hijack the constitution toward legitimizing their rule.

It should also curtail the "cult of personality" voting culture akin to the US where voters are routinely susceptible to electing charismatic individuals over effective ones.

Additionally, a parliamentary system should provide greater space for minority

voices. The MDP may have won an outright majority this time, but the health of any democracy is gauged by its patchwork of political actors. And should this experiment hold, it is likely a broader sampling of agendas will find its way into parliament and ruling coalitions.

Still, parliamentary systems have two fatal kinks that make them vulnerable as organizing principles of the state.

First, coalitions. Though they are more representative of citizens, coalitions also produce the "politics of compromise." Germany's fragmented political landscape is a good example. In a multiparty republic Balkanized by self-serving political agendas, the "greater good" is often leashed to the pursuit of political expediency.

Keeping everyone happy invariably requires compromising one's principles, while such concessions by the country's chief executive set harmful political precedents that trickle down to society at large.

Another issue that often surfaces in parliamentary systems is inter-organ or intra-organ bickering that slows projects of national interest down to a crawl. One clash can already be anticipated from the chief justice's confrontational statement over the planned overhaul of the judiciary.

And that is not the end of it. Whether for political mileage or simple partisanship, the routine inability of parliamentarians to meet each other halfway can greatly convolute the process of setting national development plans in motion. Pakistan's present water woes are a textbook example.

Though the MDP today commands a super-majority, it is not hard to foresee an issue like Chinese investments polarizing a more diverse legislature and perhaps throwing investments worth billions of dollars into limbo.

That said, given the Maldives' high levels of poverty, it will come down to the MDP's ability to produce results that will raise or crush the country's democratic wave.

Nasheed's "Agenda 19" promises to set a minimum wage, slash unemployment and hold corrupt past rulers accountable for their actions while repatriating the country's stolen wealth.

If he is able to make serious headway on all counts, the organizing principle of Maldivian politics will matter little to voters. S

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COLOMBO

Beneath the Surface

Leaders and experts say the bombings in Sri Lanka on an Easter Sunday show that beneath the surface, relations — even in a place considered generally tolerant — are fragile.

BY IMRAN JAN

Sri Lanka is an island nation, known for its beauty and diversity of faiths. For a decade, the Sri Lankans had viewed violence as a thing of the past. Well, not until last month. It seems that all the major factors that divide a society were at work in Sri Lanka for a long long time. The country has many cleavages of ethnicity, class and of course religion. Sri Lanka is where people come in search of spices and souls, but it is also a country that actually popularized the use of suicide bombing.

The government refused to address the cancer that had its roots in hatred, preferring to be on a sleeping pill, while at the same time working with a pain-killer strategy to address any religious issues. Since independence, Sri Lanka has seen one of its prime ministers as well as a president assassinated. Sri Lankan extremists have also killed numerous local politicians as well as a former prime minister of India, the country that gave the intelligence about the Easter Sunday bombers as well as the country where the attacks' mastermind Zaharan planned his attacks.

Home to a diverse body of religions, Sri Lanka must not be mistaken for a society that has achieved its right balance of secularism where all people lived peacefully with no official state religion. It is rather the other way around. Buddhism is the

state religion of Sri Lanka. There is a special status for Buddhism in its constitution. For most Sinhalese, it is synonymous with their ethnicity. The Sinhalese make up 70% of the population of Sri Lanka and are mostly Buddhists. Around 10% of the population is Tamil, who are mostly Christian and Hindus. Muslims make up another 10%.

Sri Lanka is an example of how democracies can be lethal when they are all about numbers. For many years, Hindus affairs in the country were driven by the Buddhism ministry. A different ministry controlled tourism, wildlife and Christian affairs. Such official recognition of one religion in a multi-religious society only fosters resentment among the minority religions in any country and Sri Lanka is no exception. When one community wants to rule over another, the hatred does not end, which is the real cause driving the violence.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil (Hindu) separatist movement fought a bloody 26-years long civil war against the Sinhalese (Buddhist) majority state. The end of the civil war was bloody, with over 40,000 Tamil lives lost. Somehow the price of both war and peace is blood. During the course of the civil war, the state attacked churches and Hindu temples that had given shelter to the Tamil insurgents. In return, the Tamils massacred dozens of Buddhist monks. In 1990, the Tamils killed more than 100 Muslims in two mosques believing them to be government collaborators. In 1998, the Tamils attacked the temple in central Sri Lanka, one of the world's holiest sites where a tooth believed to be that of the Buddha's is kept. The temple was targeted by the communist extremists in 1989. "We have many clashes of civilizations on a small island," said Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, a University of Colombo historian who is a Sri Lankan. "It's hard to know how to overcome our divided history," he says.

Put simply, the civil war was between the Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists. When the civil war came to an end, the Sinhalese Buddhists turned toward other minorities. Christians and Muslims were the only two faiths that had not attacked each other until Easter Sunday. The next logical attack could come from Christians against Muslims.

Buddhism is the state religion of Sri Lanka. There is a special status for Buddhism in its constitution. For most Sinhalese, it is synonymous with their ethnicity.

In May, Sri Lanka was going to mark a decade of the end of the bloody civil war when the LTTE was defeated. Sadly, the anniversary is now stained with a new pattern of violence (Muslims vs. Christians). However, one must repeat, this may be new violence but it is the same manifestation of hatred, which Sri Lanka is home to. M.A. Sumanthiran, a prominent legislator and human rights lawyer has said, "Now it's back to normal in Sri Lanka. We have a new enemy but the same hate."

Resentment among the Muslims was a domestic product but a clarion call for violence came from abroad (IS) and vectored the anger. When hatred shops for an ideology, religion presents itself conveniently, especially when the anger stems from religious discrimination. "Sinhalese people don't consider us real Sri Lankans, so maybe I can understand when Muslims are attracted by Islamic State, which welcomes them into a brotherhood," said M.M. Moinudeen, an imam from the eastern city of Batticaloa, the site of one of the Easter bombings.

It is extremely important to point out that the state has an indirect role in it by allowing religious discrimination. And that is just one part of the overall failed policies of the state of Sri Lanka. Everybody is making noise about how the intelligence about the attacks was ignored. What deserves more attention is what caused these rich young men to abandon a luxurious life and their families and embrace death. Terrorism around the world has always been addressed as an urgent issue yet with actions focused on the acts of terror rather than on the underlying causes of it.

Now, Muslims are at the receiving end of the wrath emanating from street violence. They are hiding, expecting the coming street onslaught. A group of 500 Muslims are being sheltered in one city where the locals have put up signs such as "We don't need Pakistan refugees!" referring to Ahmadis who faced the same hatred in Pakistan because they are not seen as Muslims. And in Sri Lanka they are hated because they are seen as Muslims. This is what happens when the state gets into the business of religion. S

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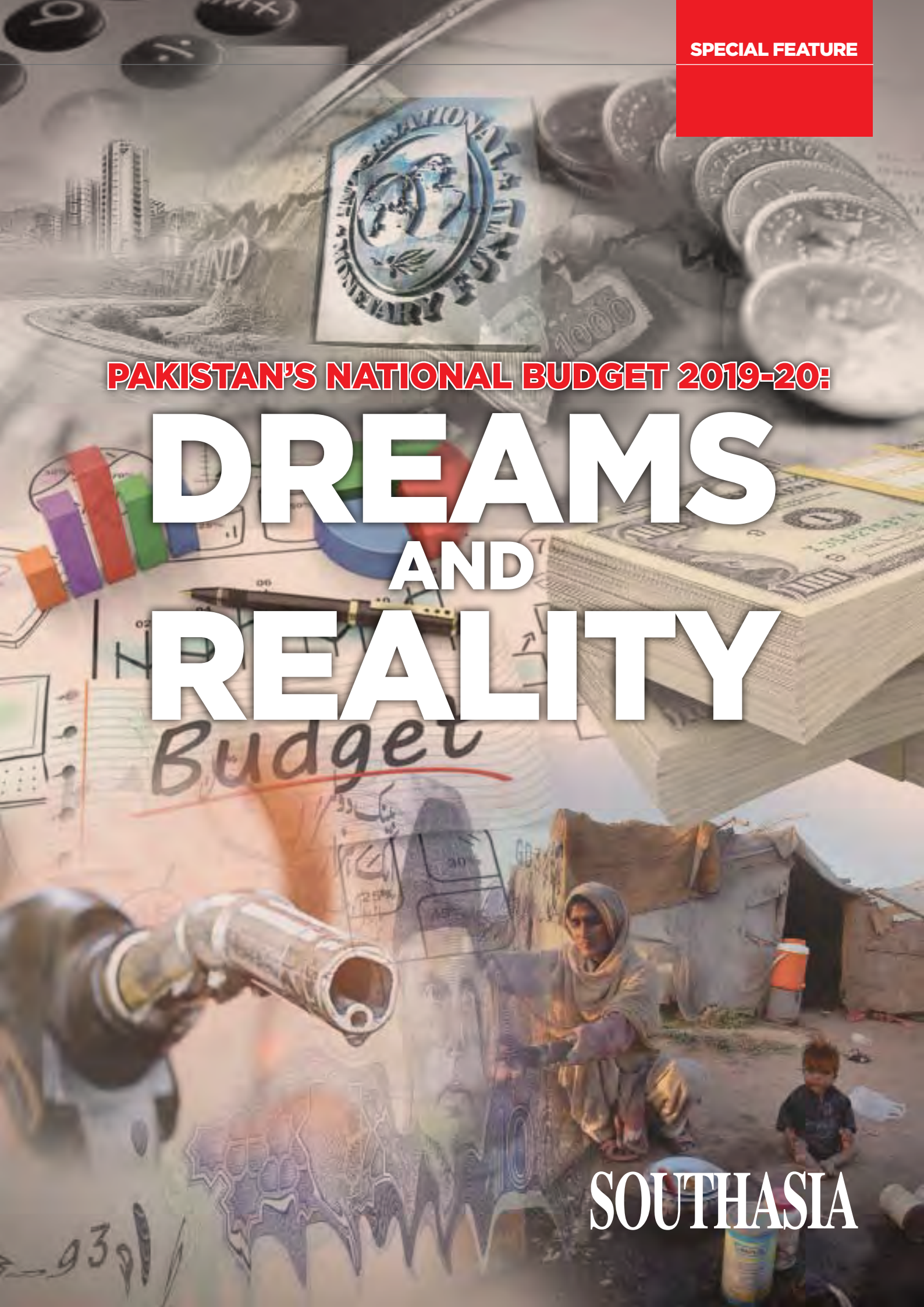

PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL BUDGET 2019-20:

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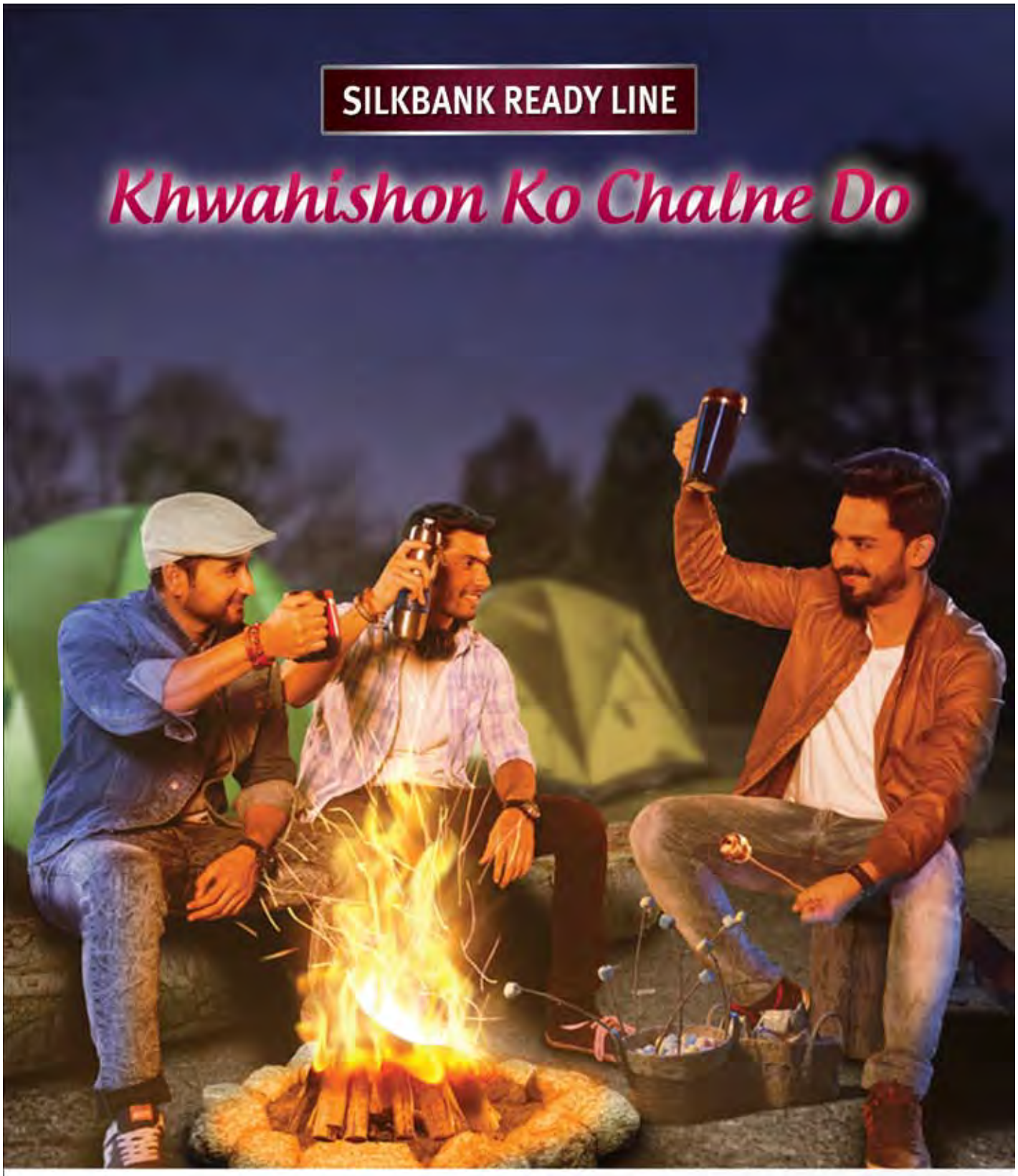

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Imran Khan is losing his support base. He may fail to retain the goodwill of the nonpartisan section of the middle class who voted for PTI not because of political affiliations, but as a reaction to the politics of the status quo.

BY DR MURAD ALI

There is no doubt that Pakistan's economy is in crisis and dire straits, to say the least. Despite tall claims of the current PTI-led regime before it came to power, the reality has been quite different so far. For instance, the annual Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2019 titled 'Ambitions beyond Growth', gave a gloomy forecast of the country's economic outlook. Released by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the report states that Pakistan's GDP is expected to remain the lowest in the region at about 4.2 per cent in 2019 and 4 percent in 2020. In contrast, the UN ESCAP forecasts that Bangladesh's economic growth will remain 7.3 per cent, India's 7.5 per cent and Maldives and Nepal are expected to maintain a growth momentum of 6.5 per cent each in 2019. Pakistan's economy is experiencing severe balance of payment worries amidst large fiscal and current account deficits and swelling pressures on the currency due to which the rupee has witnessed unprecedented devaluation as the US dollar has crossed PKR 150 for the first time in history.

All this appears more painful when people compare the existing situation with the pre-elections rhetoric of the current regime. The PTI had made incredible expectations and offered beautiful dreams to the nation. Lack of good governance and prevalence of corruption are undoubtedly the key malaise that has plagued that country for decades. The PTI leadership, however, made the nation believe that all other political parties are corrupt to the core and once they are in power, on account of their impeccable character and honesty, they will turn the country into an enviable welfare state established in the era of the early Islamic Caliphate where everything was in abundance. To strengthen their narrative of corruption as the number one enemy of the state, the nation was ensured that past corrupt and dishonest rulers have over $200 billion of the nation's looted money stashed abroad. Hence, the nation was sold the dream that after bringing back the looted $200 billion, Pakistan would pay all its external and internal debts and would be truly an independent country that would make policies in the best interests of its citizens without dictation from external powers and institutions. That was just one of the many great expectations the nation was given. It was also inculcated in the minds of Pakistani voters that every year $12 billion was being laundered out of the country and once Imran Khan assumes charge of the nation, that would stop overnight.

Another big dream was that of generating huge employment opportunities that would absorb most of the youth bulge of the population. It was promised that the party had envisioned such plans that would lead to the creation of ten million new jobs. In the same vein, it also promised to establish five million new homes which would eventually galvanise growth in numerous other manufacturing and production sectors. Millions of Pakistanis were made to believe that under the exemplary leadership of the prime minister, all types of corruption would automatically cease and with his team of exceptional people, Pakistan would be soon transformed into a Madina-like welfare state.

In view of all this, citizens had 'Great Expectations' from their charismatic leader who had not been tested before in the political arena. Many still argue, particularly the party's

staunch supporters, that the regime has been in power for less than a year and hence it is harsh to give a verdict. They claim that the government has been cleansing the mess of the previous regimes.

However, millions are now disillusioned as they believe they had falsely dreamt of a new dawn and a Naya Pakistan. Unlike the party supporters who still adore the prime minister, there are hard facts that cannot be denied. In its pursuit to restrain the current account deficit, the government devalued the currency by over 20 percent. This led to increased inflation. Also, it made the country's economy in dollar terms go from $313 billion down to $280 billion. By raising interest rates, economic growth slowed down. All this was aimed at reducing the current account deficit. However, it is believed that the current account deficit will only decrease from $19 billion to $15 billion.

Similarly, while most politicians insist that they hate the policy of borrowing and all swear to break the begging bowl once they are in power, the reality is different. Whether it was the PPP, PML-N and now the PTI, every party has accumulated incredible external and internal debts as the country has to arrange payments for a gigantic foreign debt of over $90 billion.

Due to its undecidedness to go to the IMF, the current regime not only wasted enough time but it also created enormous uncertainty among investors and business people. As a result, statistics reveal that large-scale manufacturing is down by two percent as some sectors have performed poorly, such textiles, food, beverages, tobacco, coke and petroleum products, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, iron and steel and mineral products. However, there are industries showing positive growth, notably electronics, engineering products, wood products, electric power and gas.

Agriculture that represents nearly one-fifth of the economy grew only at 0.85 percent. However, livestock registered growth of 4 percent while forestry grew at 6.47 percent. The transport sector showed high growth of nearly 39 percent for railways while air and road transport improved by three and four percent. Finance, banking and insurance also progressed.

Construction was hard hit due to various factors and registered 7.5 percent negative growth. Some economists claim that the slower growth rate has resulted in one million people rendered jobless. A rise in international oil prices also resulted in fuel inflation.

While the government eventually signed yet another IMF programme, the fact remains that the IMF's prescriptive policies are neither pleasant nor easy to implement. In the federal budget, the government seems to be between the devil and the deep sea. It will need significant belt tightening to plug the gaps. Conditionalities of the IMF deal are not yet in the public domain while the government is expected to focus on managing public sector enterprises and energy sector losses, mobilizing additional tax revenue, following a market-based exchange rate, strengthening institutions and improving governance, including consistent efforts to curb money laundering and combat terror financing.

The IMF deal will also provide fiscal space to the regime and will enable the government to get access to financing from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank which are more development-oriented. Also, the government has indicated a revenue target of Rs. 5.5 trillion in the next financial year, a 36 per cent increase over the concluding budgetary year. In view of their rhetoric to benefit the masses, it is hoped that people at the bottom of the pyramid as well as the middle classes will not be additionally burdened as a result of IMF conditionalities and the massive revenue target. It is expected that the government would come up with mechanisms not to impose new taxes but levies will be collected from current non-taxpayers. Also, it is time not to utilise the modus operandi of reliance on direct taxation and that the poor will be protected from the effect of rising utility prices. S

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'TRADE DEFICIT' REALITY

A holistic approach is needed for an effective import policy to complement exports and also remove bottlenecks faced by businesses.

BY AADIL NAKHODA

Pakistan is experiencing one of the most daunting economic challenges in recent memory. There is insurmountable pressure on the external front as imports exceed exports by a ratio exceeding two and foreign reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) are at their lowest level in recent years. The Pakistani rupee has depreciated from around Rs 105 in November 2017 to more than Rs 150 to a US dollar in May 2019. The vulnerability of the Pakistani rupee to speculative attacks creates challenges for both exporters and importers, affecting the local production of goods.

The data on trade balance available from ITC's Trademap.org shows a sharp increase in the trade deficit of Pakistan in 2005, from $2.8 billion in 2004 to $9 billion in 2005, as Pakistan liberalized its trade regime. Since then the trade deficit has continued to observe an upward trend, reaching $26.5 billion in 2016. The trade deficit surpassed $36.5 billion in 2018. The reasons behind the increase in the trade deficit are rising

imports along with stagnant exports, as imports increased from $47 billion in 2016 to $60 billion in 2018. The trend in exports is a major source of concern. Exports declined from a peak of $25.3 billion in 2011 to $20.5 billion in 2016, recovering to $23.6 billion in 2018.

The current account deficit (as reported by the SBP) and the trade deficit (as reported by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics - PBS) in FY18, were $19.9 billion and $36 billion in FY18, respectively. The current account deficit and the trade deficit are expected to be lower at the end of FY19. The trade deficit between April and July of FY19 was $26.3 billion, a decrease from $30.2 billion reported for the same period in FY18. Again, this has been due to the declining imports, as it decreased from $49.4 billion between April and July of FY18 to $45.5 billion between April and July FY19. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, export growth continues to remain stagnant. The revival of exports is crucial, particularly at a time when the economy is struggling with low foreign reserves and high external debt servicing requirements.

The curtailing of imports is likely to have impacted the large-scale manufacturing index as reported by the SBP. Sectors heavily dependent on imported inputs such as coke and petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and iron and steel reported positive growth rates for the months between July and February in FY18 but negative growth rates for the same months in FY19 as currency valuation and biased import policies have discouraged imports, even those crucial to industrial production. Further, the export-oriented industries, such as textile, food, beverages and leather, have continued to report low growth rates in both fiscal years, indicating poor performance of exports to curtail the trade deficit.

Analyzing trade data for Pakistan at HS six digit-level borrowed from Comtrade and categorizing them according to different stages of production as referenced by the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), finished consumer goods constitute a smaller proportion to total imports than unfinished inputs. Consumer goods contributed 31.99% of all imports into Pakistan in 2018, intermediate goods and raw materials contributed 47.2% and capital goods contributed 20.56%. Approximately, 53.82% of consumer goods imported into Pakistan were of mineral products, primarily refined petroleum products and LNG. Therefore, a significant proportion of non-fuel imports into Pakistan are not consumed directly but either imported in the form of capital goods or in the form of unfinished products.

Capital goods were only 14.24% of the total imports into Pakistan in 2013. Intermediate goods and raw materials contributed more than 49%. The share of imports of capital goods increased between 2013 and 2017 as Pakistan undertook massive foreign investments in the power sector to alleviate the prevailing energy crisis.

Imports grew by more than 37% between 2013 and 2018. Imports of capital goods doubled during this period, while the increase in imports of raw materials, intermediate goods and consumer goods was comparatively lower.

However, imports of power generating machinery have almost halved in the first nine months of FY19 relative to the imports in the same period in FY18 as reported by PBS. The imports of petroleum group, primarily LNG and crude oil, reported positive growth between the two aforementioned periods. There is a restructuring in the import composition in FY19.

Exports in 2018 were at $23.6 billion, approximately 6% lower than $25.1 billion reported in 2013. The exports of Pakistan are heavily focused in the textile sector, with approximately 66% of the total exports of intermediate goods and consumer goods from Pakistan originating from the textile sector. Further, the exports of textile consumer goods increased by more than 23% between 2013 and 2018, performing significantly better than other products. This increase in the exports of made-up textile articles between 2013 and 2018 is primarily due to the alleviation of the power crisis and provision of incentive schemes for textile exporters.

Approximately 11% of raw materials and intermediate goods imported into Pakistan are inputs for textile products, reporting more than $3 billion. For instance, Pakistan imports man-made fibre and fabric to produce synthetic textile products but also imports natural fibre, cotton yarn and fabric. Therefore, the flow of imports is crucial to boost production in export-oriented industries.

Apart from the low standards and quality of exportable goods, the weak business environment must improve as well to increase exports. Although, Pakistan has moved up 11 places in the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2019 rankings, it fares quite poorly in the 'Trading across Borders' subsection. Border compliance for both exporters and importers is not only costly but also time-consuming for Pakistani traders. In order to achieve the dream of transforming Pakistan into an innovation-driven export oriented economy, a holistic approach is needed that not only considers an effective import policy for unfinished products and capital goods to complement exports but also involves efforts to ensure removal of bottlenecks and unnecessary complications and challenges faced by businesses while trading.S

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DEFECTIVE VISION

As macroeconomic conditions improve and a package of structural reforms is implemented in Pakistan, growth is expected to recover from FY21 onwards.

DR MUHAMMAD BABAR CHOHAN

The ongoing bombastic depreciation of the Pakistani rupee vis-à-vis the US dollar cobbled with exponential ballooning of current and fiscal accounts deficits are brazen indications of macroeconomic failure in the recent past. However, generally, there is a persistent trend in Pakistan either to denigrate the previous governments or opposition for such fiascos without digging deep into the root causes. As a result, successive governments in Pakistan come up with desultory planning, by taking short-term measures, aimed at securing hard cash from international development agencies or friendly countries. The economy is always desiccated and dictated by the terms and conditions of the donor agencies or countries injecting cash in the name of bailout packages.

This kind of capricious scenario demands an inquiry into the core causes of economic failure and ways to eschew them in future. In line with the findings of Robert Heilbroner and William Milberg, as suggested in their book 'The crisis of vision in modern economic thought', there are two broad aspects of this investigation. The first is to calibrate recent macroeconomic developments in the context of the history of modern economic thought. The second one, being the focus of this article, is a kind of economic credence overly relying on an analytical framework without framing a vision through rigorous and robust means. The second point is indeed a trap in which politicians, usually dilettantes in the field of economics, are easily caught because of their political over-optimism without really understanding deep rooted challenges confronted by the economy. As a result, they frame eclectic and unrealistic manifestos during election campaigns that are no less than economic dreams having very little to do with reality.

This phenomenon, termed as 'Politically Sublime' by professor Bent Flyvbjerg of Oxford University in the context of megaprojects management, is equally applicable in economic planning as well. Politicians generally underestimate the challenges associated with the economy during pre-election campaigns, later drawing severe opprobrium when they fail to fulfill their promises. The guile promises they make with masses are usually duping dreams far from actual reality. In this context, framing a robust and well-researched vision for economic reforms is the foremost challenge before political parties before they think of contesting polls.

A stark depreciation of the Pak rupee in the recent past reflects a lack of economic vision on the part of the political leadership owing to political over-optimism or the so-called 'political sublime'. Vision is indeed the intervening medium between economic dreams and reality. Blindly following economic principles, without framing a robust national vision, could be disastrous and disparage the reputation of political parties. It is tantamount to prescribing all patients, with similar symptoms, the same medicine without diagnosing the actual cause of disease. Therefore the so-called economic reforms introduced by the international donor agencies, or the countries, providing hard cash may not be able to bring about long-term economic prosperity. In other words, the donor agencies usually frame a gauche economic vision, enabling the cash receiving countries to pay back previous debts without equipping them with a long-term strategy to aggrandize economic growth. It is not to argue that development agencies are technically wrong. It is actually lack of research at the national level that is unable to coalesce the challenging gap between dreams and reality by framing a well-researched vision.

The most cumbersome challenge in framing economic visions in developing countries like Pakistan is the inability of the political leadership to sense the practical problems associated with the economy. As a result, after coming into power, the political leadership is unable to handle the gigantic task of economic reforms in a directionless economy. The problem is not the availability of resources or entrepreneurship; it is actually putting the economy on the right track based on the practical experiences learnt in the past at the local level. This suggests that framing economic vision is indeed a function of local business challenges gradually learnt by the nations through a culture of abjuring unrealistic economic hyperbole. This also suggests that the application of same economic principles will be different in different nations because of their varying business and trade environments.

In this context, the political chauvinism and over-optimism exhibited by politicians only helps the political parties to gain power rather than addressing the intervening wide gulf between economic dreams and reality. The history of economic thought is also, unfortunately, not very appreciative of this aspect. The sudden rise of many economies of the world, such as China, is a result of following a robust vision capable of bridging the gap between dreams and reality. Back in 1970s, after the Cultural Revolution ended, China focused on establishing Special Economic Zones along its coastal towns as part of its successful long term Open Door Policy aimed at opening up the economy. Pakistan also needs a similar framework for long term economic planning based on a perfunctory vision. The best way to counter future currency depreciation and inflating current and fiscal accounts deficits, therefore, is framing pristine economic vision capable of realistically understanding the challenges between dreams and reality. In short, taking right economic decisions at the right time and in the right direction are the least Pakistan needs at this stage.

***Babar Chohan** is a civil servant holding a PhD in Economic Planning from Massey University, New Zealand.*

PEDDLING A FISCAL FANTASY

While Imran Khan's government has a major reform agenda, the existing financial problems appear to be hampering what the PTI promised to its voter base.

BY FARHAT ALI

Laudable are the ones who are able to turn their dreams into reality. There have been many towering personalities who could achieve this distinction in politics, science, industry and art.

In the short history of Pakistan, a few examples are outstanding. Allama Iqbal dreamt of a Islamic state for the Muslims of India, whereas, Mohammed Ali Jinnah transformed Iqbal's dream into reality and established Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims, a feat unprecedented in history.

Zulfikar Ail Bhutto dreamt of providing Pakistan with a nuclear capability and today Pakistan's sovereignty is guaranteed on account of its possession of a nuclear deterrent because so many outstanding Pakistani scientists and engineers worked tirelessly towards turning this dream into a reality.

Today, one cannot ignore the example of Imran Khan. While reading his biography, it is clear that he has been a dreamer all his life. As a young lad he dreamt of securing a slot for himself in Pakistan's national cricket team. He failed many a times but his persistence finally positioned him where he dreamt to be. He dreamt of winning the World Cup for Pakistan and he achieved it. He dreamt of establishing a state-of-the-art cancer hospital through charity for free treatment of poor cancer patients. After much struggle, he succeeded in building one of the best cancer hospitals in the region. He decided to enter politics and dreamt of leading Pakistan. After 22 years of bitter struggle and persistence he managed to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This has brought him closer to his dream of removing corruption from Pakistan's social fabric and he is at it today despite all the serious hurdles in his path.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain, an economist and academician, in his book 'Governing the Ungovernable' highlights the challenges the governance of Pakistan poses to those who govern. It is obvious that Imran Khan has set out to tame the ungovernable.

In an environment of hostility and bigotry, he dreams of making Pakistan a state based on the Madina model of early Islam, a system where there would be equal social justice for the poor and rich and equal economic opportunities for all, with no corruption and plunder.

Right from the beginning, he has announced his intentions to pursue his revolutionary dream and has advocated socio-economic policies and accountability though he has encountered tremendous resistance from forces who prefer the status quo since they have been its benificiaries all along.

Imran Khan has not been able to fathom the strength of these forces whose fraternity is spread into every segment of society. His party people too do not have the knowledge or are equipped to manage the status quo forces.

The process of accountability of the political leadership, tax evaders and businessmen has prompted the business segment to pull money out from the market and go into hibernation. This has resulted in abrupt suspension of business transactions - the prime movers of the economy with the ripple effect traveling down to the smallest shopkeeper. The government's revenue collection has dipped, the stock market has slumped and an environment of gloom and despondency has replaced an earlier environment of hope for a sunny Pakistan.

The political parties have started drum beating that the dream of Imran Khan has turned sour and has collapsed. Indeed, the economy is in a mess. But, some of achievements of the incumbent government in the preceding months must be enumerated. The government has been successful in implementation of the local bodies system under its new framework in Punjab and KP by virtue of which considerable funds will be directly transferred to the councillors to be spent on primary education, health care and civic amenities.

Thousands of acres of state land has been retrieved from the land mafia, online visa services for foreign nationals have been

rolled out, many scenic spots have been opened up to promote tourism, recoveries have been made from electricity defaulters and the target is to relieve the nation from the menace of circular debt.

The incumbent government has also prevailed upon China to divert its focus from mega projects to socio-economic projects like Special Economic Zones which could open up job opportunities for the locals. Also, the Free Trade agreement between the two countries has been adjusted in favour of Pakistan for a better balance of trade.

Knowing Imran Khan's resilience, the show for him is not yet over and he will bounce back. Recognising that the economy is indeed on the back-foot, he has promptly changed his batting team and has replaced them with professionals from the field, surmounting all the criticism, including that coming from within his own ranks. The new team appears to be gaining ground in restoring public confidence.

The new challenge to Imran Khan's dream of ushering in a Madina-like welfare state will be to manage the consequences of the forthcoming annual budget. The budget of 2019 will be one of the toughest in Pakistan's recent history. Cuts on subsidies are anticipated along with expansion of the tax base and increase in tax rates. The consequences on the ground will be higher utility tariffs, unemployment and inflation. Also, a large portion of funds will be carved out of public development funds, compromising the implementation of public welfare projects.

The lens of Imran Khan's vision now needs to be adjusted and focused on a three year horizon - during which time he and his government has to truly and faithfully adapt reforms, restructuring and fiscal discipline and compliance as advocated by the IMF, absorb public pains probably till the tail end of his tenure and confront a combined opposition pressure in an endeavour to oust him.

Judging from his track record of accepting nothing but success and success alone, it appears that failure is not an option for him.S

Farhat Ali *is former President of the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry.*

PAST PROBLEMS, PRESENT SOLUTIONS

The Pakistani economy is faced with the legacy of uneven economic policies in recent years at the expense of rising vulnerabilities and lingering structural and institutional weaknesses.

BY MIRZA AQEEL BAIG

It will be hard to disagree that the Pakistani economy is in disarray these days. This looks amazing as just two years back, there was a lot of positivity about the economy with international rating agencies and media being all praise for the economy, and predicting bright future prospects. The current precarious economic condition has made it look like a distant past.

The current government inherited the highest GDP growth rate of the last 13 years with a consistent year-to-year increasing trend trajectory of growth since 2014. We had moderate inflation, increased capacity of electricity production along with heavy infrastructure development over the last 5 years before the present government came. This was not a bad platform to move ahead although one should not forget that the PTI-led government also had the challenge of dealing with the huge current account deficit and the rising fiscal deficit.

Contrary to public expectations, it was evident only after two quarters that the economic team led by Asad Umar was clueless about the relevant economic strategy to settle these deficits. In fact they created a lot of confusion and ambiguity resulting in transformation of these challenges into an imminent crisis. Now the economic scenario is different as the IMF and other institutions have predicted a GDP growth rate of less than 3 percent for the current year, which is lowest in the decade. The economy is anticipated to slow down further in the next two years. In addition, inflation has started to creep up, the development budget has been reduced by more than 30 percent and manufacturing growth has also been tipped to decline. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, fiscal deficit for 2018-19 is going to be much higher than last year; there is a shortfall in tax collection; and government borrowings are whopping high at 4.8 trillion PKR in the last 10 months. This is unprecedented and these figures prove that the Pakistani economy is now in turmoil.

Keeping in mind the size of last year's current account deficit, it was almost certain that even if the PML (N) government were reelected in 2018, it would have gone for an IMF

bailout plan immediately. But the PTI-led government delayed the decision by seeking help from so-called friends. Though it was successful in obtaining around US$ 8 to 10 billion along with other relaxations, yet the overall insufficiency was soon revealed. Then the government reverted to the IMF after 8 months but the damage had already been done as in the meantime many economic indicators worsened and Pakistan had to succumb to the IMF demands to a level that the top of the new economic team in Pakistan was picked by the IMF itself.

Now the government has reached a staff-level agreement with the IMF for a 39-month Extended Fund Facility of around US$ 6.0 billion. Although it has been announced that the program is designed to restore macroeconomic stability and support sustainable economic growth and is expected to attract additional external financing, our past experience with the IMF reveals that it would be a tough and painstaking process without any guarantee of success. The first bitter pill to swallow in the process will be the next federal budget (2019-20).

Pakistan has experienced the IMF's structural adjustment program in the 1990s. If our own past experience and IMF conditions elsewhere are of any significance, one may have an easy guess about what is likely to happen now. The IMF and other international financial institutions are torch-bearers of the market economy and generally promote liberalization, privatization and deregulation policies. Everywhere in the world, the IMF preaches that "fiscal deficit is the mother of all economic evils," and hence urges its control at any cost. For this, withdrawal of subsidies, increase in energy prices and indirect taxes along with a rise in prices of food items are some of the common steps that have already been taken. These steps are expected to further go up in the forthcoming budget. As the new finance advisor of the prime minister, Dr. Hafiz Shaikh has already said, "Pakistan will have to adjust its expenditures in keeping with its capacity, put an end to continuous bleeding of public sector, reduce subsidies to the rich and generate more taxes from the affluent".

The IMF is expected to suggest structural changes in fiscal and monetary policies, and exchange rate regimes.

The IMF is expected to suggest structural changes in our fiscal and monetary policies, and exchange rate regimes. For example, during his last tenure, Dr. Hafiz Sheikh was very keen to introduce Value Added Tax (VAT), a task he had to leave incomplete in 2013. We might see VAT implementation or at least attempts to do so by him on the recommendations of the IMF. Similarly, market forces will be allowed to play a greater role in determination of the exchange rate. As a consequence, further depreciation of the rupee cannot be ruled out. During the 1990s, Pakistan implemented structural changes proposed by the IMF in the economy without meeting the pre-requisites which led us to an economic disaster. Actions like imposition of a market-based monetary policy largely proved ineffective just because no attention was paid to achieving its prerequisites first. That is why; the 1990s has been a "Lost Decade" for Pakistan according to many eminent economists. Hopefully our policy makers will have learnt a lesson from our past and will be better able to protect Pakistan's interests by resisting some harsh recommendations of the IMF.

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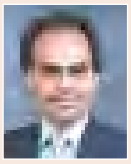

THE ROAD TO FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Financial inclusion in Pakistan could be improved if the gap between the formal products on the market and people's actual, day-to-day financial needs and preferences are addressed.

BY AMNA SARWAR SANDHU

An efficient financial system acts as a critical structure that enables sustainable solutions for a more inclusive and peaceful society. This is because financial inclusion is not just an end goal in itself but a means to many ends. Financial access is primarily defined by an adult having an active account. This account acts as a gateway to other financial services like credit and savings that facilitate families with an improved quality of day-to-day living and tackles poverty and inequality, promoting overall social and economic inclusion.

In recent years, the Pakistan government has taken several crucial steps that support financial inclusion for achieving faster inclusive growth, including the adoption of a national financial inclusion strategy in 2015 and supporting development of the digital and mobile infrastructure to improve access and use. It set an ambitious goal to provide financial services access to at least 50% of the adult population with accounts by the year 2020. However, Global Findex 2017 revealed a fairly moderate growth of 21%.

It is easy to note why expectations to observe rapid progress were so high.

Pakistan adopted financial inclusion as a national priority much before many countries. In 2008, Pakistan was among the first few countries to adopt branchless banking regulations, paving the way for digital financial services. This was further intensified in 2015 when the State Bank of Pakistan launched the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS). The NFIS outlined a road map for priority actions aimed at addressing constraints to increase access, use and quality of financial services over a period of five years, i.e. 2015-2020. In 2017, the SBP introduced the National Telecom Policy and in 2018, it launched a digital policy to address existing gaps for innovation and facilitate market entry for new providers. Overall, Pakistan has enjoyed a conducive policy environment, encouraging private banks and telecoms to fuel growth of the financial sector. Despite these efforts, the percentage change in the adult population with formal financial services rose just 8% from 2014 to 2017. Why is it so?

While the State Bank of Pakistan has been proactive in promoting the inclusive financial sector, progress has been slow as many of the issues fall outside its regulatory mandate and were rather historical barriers to inclusion. With only one year left to achieve the NFIS target, it needs to be discussed what has slowed the progress and how can the rate can be improved.

Gender barriers continue to be a key demographic differentiator in bank account registration where the gender gap has further worsened from 16% in 2014 to 28% in 2017. According to Global Findex 2017, Pakistan's gender gap has widened considerably in recent years. In 2014, 21% of men had accounts; this number rose to 34% in 2017. In contrast, the percentage of women with accounts increased incrementally from 5% to 7%. This means that men are now roughly five times more likely to have a bank account than women. Another interesting research finding was that rural men were even more likely to have a bank account than privileged educated women living in urban areas.

Women are largely excluded from the financial system because of limited mobility and social interactions. This is being somewhat addressed by the introduction of digital financial services, yet there is a long way to go. The inclusion of women requires concerted and creative efforts from both the government and the private sector to address ingrained social barriers that prevent women from active participation and to find potential solutions to end this exclusion.

Another contributor to financial exclusion is the growing informal economy. Research estimates that in Pakistan the size of the informal economy is roughly 75%-90%. The informal sector has been expanding but banks are still reluctant to engage with informal firms due to high perceived risk. In 2014, only 1.4% of adults used an account to receive wages and only 1.8% of adults used it to receive government transfers. This can be partially solved if all government-to-person transfers are shifted from cash to digital payments. This has been successful in the case of the Benazir Income Support Program where beneficiaries are paid through bank accounts. The people at the bottom of the pyramid are also encouraged to open accounts. This can also be useful in the private sector by creating incentives for them to use digital methods for paying invoices and salaries.

Lastly, the lack of capacity among both financial institutions and clients is a valid constraint. Most private financial institutions focus on the upper end of the business and retail markets, while microfinance providers focus on clients in need for micro credit only. Financial service providers have not properly developed skills, techniques and services essential to serving the large chunk of the 'missing middle', efficiently.

On the client side, there is a need for financial and digital literacy outreach and awareness. A survey showed that despite relatively high awareness of formal financial services, 84% people had low perceived need for them. This is not surprising given financial literacy is under 20% across all demographics and the current economy is majorly cash driven. A survey showed that only 2.9% of adults have a debit card and only 1% use them to make common payments. Notably, there exists a huge skills gap across genders when it comes to phone usage. Only 30% of women know how to send and receive a text as opposed to 57% of men. Addressing these preconditions will ensure that every day basic needs such as utility payments and person-to-person transfers can be done conveniently through mobile money accounts.

Pakistan faces many challenges and their magnitude requires active participation and innovation from both the policy makers and the private sector to foster financial inclusion. The SBP has led efforts for decades and the market has responded positively up until 2011. Their regulations combined with cultural reforms have the ability to spur innovation and growth as they tackle issues like uncertainty and reduce perceived risk. Introducing and implementing these enabling regulations and initiatives could lead to rapid socio-economic progress.

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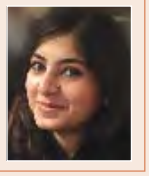

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ISLAMABAD

THE GLOBAL TERRORIST

The UN has designated Masood Azhar, the leader of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), as a terrorist. The UN move comes after China dropped its objection to the listing. Masood Azhar will be subject to an assets freeze and travel ban.

BY S.M. HALI

The Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 has designated Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) leader Masood Azhar as a global terrorist after China did not raise any further objections to a fresh move by France, the United Kingdom and the United States to get him listed.

India had been seeking Azhar's listing since 2016, but the latest push came after the February 14 Pulwama attack on the Central Reserve Police Force in Indian-held Kashmir, which was reportedly claimed by the JeM. The Indian resolution was backed by UNSC permanent members, namely the US, United Kingdom and France. China had been blocking the listing by applying technical holds.

After Pulwama, India tried to politicize the listing of Masood Azhar by linking him with state institutions and also terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).

China and Pakistan succeeded in avoiding the UNSC and brought back the matter to the sanctions committee, delinking it with state institutions and labelling of the J&K movement as terrorism. Interestingly, Masood Azhar and JeM were defunct and disbanded since 2002 and was barred from traveling abroad so he could not maintain any bank accounts nor was he able to own or carry any weapons.

The listing of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the Sanctions Committee under 1267 will put restrictions on Masood Azhar such as no foreign travel, no holding of bank accounts and no bearing of weapons.

Pakistan has no additional penalties nor is it bound to take legal action against Masood Azhar; however, his listing is being exploited by India, especially Modi, as a big success. While trying to denigrate Pakistan, India needs to look inwards as, on the same day, a Naxalite attack in India killed 26 commandos. There are numerous indigenous insurgencies prevalent in India because of the oppression of its minorities, yet it is hell bent upon defaming Pakistan.

The origins and activities of Masood Azhar are questionable. He joined the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1990s and returned after sustaining injuries. He became the head of Harkat-ul-Ansar and was constantly traveling abroad to broaden his contacts and raise funds for his organization. Azhar confessed that in 1993 he traveled to Nairobi, Kenya to meet with leaders of al-Itehaad al-Islamiyah, an al-Qaeda aligned Somali group, which had requested funds and recruits from Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM). Indian intelligence officials believe that he made at least three trips to Somalia and that he also helped bring Yemeni mercenaries to Somalia.

In early 1994, Azhar travelled to Srinagar under a fake identity, to ease tensions between Harkat-ul-Ansar's feuding factions of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. India arrested him in February from Khanabal near Anantnag and imprisoned him for his terrorist activities with the groups. In 1998, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in its report stated, "HuA is an Islamic extremist organization."

In July 1995, six foreign tourists were

kidnapped in Jammu and Kashmir. The kidnappers, referring to themselves as Al-Faran, included the release of Masood Azhar among their demands. One of the hostages managed to escape whilst another was found in a decapitated state in August. The others were never seen or heard of since 1995. The FBI had interrogated Azhar many times during his jail stay on the locus of the kidnappings.

In December 1999, an Indian Airlines aircraft, flight 814 (IC814) enroute from Kathmandu in Nepal to New Delhi was hijacked and eventually landed in Kandahar, Afghanistan after being flown to various locations. Three militants – Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, and Masood Azhar were released in exchange for freeing the hostages. These militants have since been implicated in other terrorist actions, such as the false flag operation of December 2001 - an assault on the parliament building in New Delhi; the 2002 kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl; another major Indian false flag operation in 2008 - the Mumbai attacks. The hijacking has been seen as one of the millennium attack plots in late December 1999 and in early January 2000 by al-Qaeda-linked jihadists. Following the 13 December 2001 attack on the New Delhi parliament, India deployed its troops in a belligerent fashion to attack Pakistan. Swift redeployment by Pakistani armed forces deterred the attack but Indian troops remained poised for assault for ten months. Daniel Pearl's brutal assassination became an international scandal while India continues to use the 2008 Mumbai qttacks to flog Pakistan.

Some analysts say that Masood Azhar, during his incarceration had been turned by India and since his release, has been used by the Indian spy agency RAW to further its machinations against Pakistan.

In 1999, after Masood's release, the Harkat-ul-Ansar was proscribed by the U.S. and added to the list of banned terrorist organizations. This move forced Harkat-ul-Ansar to change its name to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM). Jaish-e-Muhammad was set up in 2000 and has been deemed culpable for numerous attacks such as the 2001 attack on Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, the 2001 Indian parliament attack, the 2016 Pathankot airbase attack, the 2016 attack on the Indian mission in Mazar-i-Sharif, the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, each of which has had strategic consequences for Pakistan-India relations. After the Uri and Pulwama attacks, India tried to launch surgical strikes against Pakistan but these failed miserably.

Besides operating in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), Masood Azhar caused irreparable damage to Pakistan by creating the Punjabi Taliban, a loose confederation of jihadists, also consisting of sectarian elements. Though the JeM was banned in 2002 by Pakistan, its activities continued, and Masood Azhar has roamed freely. Now, with the UN proscription, it is hoped that the group is permanently shut down and its head not allowed to continue his activities.

Pakistan needs to be wary of RAW protégés operating in Pakistan and decry Indian efforts to defame the just freedom struggle of the Kashmiris. Pakistan will have to clean the Augean Stables of militant groups and non-state actors that promote hateful, divisive and sectarian narratives. Their funds must be choked and their organizational capabilities neutralized. The National Action Plan must be implemented in letter and spirit. It is also hoped that the blacklisting of Masood Azhar will help strengthen the country's case with FATF, to prove that Pakistan is working hard to eliminate all militant outfits. S

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DHAKA

Culture of Impunity

Morals and values are eroding in Bangladesh. It is becoming very difficult for the people to bear this miserable aspect of life.

BY SABRIA CHOWDHURY BALLAND

The greatest incitement to guilt is the hope of sinning with impunity. - *Marcus Tullius Cicero (Roman statesman, orator and lawyer in the Roman Empire, 63 BC)*

There has been a very disturbing increase in child rape and sexual abuse cases in Bangladesh. Between May 1 and 8 alone, in a matter of just 7 days, 41 children, 37 girls and 4 boys were raped, according to the human rights advocacy group, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). The Foundation also states that three of these rape victims died of their severe injuries.

Sexual violence against women and children in Bangladesh has become

exceedingly widespread in recent times. Another human rights organization, the Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) states in its annual report that child rapes have increased by 18% from 377 in 2017 to 444 in 2018. ASK says that in 2018, 1,011 children were subjected to various forms of torture causing deaths of 283 children. 108 children committed suicide and 28 died under mysterious circumstances.

The Home Ministry of Bangladesh claims that a total of 17,289 rape cases have been registered across the country between January 2014 and December 2017. The breakdown, according to the Ministry, demonstrates that 13,861 of these cases were of women and 3,528 of children. However, according to the Home Ministry's own statistics, only 673 rapists have been convicted, resulting in 17 death penalties. The remainder of the accused are supposedly either imprisoned for life or imprisoned under various other terms.

The figures given by the Bangladesh Home Ministry are shocking in terms of the number of people raped and equally for the number of rapists caught and incarcerated.

With regard to statistics, it is of utmost importance to recognize that the figures cited are reported incidents of rapes and sexual assault. They do not take into account the perhaps thousands of cases which are swept under the rug for fear of social stigma and threats. Undoubtedly, the figures which are already hauntingly shocking, are bound to be higher.

Perhaps the most widely internationally reported sexual assault case in Bangladesh is that of Nusrat Jahan Rafi, the 19 year old student of a madrasa who was sexually assaulted by the principal. Nusrat and her family refused to remain silent and reported the incident to the police, for which reason the principal ordered her murder and Nusrat was burned alive in broad daylight in April this year.

Tragically, Nusrat's case is not isolated. Every day, there are countless reports of rapes of young women, children, housewives, etc. When killed, the bodies of the victims are often found thrown in fields, garbage dumps and drains. It is a grotesque picture of an evidently lawless set of circumstances which remain unchecked by the law enforcement forces and lawmakers of Bangladesh. The most important question is: why?

After the Nirbhaya case in India in 2012, the Indian Parliament passed a law for fast-track processing of rape cases and more severe punishments for the accused. Whether this is considered sufficient enough for a system to address this horrendous crime is another discussion because what is significant is the fact that the government of India took measures, any measures, to handle the problem.

On the contrary, what we are seeing in Bangladesh is an attitude of detachment from these issues from the Prime Minister and her parliament and a spillover of this attitude in the law enforcement agencies. Human rights groups in Bangladesh are repeatedly blaming the "culture of impunity" for the shocking increase of rapes in the country.

The opinion of the human rights groups is actually legitimate, considering the current state of political affairs in Bangladesh, a country which has become a one-party authoritarian state under Sheikh Hasina, who is widely regarded domestically and internationally as as a dictator. Political and economic power lies entirely within the the Awami League and its cronies. Equally powerful is the Chathra League, the student wing of the party, the foot soldiers of almost all of the violence and unrest on the streets. The toxic combination of all these Awami League associated entities have given rise to the impunity which has ingrained itself within the social and political structure. The network extends far and wide, not unlike a criminal organization. Thus the impunity is also exercised frequently. Rapists do not have the fear of punitive consequences as they or someone within their network of family or friends will most likely be associated with the Awami League thus they are sure to get free rein.

During the farcical parliamentary election in December of 2018, a woman was threatened that she must vote for the ruling party but she refused and voted for the opposition. She was consequently gang raped by local Awami League leaders in her home, in the presence of her husband and children. The main accused in the Nusrat murder case as well is known to have strong ties with the Awami League. These are merely two examples in a myriad of others. The word "impunity" was not used by human rights groups in vain. Undoubtedly, the Awami League claims the accused in at least these two crimes have been imprisoned but judging from the current state of governance, it will not be shocking at all if they have been released because of the impunity at play.

It is shocking, to say the least, that Sheikh Hasina, who by all accounts is the sole decision-maker in the mock government, has done nothing to lead or comfort the nation which she rules with a pronounced sense of ownership. Apart from nebulous statements alluding to the rapists not being spared, her only contribution to the Nusrat case (most certainly because of the international coverage and global outrage it received) was to bring in the family to visit her and to offer Nusrat's brother a job. The woman who was raped for voting for the opposition was not that fortunate.

This, like many, if not all of the ruling party's shenanigans, adds insult to injury, to put it mildly, proving that impunity and protecting her network, and not the lives lost and destroyed are what matters most to Sheikh Hasina, who ironically, is referred to as "the mother of humanity" by her sycophants.

The transparent moral degradation in Bangladesh caused by an amoral leadership is taking a colossal toll on society at large. To quote former U.S. President Barack Obama, "You can judge a nation, and how successful it will be, based on how it treats its women and its girls." The Bangladeshi leadership seems to think success is based on half-baked economic statistics and percentages. They could not be more wrong. S

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KATHMANDU

No to Nationalism

With religious identity becoming a more prominent force in South Asian politics, what is happening in Nepal reflects a wider regional trend.

BY SYED KAMRAN HASHMI

Just as the Alps bestow unparalleled beauty on Switzerland, the Himalayas lighten up Nepal with breathtaking valleys, mesmerizing mountains and towering peaks, Mount Everest being the tallest in the world - and the most famous. Extending southwards from the foothills of these heights, the agricultural plains of the land-locked country stretch down to India, entering Uttarakhand and Utter Pradesh in the West and Bihar in the East.

Nepal usually does not draw international headlines. Perhaps because it is not afflicted with the curse of a strategic location like Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Iran or Egypt. In reality, it has only two neighbours, India enveloping it from three sides and China bordering the North. Nepal lacks extreme religious elements like those in many Muslim countries with similar per capita income. It does not mean that poverty and political instability does not afflict Nepal. Like any other developing country, it struggles with its own share of uncertainty, border tensions with neighbours, rifts over absence of a coast and the rising trend towards Hindu Nationalism which by no means has reached the same level of insanity as it has done in India.

More than eighty two percent of the population follows Hinduism. After that, the largest minority which holds around ten percent of the total are Buddhists. Though, Buddhism proposes its own religious philosophy and concept of divinity (or lack thereof), yet as both these two religions share the same geographical origins along with many social, cultural and even moral values, most Hindus take Buddhism as an offshoot of their own religion. That means, together they constitute close to ninety-four percent population of the country. The other five to seven percent mostly comprises Christians and Muslims.

Till the last decade, Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah, the last Emperor of the Shah Dynasty, ruled Nepal, recognizing the country as a Hindu state and himself as a Hindu King. In 2008, after a long disturbing decade of political turmoil and violent insurgency, the monarchy was abolished. It was replaced by a multi-party democracy. The constitution then drafted took Nepal's Hindu identity away, declaring it a secular state. Thus, the modern concept of a religious republic has not taken deep hold in the psyche of the nation. Upon fighting an uphill battle against economic hardship, rampant corruption, nepotism and blatant incompetency, people flirt with the idea of welcoming the monarch back into power and be identified as a Hindu country again.

Their reasons? If Pakistan, Iran or Saudi Arabia with a significant Muslim population distinguish themselves as Muslim states, then Nepal with an equally strong Hindu population must also do the same. This would provide the same level of pride and honour to the majority as it does in the Muslim countries. For those who object, the proponents say if the idea can be justified in relation to Islam, then why cannot the same liberty be extended to other religions?

How would this affect the average citizen? Unlike Abrahamic religions that

indoctrinate their own set of core values and promote a separate legal system that sometimes clashes with the penal code of the country, Hinduism does not introduce new values or enact a parallel system of jurisprudence. The life of the ordinary citizen hence stays unchanged and the declaration is just ornamental.

To one's surprise, even the most educated and liberal individuals, like Badri Pokhrel, a PhD scholar and a former civil servant, want to make that change as well. He says recognition of the will of an overwhelming majority is a prerequisite for every democracy.

While they raise some valid points, they fail to appreciate the flip side of the argument - a slippery slope. The proponents of the proposal need to be asked first as to how are the minorities doing in Pakistan? They may constitute less than one percent of the population. It is indeed hard for the Qadiyanis - a faction that claims to be within Islam but is condemned by all other Muslim sects in Pakistan. They shudder with fear of being lynched, tortured, abducted, accused, abused or insulted anytime, anywhere, including the cyber universe. Almost a book can be written on what is happening to the Pakistani Shia community. Separate books on Pakistani Christians and Hindus can be produced too.

Nepal usually does not draw international headlines. Perhaps because it is not afflicted with the curse of a strategic location like Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Iran or Egypt.

Moreover, have the Nepali Hindus ever heard of non-Muslim citizens of Saudi Arabia? Does anyone know under what conditions do they live in the Kingdom? Who represents or safeguards their rights? Most Pakistanis who share the same religion with the Saudis, would not know about them. Once the majority gets the right to constitutionally own the country, it encroaches on the rights of the minorities who keep losing the battle till almost all of them have disappeared. This is what has happened in Saudi Arabia or is happening in Pakistan - the Qadiyanis immigrating to the West and the Hindus fleeing to the East - for protection.

The same applies to Nepali Buddhists They want to maintain their separate identity, preserving their own culture, their own ideology and their own spirituality irrespective of their Hindu beginnings. It does not matter how subtle their current differences are with Hinduism. What matters is that those differences must be respected rather than be ignored or minimized - a trend promoted by Hindu nationalists. If that is followed, there would be the risk of making Nepal a cultural wasteland.

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KABUL

SHIFTING BASE

As the Islamic State has lost its core territory in Iraq and Syria, it might turn to Afghanistan as a base for its global caliphate.

BY MANISH RAI

Islamic State Afghanistan claimed responsibility for an attack last month on the communication ministry building centrally located in Kabul. The Islamic State's local arm has repeatedly targeted both official and civilian facilities, as well as religious gatherings, in the Afghan capital. The Afghan affiliate of IS, commonly known as Islamic State Khorasan (ISK), has been active in the war-torn country since 2015, fighting the Taliban as well as Afghan security forces. But recently they have carried out some bold attacks to make their presence felt.

IS Khorasan has received significant support from the Islamic State's core leadership in Iraq and Syria since its founding in 2015. But now as the Islamic

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State has lost its core territory, it might turn to Afghanistan as a base for its global caliphate. Even a recent United Nations publication commented that "ISIS core continues to facilitate the relocation of some of its key operatives to Afghanistan". The United States military estimates there are about 2,000 Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan but despite their small number they still pose a grave threat. That's why United States dropped one of the largest bombs in its inventory, the MOAB, on a cave complex used by the ISIS terrorists in eastern Afghanistan in April, 2017.

The Islamic State is pushing hard to expand into a country that has hosted both Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds for decades. In order to establish a foothold in Afghanistan, ISK is challenging both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Rather than attempting to co-opt these groups, as it did with groups like Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Islamic State leaders instead tried to discredit the local dominant groups in Afghanistan. This is leading to frequent deadly clashes with the Taliban in which both the sides have lost hundreds of fighters.

It is very much clear that the Islamic State won't enter into any accommodation with the largest insurgent group that is the Taliban. Islamic State Khorasan is trying to portray the Taliban as an Afghan-centric force which wants to restore its government in Afghanistan rather than fighting for Islam. The Afghan Taliban should be seen as a political rather than an Islamic force. Definitely at this time the Islamic State is not as powerful as the Taliban nor can it take control significant swathes of Afghanistan as it once did in Iraq and Syria. But it is also true that ISIS has the potential to wreak plenty of havoc in the country. This is due to the fact that It has attained enough operational strength, organizational structure and skills to carry out large-scale attacks.

The Afghan battlefield is widely known to be one of most militant-saturated battlegrounds in the world. The notable presence of an Islamic State affiliate has further complicated a multifaceted militant landscape. Everyone who keeps an eye on the security dynamics in Afghanistan knows that the forces in the country are actually trained to fight insurgents, who mostly employ hit-and-run tactics, including insider attacks on security forces. On the other hand, terrorist organizations like the Islamic State don't operate like this. They launch massive-scale attacks, and diversify their target areas to ditch the security apparatus. The mismatch between ISK tactics and the Afghan security forces' counter-insurgency training gives ample breathing space to the group. For sure, the IS has shaken the existing jihadist landscape of the country, making it more complex, violent and polarised. Moreover, the growing competition between IS and Taliban has negatively affected the country's security and stability. Also, the IS model has provided the new generation of jihadists with a viable alternative option.

The presence of the Islamic State Khorasan could even complicate any peace deal with the Taliban, which has pledged to prevent any terrorist group using Afghan soil as a haven to plot foreign attacks against the west. Afghanistan is struggling to reach political settlements with insurgent groups for decades. For it, a strengthened IS-Khorasan could deepen the sectarian rifts which ISK has established in the country by attacking minorities and this would make it harder to bring about the social cohesion necessary for any kind of political settlement in future.

The Islamic State seemingly emerged as a new dangerous threat in Afghanistan, one that could grow to overshadow the Taliban. Hence the United States and its allies should ensure that the Islamic State is prevented from carving its own space in the war-torn country. Because if IS-Khorasan cannot be effectively countered, then the political landscape of an already complex society stands to become even more complicated and ugly. A strong IS in Afghanistan is not only a threat to the region but to the whole international community. The ISIS is hostile to any accommodation with the west and its allies and, in many ways, it is deadlier than the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As its sole focus on global jihad motivates it to launch attacks on the West soon, it has a fertile ground for itself. S

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WATER POLITICS

Population growth and urbanization are the main reasons behind the water scarcity crisis in Pakistan. The issue has also been exacerbated by climate change, poor water management and a lack of political will to deal with the crisis.

BY NISAR A MEMON

The government functionaries, for several years, have been alerting the people of Pakistan about the water challenges. The politicians, administrators, scientists and experts are raising alarm bells about water availability, quality and its misuse. Since water is a non-traditional security, we need to heed these voices.

Day after day, we are forewarned about the reduced water quantity and availability decrease from 5,000 cubic meters per capita in 1951 to water stress level of <1,700 in 1991 to water scarcity level of <1,000 at present. However, the glaring nexus of water with the population is not talked about adequately. We are in this situation due to ineffective population management and control. The population increased in the aftermath of partition with millions of Muslims migrating from India and later refugees coming from Bengal, Burma and Afghanistan. Apart from migration, lack of population control added to our woes. In the 60s, some efforts and family planning programs were launched but fell victim to religious interpretation of birth control and were abandoned.

Pakistan, with a 205 million population, had growth as high as 3.39% in 1991 while Bangladesh stood at 2.64%. Our western and eastern rivers between 1976-2017, mainly Indus River and Kabul River, provided in a year a minimum of 99 and a maximum of 183 million-acre feet (MAF). If the population increase continues unabated, water will be a natural victim, affecting food and energy requirements and strangulating the already fragile economy. This then leads to reliance on the IMF and other international financial agencies, resulting in further compromise of our sovereignty. Nations and people without sovereignty, especially economic sovereignty, are susceptible to all sorts of pressures, even ceding the use of national territories for wars of those who lend the funds. Pakistan has no option but to control its population, defend its sovereignty, pursue its development initiatives like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and strengthen the strategic assets vital for its security.

The mountain streams from crystal clear glaciers have been polluted with animal and human feces, plastic and waste material. The water flow from the mountains through pipes is not in vogue, except in Gilgit-Baltistan by the Aga Khan Foundation. In so far as the rivers are concerned, we poison them with fertilizer wastes and by discharge of untreated chemical waste from our industries. We have thereby deteriorated the water quality. This is what we have done to mother earth which tantamounts to 'self-inflicted injury'. How callous could we be to allow our people to drink this water, particularly when we know we have not provided them the necessary medical facilities!

This is true for our marine life too where we dump untreated urban sewerage, solid and industrial waste in violation of legal requirements. On the one hand, we import and build expensive naval vessels while, on the other hand, we allow them to be corroded by these chemicals. The fisheries, a source of our export revenue, are severely affected due to absence of legal compliance. Despite several laws, we have failed to implement them while our people continue to suffer the agony of unsafe drinking water.

The government and the opposition, agriculture and industries, urban and rural, civil and military, private and public sector, in-country or in-region; all recognize that availability of water of an acceptable quality is a fundamental right and we are committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No.6 "Clean Water and Sanitation" for all people but yet unable to provide it. We can identify several reasons for this failure, but the key ones are: weak governance and lack of an appropriate pricing mechanism.

Governance is where water politics comes into play. The Indus and Kabul River waters have fallen prey to regional politics. Indian Prime Minister Modi is threatening to stop the flow of Indus waters down to Pakistan, ignoring the time-tested 1960 'Indus Water Treaty' between the two countries. This threat of pitching his country against a neighbour to gain popularity with the hope of winning the 2019 elections is a dangerous move. In addition, India by helping to build structures in the path of Kabul River on the Afghanistan side, is attempting to deprive Pakistan of water from the west without realizing that the Chitral River from Pakistan flows into the Kunar River on the Afghanistan side which flows into the Kabul River before it enters Pakistan. History tells us that cooperation and collaboration, not conflict, is a saner course to pursue in managing the transboundary water.

The upper and lower riparian contest for water is witnessed in many countries, including Pakistan. Our four provinces resolved this political issue by penning the '1991 Water Apportionment Accord' for Indus water distribution. The Indus River System Authority was established to implement it, yet disputes emerged in management of water flows and on release of assigned water allocations. The resolution of water distribution, both in-country and in-region can be addressed by installing fool proof technology, like telemetry, to measure the flows and report in real-time through satellites, without human intervention.

Politics creeps in for the release of waters within a province too when chief ministers issue special permits authorizing some farms extra water, mainly due to political considerations. The corrupt practices of irrigation departments further aggravate the situation. It is here that the watchdog department like the National Accountability Bureau, which have been able to get sitting prime ministers out of office, needs to play its role for judicious distribution of water.

We must not shy away from appropriate water pricing towards judicious use of this key national resource. A proper water metering system in urban, peri-urban and rural areas is normal practice in many countries and we too should follow it. Realistic and not nominal rates for farm and industrial water supply will recover the costs as well as discourage wasteful use of water.

For our region to live in peace and harmony, joint-management of water can create trust, but much depends on the leadership to engage constructively in all earnestness.

The resolution of water distribution, both in-country and in-region can be addressed by installing fool proof technology, like telemetry, to measure the flows and report in real-time through satellites, without human intervention.

In Pakistan, the new political leadership and their ardent supporters need to address water management through education and enforcement of laws for the sake of deprived millions. If not, one fears the French phenomenon of 'manifestation' may emerge to make it happen for security and sovereignty. S

The writer is Chairman, Water Environment Forum, Pakistan and a former Federal Minister and Senator.

XINJIANG

THE SINICIZATION QUESTION

The West is criticizing Sinicization of the Muslims in China to distract attention fom its own trends of Islamophobia based on an irrational fear or prejudice towards Muslims and Islam.

BY S. M. HALI

There are reports of the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s efforts to Sinicize Islam by 2022.

The dictionary definition of the word 'Sinicize' is to modify by Chinese influence. Various forms of western propaganda have taken to condemning China in its alleged Islamic Sinicization, which calls for millions of Uighur Muslims being interred in re-education camps to pledge their first loyalty to the Party. Sinicization is being propagated as an infringement on the right to religious freedom of Chinese Muslims. Such propaganda, emanating from countries — whose own track record of Islamophobia is pathetic — cannot be taken seriously.

I visited China and toured the length and breadth of Xinjiang, home to the Uighurs and Ningxia, where the Hui reside. Apart from conducted tours, I undertook visits to Muslim populated areas in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, Kashgar, Korla and Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia.

Before presenting my first-hand observations, let us examine the allegations against the CPC. A five-year plan is being projected for the "Sinicization" of Islam to redefine the practice of the religion and align the beliefs of Muslims with the CPC's policies and traditional Chinese culture. There are reports about plans that will focus on requiring mosques to uphold core values of socialism, traditional culture, laws and regulations to "guide, mobilize and inspire" Chinese Muslims. This will be done with lectures and training sessions on topics that uphold the spirit of a Sinicized Islam by using examples of notable figures. The Islamophobic elements have labeled the plan as a "cultural genocide" of the Chinese Muslims and consider it "utterly coercive."

I have been visiting China regularly since 1974 and I am witness to China's tremendous development. I have authored four books on the subject. In my latest visit in January, the Sinicization question was discussed with Xinjiang authorities, Uighurs and even Pakistanis having Uighur spouses, residing in Xinjiang for over three decades. It is a fact that for ages, the opulent eastern provinces of China had presented a stark contrast with the underdeveloped western provinces but with the advent of the BRI, this disparity has been removed. It is only that the sense of deprivation of the underprivileged Uighurs has been exploited by China's disparagers to coerce an insurgency and give rise to violent extremism. Progenitors of the propaganda machinery have included Uighurs settled in the West. They have been using social media to incite Uighurs in Xinjiang to demand certain rights, indulge in violence and spread fundamentalism. Numerous acts of violence did erupt in 2009; since then there have been sporadic incidents of extremism.

The Chinese government has dealt with the issue boldly. It has removed the sense of deprivation, if any, of the Uighurs by providing them opportunities of better employment, higher education and vocational training so that they could be gainfully employed in the mushroom growth of jobs springing up under the BRI umbrella. Simultaneously, the authorities have cracked down hard on the troublemakers.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has been an area of serious study by the US in the wake of the 9/11 catastrophe and incidents in Britain, France, Germany and many Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia. There has been a spate of violent attacks. Each country has adopted various methods and strategies to deal with violent extremism. Information and literature is available on the modus operandi of the West and even that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the successful implementation of their plan. As for China, its methodology is its internal matter though it merits discussion.

It must be understood that China thinks issues thoroughly before evolving a strategy to resolve them. Professor Zunyou Zhou, a Germany-based Chinese scholar whose paper was published in the Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence in 2017, finds Chinese CVE strategy to be based on multiple methods, including Western CVE approaches that were examined before evolving the Chinese model. The approaches include 'five keys', 'four prongs', 'three contingents', 'two hands' and 'one rule'. Viewed together, these approaches point to legal, religious, cultural, ideological, and scientific aspects of the de-radicalization effort, implemented by government agencies, public institutions and non-government organizations in the region.

The Xinjiang government has developed several programmes aimed at different groups of people, including those who are 'radicalized' as well as those who are

not but are considered vulnerable to recruitment by extremists. The five 'keys' — ideological, cultural, customary, religious and legal — give a long-sustaining solution to terrorism. The 'four prongs' refer to a combination of four methods: 'squeezing by correct faith'; 'counteracting by culture'; 'controlling by law' and 'popularizing science'.

'Squeezing by correct faith' refers to clarifying people's understanding of Islam while 'counteracting by culture' means seeking effective and practical solutions to thwart extremism and guiding people towards secularization and modernization. The 'three contingents' refer to the policy of reinforcing three main groups of people the government can count on to maintain stability and security. The 'two hands' refer to the one 'firm hand' that cracks down on terrorists, and the other 'firm hand' that educates and guides Uighur people while the 'one rule' means the policy of ruling Xinjiang according to the law.

Nowhere was any evidence found of the Chinese government renouncing Islam or urging the faithful to avoid practicing their religious duties. Indeed, a policy document entitled 'Several Guiding Opinions on Further Suppressing Illegal Religious Activities and Combating the Infiltration of Religious Extremism in Accordance with Law' was issued by Xinjiang's CCP Committee in May 2013. The policy document was also referred to as 'No. 11 Document', and described the borders between ethnic customs, normal religious practices and extremist manifestations.

The Chinese Constitution ensures freedom of religion and Islam is no exception. However, Western critics and detractors of China have been spreading rumours about the practice of Islam being curtailed. Since extremists have been distorting the tenets of Islam, quoting verses out of context and leading the faithful astray with their particular brand of religion to fulfill their heinous designs, the Xinjiang Islamic Institute has picked up the cudgels to produce scholars and religious teachers who can become Imams in various mosques and university professors and teachers as well as research scholars to guide the faithful and protect them from extremism.

To date only Turkey has criticized Sinicization of Islam, perhaps because the Uighurs are of Turkic origin. In this backdrop, it is unfair of the West to besmirch the Sinicization process. S

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BANGKOK

END OF CHAOS

With a new king, will 2019 herald a new political normal for Thailand? Since 2005, Thailand has been stuck in a damaging election-protest-coup-re-election cycle, but the coronation of a new monarch could lead to a new kind of politics away from the red vs yellow confrontation of the past.

BY ANEELA SHAHZAD

Thailand's departure in 1932 from absolute monarchy to a constitutional one and its subsequent experiments with democracy, have been a plunge into a chasm of uncertainty and chaotic experimentation.

In its democratic experience, Thailand has witnessed a decades long feud between an established order backed by the troika of the monarchy, the military and the bureaucracy and the newly-evolving political parties.

Entrenched for over two centuries in history, the monarchy under the Chakri Dynasty is not only revered in Thai culture and in the hearts of the people, but has also penetrated in the established order of the country. For this reason, though the monarchs have welcomed democracy, they have deterred it from becoming an uncontrollable force that would trample under its feet, Thai heritage and aristocracy, which has also been the guard of its peace and security. But in this urge for control, the established order has made extraordinary feats in moulding the democratic ideal in its own unique casting.

However vital and satiating, the idea of democracy is always accompanied with vices like populism, electoral rigging, graft, money politics, corruption, cronyism

and what not – Thailand's political parties had all these germs too – and the only way the monarchs knew of to curb them from these vices was to end the game every time and restart from square one, hence 19 coups, 19 different constitutions, and 35 different prime ministers since 1932. Most of these constitutions have been written by the military itself with little or no participation of the political parties.

Owing to relatively people-friendly constitutions between the 1970s and 90s, Thailand saw a high growth rate of 7% to 10% that resulted in the growth of an educated middle class and an elite business class that pushed for more share in political power. However, political upheaval continued until the 10 years period of Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda followed by 2 years of Gen. Chatichai's government from 1980 to 91. After this, there was political chaos again with continuous coups that did not allow any government to complete its full tenure.

In 1997, the military designed a new constitution that would ensure transparency and accountability by providing for a fully elected bicameral legislature, empowered to impeach unscrupulous cabinet ministers, and by installing agencies to check graft and the assets of politicians. Under the shadow of this constitution, Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunications tycoon and his party the TRT rose to prominence and won the 2001 and 2005 elections. Thaksin rose through his populist agenda of income distribution that captured the hearts and minds of Thailand's rural majority. His economic activities led the country towards economic growth again and allowed him to induct cheap health care and rural microcredit programs that gave him a permanent populism. Yet, in all this time, criticism mounted against Thaksin's abuses of power by which he monopolized the electoral system, manipulated the constitution and penetrated the institutions made for accountability. In 2006 as Thaksin sold a family-owned telecom giant to Singapore, he approved a law that gave him a tax-exemption of US$1.9 billion, just one day before the sale. Thaksin was removed by a coup and went into exile.

From exile, Thaksin has continued to influence Thai politics and reorganized his followers in the People's Power Party that won in 2008 elections and its successor party the Pheu Thai, that won again in 2011, only to be downed by coups every time. The political chaos was only fenced when the military formed the National Council for Peace and Order in 2014 and self-appointed former General Prayut Chan-o-Cha the PM of the country, under whom Thailand has had its 2019 elections.

These latest elections have been designed under yet another constitution that allows the 500 seats of the Lower House to be elected, while the 250 seats of the Senate are all appointed by the Junta. Therefore, for Gen. Prayut to win, he would only require 126 seats in the Lower House.

The results were finally announced after a lag of one and a half months on May 9, with Thaksin's Pheu Thai topping the field by 136 seats, the pro-Junta Palang Pracharath coming second with 97 seats and the Future Forward Party scoring 80 seats. The already pro-Junta electoral system was further manipulated by the Election Commission, when it awarded 11 seats to small parties that were not eligible owing to being much below the 'popular vote threshold of 71,000 required for being awarded a seat according to the constitution – an act that is being interpreted as the EC's 'controversial calculation formula', further proving the EC to be an instrument of the Junta. This was added with the usual allegations of EC malfunctioning, miscounting of ballots, vote buying and vote stuffing on Election Day.

All this has given General Prayut Chan-o-Cha an easy return to power, but gives democracy a bad name in the region. Critics have alleged that the long time gap allowed the military-royalist establishment to manipulate results, and that the 11 seats awarded to the unpopular parties will easily be bought by the Junta.

In an attempt to bar the General from consolidating power, 7 leading parties including Pheu Thai have made the 'Democratic Front' which have around 245 seats between them – a near majority in the lower house – yet far behind the General and the Senate combined.

If the Democratic Front is able to sustain its alliance, the least they would be able to do would be to make the General miserable in decision-making in the Parliament – and the worst they could do would be inciting a series of street protests and popular agitation around the country – a move that, sadly, may not be helpful in securing a true democracy for the people of Thailand – but would certainly be helpful in rolling the country into uncontrolled violence and in further destabilizing the peace prospects of the country and the region. S

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GOLAN

The Hornet's Nest

U.S. President Donald Trump has made the controversial decision of recognizing Israel's 1981 annexation of the Golan Heights. The move will have a fierce afterburn. It will damage Israeli security and undermine American interests in the Middle East and beyond, while stirring a hornet's nest.

BY ATIF SHAMIM SYED

Donald Trump has a flair for drama. Recently, he took the role of an artificer and deployed a payload of political dynamite at the foot of Mount Hermon in Palestine. Thanks to his precipitous political whims, the area already known to be extremely volatile is at the brink of a blast.

The bomb was dropped on March 25, 2019 when Trump, in all his arrogance and ignorance, proclaimed that the United States recognizes the Golan Heights as a part of Israel. This rendered the US as the only country in the world to do so. A shocked European Union hurriedly announced that it does not recognize Israel's claim over the disputed territory, keeping in line with international law which states that land acquired through war, whether defensive or aggressive, cannot be annexed.

The Golan Heights is located on the border between Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The 1,500 square kilometers of Golan were occupied by Israel during the fighting against Syria in June 1967. The area is very important for both Syria and Israel militarily as well as strategically. On the Israeli side, it overlooks the Sea of Galilee. On the Syrian side it offers an excellent vantage point all the way to Damascus. From the Israeli perspective, a protective buffer zone providing a peek right into the heart of the enemy couldn't be any better.

Over the last five decades, Israeli leaders have tried to negotiate peace with Syria in return for Golan. However, it was never disputed that the territory belonged to Syria and will have to be returned to its rightful owner at some point in the future. That is, until Trump declares otherwise. Obviously, the president didn't even bother to consult his own lawyers at the State Department who regard Golan as Syrian territory. Donald Trump's decision has fundamentally altered the political context of the Golan. He has squandered any chances of peace in the future between Syria and Israel.

Trump's Golan declaration is the second diplomatic victory for Benjamin Netanyahu. The first was the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Donald Trump – being a shrewd businessman – has other reasons for the abrupt Golan decision. It is not a coincidence that the announcement was made on the same day that the main Israeli lobby group was holding its annual conference in the US capital. This year a number of democrats boycotted the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) meeting. Team Trump was quick to portray it as a sign of the Democratic Party's waning support for Israel in a deliberate attempt to woo the Jews and evangelical Christians towards their own Republican Party. In fact, Trump is more interested in the evangelical vote bank which constitutes 25% of the US electorate. Jews represent only about 2%.

With Donald Trump in office, co-ordination between Israeli and American administrations has reached an unprecedented level.

The evangelical community is highly supportive of Israel. Some of the most important positions in the Trump administration are occupied by members of this community who are helping their president gradually shift the US discourse towards the right. This is very favourable for Israel's own rightist prime minister who could never get along well with Trump's liberal predecessor, Barack Obama. Now,

The Trump-Netanyahu alliance is highly beneficial for Israel but it is proving even more catastrophic for the Palestinians.

with Donald Trump in office, co-ordination between Israeli and American administrations has reached an unprecedented level. A series of political decisions in favour of Israel has improved re-election chances for both incumbents in their respective countries.

The Trump-Netanyahu alliance is highly beneficial for Israel but it is proving even more catastrophic for the Palestinians. Slowly and methodically, the US president is dismantling the Palestinians state. Trump's benevolent attitude towards Israel may well prompt the Jewish state to begin annexing parts of the West Bank. Such a move will render the future of the establishment of a separate Palestinian state inconceivable. It will be last nail in the coffin of the two-state solution.

The Palestinians are now truly isolated. Their dream of a separate Palestinian state within UN recognized borders is shattered. There is no hope for Arab-Israeli reconciliation. This is the same situation in which the people of Palestine found themselves after the Nakba – the forced exodus of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948.

At that point, the Palestinians had no genuine leaders. It took them seventeen years to establish an organized resistance to the occupation of their lands. Fatah was able to not only unite the Palestinians but also the wider Arab world behind a single cause.

The Arab man in the street is still in favour of the Palestinian cause. Recently, as protestors swarmed the streets of Algiers, the only other flag that could be seen was Palestine's. Another wave of the Arab Spring, the unfolding of which could emerge from Algeria, will change the entire Middle East equation.

Donald Trump is unable to see that. With a series of irrational decisions, he is not strengthening Israel. He is laying the foundations of the next bigger - and brutal - war.

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CAIRO

TALKING SHOP

The Arab League can step out of its present role as merely a talking shop and infuse unity among its member countries, some of which have the desired money and resources, to form a huge and very effective global political entity.

BY MANISH RAI

The Arab League, commonly known as the League of Arab States, was formed in 1945 for the purpose of aligning the Arab nations on matters of mutual interest and concern. The foundation of the League was laid by the Alexandria Protocol of 1944 issued by representatives of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan (now Jordan). The undercurrent for Arab unity started from the Arab Revolution against the Ottoman rule in 1916. Many Arab scholars at the time wanted to unify the Arab world into one big entity.

Since then, nationalism was on the rise in the greater Middle East and elsewhere. An Arabic nationalism ideology was adopted as people were looking for ways to end the presence of colonial powers in the region and to achieve independence. Thus, the formation of the Arab League was complementary to the circumstances that the Arab world was living in at that time. The Arab League has witnessed both good and bad times since its formation but this pan-Arab body is struggling to find its relevance today. The Arab League today represents a little more than a fake talking shop where Arab leaders engage in brief meetings whilst exchanging empty pleasantries, before going back and pursuing their vested interests.

The stated purposes of the Arab League are to strengthen ties among the member states, coordinate their policies, and promote their common interests. But ironically, it has failed to achieve any of these objectives. There are various reasons responsible for making the grouping lose its appeal. First is the growing divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims as it is creating further fissures among the Arabs.

Now there is a growing tendency for people to identify themselves as Shia or Sunni rather than as Arabs. The League is considered by a growing number of people as a Sunni Arab body rather than a pan Arab body. Another important reason is the absence of democracy in the member states of the League. It looks like the Arab League is the meeting platform for Arab dictators rather than Arab nations. Also, there is negligible economic integration among member states and flow of capital and manpower is highly restricted. History has demonstrated that powerful trading blocs have strengthened regional groupings. The best example is the European Union. The Arab League does not represent any such trend.

Moreover, two regional non-Arab powers, Iran and Turkey, are penetrating lands in Iraq and Syria and openly interfering in the affairs of many Arab states, including Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. Iran now has significant influence in the Arab world through its state and non-state actors. Ankara and Tehran are in a much better position to undermine any serious efforts of strengthening Arab unity.

Another contributing factor for the decline of the League's relevance is the lack of institutional reforms. The League should address the functional overlap between bodies such as the Council, the Political Committee and the Summit meetings, and should reinforce the powers of the Secretariat. Also, there is lack of cooperation among the members to counter growing extremism which is a common threat for the entire Arab world. No serious thought has been given by the league to formulate a joint counter-terrorism effort. Increased intelligence co-operation and a centralised intelligence gathering mechanism is the need of the hour. It should not infringe on the sovereignty of member states and should be unanimously and immediately passed by the League without any hindrance and lengthy bureaucratic obstacles. Despite all its flaws, the Arab League has one core advantage. It is the only regional organization which brings together all Arab states. If the organisation is strengthened, it could be a powerful regional platform for coordination and cooperation.

Arab states have to understand that Arab unity doesn't only mean criticising Israel, talking about the Iranian threat and giving mere statements of support for the Palestinian cause; it has to go much beyond that. The Arab world must rise to meet the many challenges it faces and take control of its own fate rather than just leaving it to global powers. The concept of a wider Arab identity in the form of a transnational narrative (qawmiya) should be promoted. The Arabs should also understand the potential of enhanced mutual cooperation. If, in the future, the Arab world is somehow united to form a single powerful federation or confederation, it would be the third largest state-entity in the world, behind China and India and just ahead of the United States. Because of its energy wealth, its access to some of the world's most important shipping lanes and its younger population, such a United Arab Federation could become a global superpower. At this point, it looks nearly impossible to think about an Arab federation but if given the right direction and with sincere efforts, such a body can be a possibility in the future. Small steps today can lead to major results tomorrow. S

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TRIPOLI

A Strongman for Unity

Libya's latest upheaval comes at the hands of a military strongman who lived in the U.S. for 20 years, has past links with the CIA, and recently spoke on the phone with President Donald Trump about their "shared vision" for the country.

BY MANISH RAI

General Khalifa Haftar's ongoing offensive against the capital Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) is not going very well even after several weeks of intense fighting. Haftar's forces have, however, failed to breach the southern defences of the city. That is mainly because the militias allied with GNA are fighting in their backyard. These militias do not have long supply lines to protect, freeing their forces to move quickly as

necessary. On the contrary, the Libya National Army has major problems with their supply lines, which stretch across hundreds of kilometres of desert to its base of operations near Benghazi. But despite this, General Haftar is the most dominant player in the Libyan political landscape and controls, according to some estimates, 70 to 80 percent of Libya. The general's forces have both strengthened their hold on their stronghold in Cyrenaica in eastern Libya and advanced slowly towards western Libya into critical terrain since May 2017. Moreover, the recent push in the southern region of Fezzan has left Haftar in control of most border crossings and many key oil installations, including the large oil fields in the Murzuk basin.

The veteran general clearly understands different dynamics of power in Libya based on region, city, tribe, political factions, ethnicity, and militia membership. That's why Haftar has ensured that he gets support from major tribes like Magharba, Baraasa, Hasa, Obaidat and up to some extent Zintan which has the most powerful tribal militia called Zintani brigades. Recently Haftar established contact with western Libyan tribes Warfalla and Tarhouna as well. Speaking of foreign backing, the general looks strong as even the Tripoli based government has international recognition. Haftar has the backing of Egypt, France, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Rumours are in circulation that the Russians of the Wagner Group, the main private military group used by Russia, are present in the LNA forces. United States President Donald Trump spoke by telephone with General Haftar recently and recognized his significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya's oil resources. This has definitely boasted the morale of Haftar and his forces. Hence, the General has carefully taken care of internal and international dynamics and ensured that it worked in his favour.

On the military strength aspect as well, Haftar looks stronger. The general's Libyan National Army, is the strongest force in Libya as of now in terms of both men and material. LNA consists of a nationalist coalition of military units, local and tribal militias, Salafi fighters and Sudanese mercenaries, particularly from the Darfuri rebel groups. The LNA currently controls the populated areas of eastern Libya, the oil crescent region, and strategic military sites in the southwest which has boosted the role of General Haftar. It is a game changer in Libyan politics. Haftar's forces are also unique in Libya as they include a small but functioning air force. Because of the large number of trained ex-Gadhafi air force personnel who joined his cause, Haftar has almost complete air superiority over Libya. He has used this to launch air raids on Tripoli, Misrata and the western mountains, as well as for close-air-support missions in Benghazi and Derna. His jets have targeted civilian infrastructure, such as Tripoli's Mitiga Airport, the capital's only functioning air terminal since forces allied to Libya destroyed the Tripoli international airport last year.

A significant number of Libyans now see Haftar as the only person who can bring some form of order in their lawless and chaotic country.

Khalifa Haftar is also hoping to capitalise on the increasing discontent among the civilian population in western Libya. The situation inside Tripoli has been steadily deteriorating. Crime, insecurity and corruption have been on the rise, while living conditions have markedly worsened as the local economy has struggled and the provision of social and health services has nearly collapsed. The capital is divided between different militias with different vested interests, and the GNA is itself weak and corrupt to control them. Haftar has tried to project himself as a military strongman who could unite the country and bring back stability and order. This self-styled image as Libya's saviour has been promoted by a massive propaganda programme propagated by backers of Haftar. Due to this, a significant number of Libyans now see Haftar as the only person who can bring some form of order in their lawless and chaotic country.

It is a reality now that united Libya is unimaginable without the support of General Haftar. He is too powerful to be ignored. To ensure long-term stability for Libya, regional and international backers of Haftar should persuade him to play a constructive and stabilizing political role and not just solely rely on military means. A comprehensive political settlement that includes participation of all Libyan political parties and important forces on the ground in any potential settlement in the only way forward for Libya. Haftar also has to be engaged heavily to play his significant role for any future political solution. He should be offered a greater role to play in any future arrangement. S

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KARACHI

A LOSING BATTLE

Media is in turmoil all over the world. New business models and sophisticated strategies are now needed to combat the chaos.

BY SHABANA MAHFOOZ

Driving down a busy commercial street of Lahore, I see a weathered-down signboard of an otherwise popular daily publication. The publication itself is rumoured to be close to shutting down and the board truly depicts the condition of the news industry in Pakistan: battered, bruised and bleeding. Months of non-payment of salaries, an almost criminal cut in revenues, massive layoffs and shutdowns, coupled with censorships and threats, have turned the media in Pakistan into a battleground. The battle is for survival of the basics and also for the survival of journalism as a viable profession.

Not a day passes, when you don't hear some dismal news or the other from the ones who belong to the news process themselves – the media. There is not a single publication in Pakistan at the moment which is not suffering from some form of a financial loss. Altogether, news media in Pakistan is facing its worst ever crisis.

A decline in print media can be witnessed the world over. The number of pages in newspapers is shrinking and magazines are losing circulation. Wikipedia quotes sources claiming that "By March 2018, it was acknowledged that the digital circulation of major newspapers was declining as well, leading to speculation that the entire newspaper industry in the United States was dying. In June 2018, a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed a 9 percent decline in digital circulation of newspapers during 2017, suggesting that revenue from newspapers online could not offset the decline in print circulation."

Largely, technology is to be blamed. The smart phone of today has become smart enough to keep its user glued to its screen. Networking, entertainment, news – you name it and you have it on your phone. Is your ride in the cab a bit too long? Some browsing can help you kill the time as well as keep you updated. Can't afford to pay for monthly magazines or don't have space to stack them? No worries. Just check out their websites. Don't have time in the morning to read the daily headlines? You don't need to; subscribe to the same newspaper on your phone and the headlines are at your fingertips. Awesome!

Well, not exactly. While this may be the reaction of the millennial generation, it's definitely not for those who are in the business of publishing newspapers and magazines. But the truth is that their popularity is now restricted mainly to the older generation who are still hooked to starting the morning routine with a cup of tea or coffee and the entire self submerged behind a full newspaper. For them, the old habits survive, which are following headlines on paper or on television to stay updated and checking a dictionary for new vocabulary. For the young, the answers lie in their palm, in the shape of a phone or a tablet.

Pakistan is no exception. Print media here is also fighting for survival. And so are the journalists associated with it.

"In an age of electronic (and digital) media, they (the public) already have the news," says Farah Zia, former editor of The News on Sunday. "You can't hold on to older systems and the march of history,"

But as the march moves forward, in many mainstream publications, journalists work for months on end without pay. In other worrying examples, those earning an upper bracket salary are handed over letters warning of downward revisions in their packages. Even worse, they are laid off.

In a detailed article printed last year in Dawn, Nasir Jamal quoted Afzal Butt, president of his faction of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), who had put the number of employees having lost their jobs somewhere between 300 and 500. Until the time this piece goes into print, the number would have increased considerably.

What can be more shattering is the shutdown of an entire publication. That happens as well.

Just towards the end of last year, Pakistan's largest publication house, the Jang Group of Newspapers, shut down five newspapers in various cities rendering

hundreds of journalists and media workers jobless.

Until the beginning of this year, the iconic monthly publication The Herald was rumoured to be printing its last issue this January. The publication, in print since half a century, remains in circulation for now, although its future has surely become uncertain. Its parent publication, Dawn, which is also a part of one of the largest media groups in Pakistan, has apologetically shrunken the pages of its Sunday Edition due to the 'financial crunch'.

Along with the ripple effects of technology and global trends, Pakistan has added woes which worsen the prospects of print media in the country.

Media houses argue that they are unable to pay their staff because they have not been paid themselves by the federal and provincial governments that provide a revenue stream via the advertising space that they purchase.

"The reason, strictly in the local environment, is the two-fold impact of the government withdrawing all its advertisements and the corporate sector holding back as well because of the adverse economic situation," explains Shahab Jafry, former associate editor of Pakistan Today, a countrywide daily publication issued both from Karachi and Lahore. "So there's little likelihood of the private sector making up for drying revenues from government departments till the economy turns. And since we know now, largely thanks to reporting in newspapers, that this downturn will last at least throughout the present electoral cycle, there's a very real possibility of many more publications going under in the near future."

Senior journalists suggest that there may be more than just a financial squeeze which is bringing the crisis.

"Someone, somewhere, does not want media to say something overt," says Farah Zia. "There are some forces which are squeezing us in a way that we should not even exist."

In a special report last year, Committee to Protect Journalists (CJP), an independent organisation working to promote press freedom worldwide, concluded that the climate for press freedom in Pakistan has been deteriorating, even as overall violence against and murder of journalists decline. In a special report compiled after recording testimonies in various cities of the country, the CJP said journalists, including freelancers, had "painted a picture of a media under siege".

With the multiple reasons behind the decline of print media in Pakistan "markedly different" than those in the West, experts suggest that a revised model may help sustenance.

"There might be no model to retrieve ad revenues that have, more or less, permanently gone the way of the digital world. Yet it was precisely the internet's ability to reach large audiences, for free, that the new management of Washington Post – after billionaire Jeff Bezos bought it – used to turn the paper profitable," informs Shahab Jafry.

Along with the ripple effects of technology and global trends, Pakistan has added woes which worsen the prospects of print media in the country.

"Media should revise their business model and not depend on the government, (although) the government is always the biggest advertiser," says Farah Zia, giving her input. "There needs to be a dialogue within media houses, which is not happening. A change needs to come in the current format. What should we package, how do we present the news in the newspaper. The New York Times is not what it used to look before."

Recently, the President of Pakistan, Dr Arif Alvi has voiced the hope that the current financial crisis faced by the media would be over through a trickle-down effect after improvement in the national economy. Addressing the Pakistan Media Convention organized by the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE), President Alvi also suggested that the print media should evolve itself to cope with the challenges thrown up by digital media, saying that "The interest of the young generation in print media has diminished."

Nevertheless, the power of the pen remains and pushes forward, irrespective of expectations of the demise of the print industry. As Shahab Jafry comments, "While everybody might be right in expecting print's death, they might still not be spot-on about the timing."

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ISLAMABAD

IMPROVING JUVENILE JUSTICE

Justice systems designed for adults often lack the capacity to adequately address the protection of the rights of juvenile offenders and are more likely to harm than improve a juvenile offender's chances for reintegration into society.

BY WAJAHAT ALI MALIK

A juvenile prisoner under Rule 3(vii) of the Pakistan Prison Rules of 1978 is a person who has not attained the age of 18 years. In the criminal justice system, the age of the accused is reckoned on the day of commission of offence but the jail administration has nothing to do with the date of the commission of offence. For the purpose of segregation, and admission in prison, the age of the accused is computed on the day of his admission in jail. Jail authorities conduct the medical examination of an accused or convicted person upon his/her entering the jail and the age of the accused or convicted person is primarily recorded on the basis of the observation of physical appearance of the accused/convicted person and not through any other authentic or forensic method.

Juvenile prisoners in Pakistani jails are classified in four categories:

1. Juvenile Pre-Trial Prisoners
2. Juvenile Under-Trial Prisoners (UTPs)
3. Juvenile Convicted Prisoners
4. Juvenile Condemned Prisoners

1) Juvenile Pre-Trial Prisoners are prisoners who are detained during pending investigations and trial courts have not taken cognizance of their cases or their trials have not been commenced formally by the trial courts.
2) Juvenile Under-Trial Prisoners (UTPs) are prisoners whose trial is in progress and they have not yet been convicted or acquitted of the offences by any court of law.
3) Juvenile Convicted Prisoners are those whose trials have been concluded by the trial courts and they have been found guilty of committing an offence and a sentence has been awarded to them.
4) Juvenile Condemned Prisoners are those who have filed appeals in the High Courts or Supreme Court of Pakistan and have ultimately submitted mercy petitions before the President of Pakistan against their conviction or sentence and their appeals and mercy petitions have been decided by the apex courts and President of Pakistan, respectively, by confirming their sentences.

On October 1, 2017, all Home Departments in the provinces in Pakistan, except in the former FATA, shared official data about the prison population in the country. According to this data, there were 84,287 prisoners in 112 prisons administered by the governments of the provinces/administrative territories. Some 1343 out of 84,287 prisoners in the 112 prisons were juvenile, i.e. 1.6 percent of the total population of prisons. Out of these 1343 juvenile prisoners, only four were female, all detained in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) prisons. The combined authorized official capacity of prisoners in all the jails of Pakistan was 53,744 prisoners as compared to the occupancy volume of 84,287 prisoners on 01 October 2017. Therefore, the prison occupancy rate in Pakistan stood at 157 percent, which could be interpreted as a 57 percent overcrowding or high occupancy rate.

The chart here shows the level of overcrowding in prisons on the basis of province/administrative territory in Pakistan. The occupancy rate is the highest in Punjab at 168 percent, followed by Sindh at 155 percent, then KP at 149 percent and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) at 147 percent. However, not all prisons in Pakistan have more than their official capacity. Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) have less prisoners than their total capacity. This does not automatically mean that there would be no overcrowding in any of their prisons. In fact, one central prison and three district prisons in Balochistan have prisoners beyond their official capacity.

Overcrowding in prisons automatically generates substandard and inhumane conditions of detention such as unbalanced food, insufficient water, inadequate accommodation, poor access to healthcare, lack of hygiene, difficulties in family visits, lack of staff and safety and security concerns. All these issues lead to

the abuse of juvenile prisoners in Pakistani jails.

In April 2018, the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP) also published statistics on its website about the prison population in Pakistan. According to LJCP's statistics, the total population of prisoners in all the prisons of the four provinces of Pakistan was 80,139, whereas the combined authorized capacity of keeping the prisoners was 56,628. Thus, the prison occupancy rate stood at 142 percent, which interpreted as a 42 percent overcrowding rate in all the prisons in Pakistan. Out of a total 80,139 prisoners, 28 prisoners were juvenile pre-trial prisoners, who were waiting for their trials due to non-submission of challans in their cases. All of them were males and were detained in KP jails. Similarly, 1081 out of a total 80,139 prisoners were juvenile UTPs, which included 16 female juvenile UTPs, 14 detained in Punjab and 2 in KP jails. 118 out of the total 80,139 prisoners were juvenile convicted prisoners and all of them were males.

Out of the total 112 prisons in Pakistan, 7 prisons are made for juvenile prisoners. Juvenile prisons are also called special prisons. Punjab and Sindh have special prisons for juvenile prisoners, such as Borstal Institutions or Youthful Offenders Industrial Schools, whereas similar prisons for juvenile prisoners do not exist in other provinces/autonomous territories, such as Balochistan, KP, GB and AJK.

In Punjab, 640 out of the total 50,405 prisoners, i.e. around 1.27 percent were juvenile prisoners as of 01 October 2017. All the juvenile prisoners in Punjab were males. There are two specialized detention facilities for juvenile prisoners in Punjab, one each in Bahawalpur and Faisalabad, called Borstal Institutions and Juvenile Jails (BIJJ). Juvenile prisoners were accommodated in 30 general prisons and two specialized juvenile detention facilities (BIJJ) in the Punjab.

In Sindh, 228 out of a total 18,998 prisoners, i.e. around 1.2 percent, were juvenile prisoners as of 01 October 2017. All the juvenile prisoners in Sindh were males. Sindh has five separate prisons for juvenile prisoners called Youthful Offenders Industrial Schools (YOIS). The YOIS exist in Karachi, Hyderabad, Dadu, Sukkur and Larkana. Out of these five YOISs in Sindh and one in Dadu are un-operational. All juvenile prisoners in Sindh are sent to specialized prisons for juvenile prisoners.

In KP, 267 out of the total 11,330 prisoners, i.e., around 2.36 per cent, were juvenile prisoners as of 01 October 2017. KP also had one convicted female juvenile prisoner and three female juvenile UTPs in Central Prison, Haripur. They were all confined in the general female quarters of the respective prison. There are no specialized detention facilities for juvenile prisoners in KP, but segregated areas within some of the existing prison premises have been assigned to them. This is despite the fact that KP has enacted legislation called 'KP Borstal Institutions Act 2012'. A Borstal Institution has been constructed at Bannu (KP), but it is still not operational due to technical reasons and the lengthy rule-making process. 16 of the 22 operational prisons of KP have juvenile prisoners.

In Balochistan, 47 out of the total 2,427 prisoners, i.e., around 1.94 per cent, were juvenile prisoners as of October 1, 2017. All these were males. There are 11 prisons in Balochistan, which consist of 5 Central Prisons and 6 District Prisons. There are no specialized detention facilities for juvenile prisoners in the province, despite the enactment of the 'Balochistan Borstal Institutions Act 2014'. 6 of the 11 general prisons of the province take juvenile prisoners.

In the administrative territory of GB, 12 out of the total 374 prisoners, i.e., around 3.21 percent were juvenile prisoners as of 01 October 2017. All the juvenile prisoners in GB were males. Since there are no specialized detention facilities for juvenile prisoners in GB, 3 of the 6 general prisons take juvenile prisoners. There were no juvenile prisoners in any prison in AJK as of October 1, 2017.

Juvenile prisoners are put in with adult prisoners in some jails but in separate barracks, especially in Balochistan and KP, where there are no separate juvenile jails. This leads to abuse of juveniles by other prisoners and prison staff. Such incidents are often not even properly investigated and the perpetrators go unpunished. The government needs to carry out systematic and regular monitoring of such detention centres. It should investigate any reports or allegations of torture or ill treatment and ensure that perpetrators are punished.

The Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 is the latest law, which protects the dignity of juvenile delinquents while they are in the custody of the State. The law strongly emphasizes establishment of separate jails and rehabilitation centres for juvenile prisoners, including separate jails and rehabilitation centres for female juvenile prisoners in order to meet the international standards of juvenile detention conditions.

The Juvenile Rehabilitation Center is a special kind of prison established exclusively for keeping juvenile offenders. The convicted juvenile prisoner, instead of being confined in an adult prison, can be sent to a Juvenile Rehabilitation Center for social reintegration, till the completion of period of imprisonment or until he attains the age of 18 years. The Juvenile Rehabilitation Center is a place where a juvenile prisoner is kept and given education, vocational or technical training for his mental, moral and psychological development. This includes certified institutions, juvenile training institutions, borstal institutions, vocational centres and dar-ul-amaan and women crises centres established by the government or by voluntary organizations certified by the government. The government can also certify an already established association or society for social reintegration or rehabilitation of a juvenile offender who is released on parole or discharged from a Juvenile Rehabilitation Center and may regulate activities and functions of such offenders in the prescribed manner. The government, if dissatisfied with the condition, management or superintendence of a certified Juvenile Rehabilitation Center may at any time withdraw the certificate issued in the prescribed manner.

Since the enactment of JJSA 2018, not a single juvenile rehabilitation center or special prison for juveniles has been established or certified. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the government must establish and certify Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres in all the provinces and administrative territories in order to prevent abuse of juvenile prisoners in the prisons of Pakistan and for their rehabilitation and re-integration into society. S

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LONDON

WHO WILL TAKE THE CUP?

Ten cricket teams will compete in the 2019 Cricket World Cup. Will Pakistan beat India this time? Who will emerge as the champion?

BY MUHAMMAD OMAR IFTIKHAR

England and Wales are hosting the 12th edition of the Cricket World Cup that will see 10 teams battle it out during a 45-day tournament to determine who will become the best in the world of One Day cricket this time around. The 2019 Cricket World Cup is the fifth edition to be hosted by England, which previously hosted World Cups in 1975, 1979, 1983 and 1999. However, this is for the second time that the World Cup is being jointly hosted by England and Wales. They have also been the co-hosts of the 1999 edition of the tournament.

Having its origins in England in 1975, the Cricket World Cup has been a must-watch sport in South Asia with Pakistan and India being the two biggest proponents of the game along with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Afghanistan is the latest addition to the tournament. In Pakistan and India, the youth supports their respective teams and indulges in playing street cricket, signifying their love for the game that is etched in their hearts from childhood. Emotions are always high whenever Pakistan and India meet on the cricket pitch, especially during the World Cup. It is considered as one of the most heated sports rivalries in the world and perhaps the most notable in cricket after the England-Australia rivalry in the Ashes Tests. Although Pakistan has won 74 ODIs out of the 131 it has played against India, it has not defeated India in any matches played during the last 11 editions of the World Cup. While the Pakistan Cricket Team – aptly known as the Cornered Tigers – did defeat India in the finals of the Champions Trophy 2017 in England, Pakistan has yet to beat its arch nemesis in the World Cup. Pakistan played the semi-final of the 2011 World Cup against India but lost by 29-runs.

For many years, Pakistan and India have been using cricket as a means of diplomacy. The 2011 World Cup encounter between India and Pakistan, as many say, eased the

ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP
ENGLAND & WALES
2019

tensions between the two counties when they played a World Cup match following the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The then Prime Ministers of both countries, India's Manmohan Singh and Pakistan's Yousuf Raza Gilani, watched the match together at Mohali. However, the Pakistanis did not want to see cricket being used as a diplomatic tool and they wanted their team to trounce India in the World Cup. Pakistan did not.

The Pakistan Cricket Board has recently announced the Pakistan squad for the World Cup. Dropping Mohammad Amir may cost Pakistan a number of matches as his deliveries can create havoc on England's fast pitches. Furthermore, Imam-ul-Haq should not have been included in the squad as he may not adjust to big matches or during the crucial moments of the game. Pakistan and India will play their 2019 Cricket World Cup match on Sunday, June 16, 2019. Before facing India, Pakistan would have played four matches against West Indies, England, Sri Lanka and Australia and would play four more matches against South Africa, New Zealand, Afghanistan and Bangladesh after playing against India.

Keeping in view Pakistan's track record

versus India in World Cups, it needs to give a stellar performance during the four matches it will play before the all-important match against India because India just might retain its winning streak against Pakistan. Pakistan can etch its name in history by defeating India as they are an unpredictable side. If the Indian players still remember the Abhinandan Varthaman episode, they may view Pakistan as a formidable opponent that has the ability to silence its adversary when least expected.

When it comes to winning, Pakistan and India have always worked their way through the tournament to become winners. Pakistan won the 1992 Cricket World Cup against England. It reached the semi-finals in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 2011 and the finals in1992 and 1999. It was the quarter-finalist in the 1996 and 2015 editions. One of the most probable winners could be the five-times champion and defending champion Australia. It won the World Cup in 1987, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2015. It is ironic that England, the country hosting the first World Cup and which played the first-ever Test and ODI, has not been able to win a single tournament so far.

England has the home-crowd and home-ground advantage this time and they must use it to achieve a historic win.Their current squad is stronger than the one that played the 2015 World Cup. India may win its third title but nothing can be said with surety as Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and West Indies will give their best shot in each match. The probable winners could be Australia, India, New Zealand or the West Indies. As far as Pakistan is concerned, any prediction becomes invalid when the green shirts are playing. S

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ISLAMABAD

RESOLVING DISPUTES

Quick dispute resolution is becoming increasingly important. Litigation is a very old process that involves determining issues through a court, with a judge or jury. However, arbitration involves two parties in a dispute both of whom aim for speedy justice.

BY KOMAL ANWAR

One of the ways of determining the value of international commercial arbitration is through comparing it with litigation. This is because in most commercial disputes, parties opt for either of the two dispute resolution mechanisms.

Not a day passes, when you don't hear some dismal news or the other from the ones who belong to the news process themselves – the media. There is not a single publication in Pakistan at the moment which is not suffering from some form of a financial loss. Altogether, news media in Pakistan is facing its worst ever

crisis.

The issue of delays in the court system is global and has been given wide coverage in the media. However, prolonged delays in arbitration is a topic seldom talked about. This article will critically analyse arbitration and litigation in contrast to one another.

At the inception, it is important to understand the meaning of arbitration and litigation. Arbitration is a process in which a single third party or a panel of arbitrators, most often chosen by the parties themselves, render a decision, in terms less formal than a court, but with a written award. On the contrary, litigation refers to a process whereby disputes are resolved in a court often through lawyers appointed by the parties.

The key elements of an international arbitration are the agreement to arbitrate, the need for a dispute, the commencement of arbitration, the arbitral proceedings, the decision of the tribunal and the enforcement of the award. There are three main stages of arbitration which can be classified as pre-arbitration, during arbitration and post-arbitration. The delays involved in each of these stages will be discussed below.

The pre-arbitration stage involves two major steps. The first is to commence arbitration. It is of utmost important for there to be an arbitration agreement agreed between the parties. This is because arbitrators derive their jurisdiction from the presence of an agreement which gives them the authority to resolve the dispute. The issues involved at this stage are mainly on the interpretation of the arbitration clause and its validity.

Often, arbitration clauses are worded vaguely which gives the party reluctant to take the matter to arbitration a chance to contest in court regarding the existence of the arbitration agreement. This may lead to concurrent proceedings before the court and the arbitrators. Under the Arbitration Act 1940 (1940 Act) which is applicable to a domestic arbitration and domestic award, the court has the power to determine the existence and validity of the arbitration agreement. The arbitrator too can simultaneously determine its competence to decide the dispute and can then proceed to resolve the dispute. Secondly, the appointment of the arbitrators by the parties is another step that may result in delays if the arbitrators are not appointed in time.

The second stage which commences once arbitration proceedings begin can also result in delays for several reasons. Under the Pakistani law, there is no definite time period for the arbitrators to decide their dispute. Hence, this may lead to the arbitrator/s taking an unnecessary long time in rendering the award. One of the ways to curtail such delays is through parties deciding to conduct arbitration through an arbitral institution. Currently, there is only one international arbitration centre in Pakistan, namely Centre for International Investment and Commercial Arbitration (CIICA), providing comprehensive arbitration services. One of the ways in which an arbitral institution can assist in expediting the arbitration proceedings is through monitoring the progress of the arbitrators and avoiding excessive delays. In cases where one of the parties causes delays through not participating in the arbitration proceedings, arbitral institutions may allow the arbitrators to proceed ex parte which means that the matter can proceed in the presence of one party only.

The most misused practice by lawyers, which is the biggest cause of delay in litigation, is to seek adjournments (another date for the hearing).

The third stage which is the post-arbitration stage involves the maximum delays. This is mainly because the losing party does not want to comply with the award passed by the arbitrator and tries to seek relief through court. This can be done through various tactics. One such tactic is to challenge the award through court in order to set it aside. Given the delays in the court system, it may take several years for judges to determine whether there is any ground on the basis of which the arbitrator's award can be rejected.

Now, let us discuss the delays inherent in litigation. The first step involved in litigation is to institute the case in court and to issue summons/notice to the party to appear before the court. This step alone can take several months if the party resides abroad or if the address on which the notice is supposed to be sent is not known.

The most misused practice by lawyers, which is the biggest cause of delay in litigation, is to seek adjournments (another date for the hearing). This results in the cases being not heard by the judges simply because the counsel of one of the parties does not want to proceed with the case. Given the tremendous backlog of cases in courts, the practice of adjournments should be curtailed, and only very serious reasons should justify the judges postponing the hearing.

Another drawback of litigation is that there is no concept of emergency judges whereby a matter of urgent importance can be decided expeditiously through fast track procedure. While the parties can seek an interim order through court, they cannot seek a final decision on the matter earlier than the normal duration. In contrast, arbitration provides a quicker relief at times. For example, CIICA has its own rules which provides for an interim and emergency award. This enables the tribunal at the request of a party to issue an award granting an injunction or any other interim relief deemed appropriate. A similar practice exists outside Pakistan as well. In America, under the American Arbitration Association rules, an arbitration case involving less than $75,000 can be handled on a "fast track" proceeding which requires that the hearing take place 60-90 days after the arbitration is filed. Litigation trial dates will generally be unavailable from the court until 9 months from the date of filing.

Overall, both litigation and arbitration have their own pros and cons. However, when it comes to speedy justice, it cannot be said with certainty which dispute resolution mechanism provides faster relief. The answer to this question will depend on how efficiently both the processes are carried out without the stakeholders causing unnecessary delays. S

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DHAKA

The Tradition Lives On

Women in the sub-continent keep the tradition alive by draping themselves in the wonderful sari.

BY SAMAR QUDDUS

As a living tradition, the sari continues to be the most popular dress and still attracts Indian and Bangladeshi women. Be it a religious ceremony, festival, wedding, workplace, party or everyday wear, the sari is the most sought-after attire for women in these countries. From the prime minister of Bangladesh to a business executive to a daily labourer working in the fields, women in all walks of life have their unique ways of draping saris because Indian and Bangladeshi women generally follow their cultural norms in their attire.

Handloom saris in attractive designs embellished with delicate embroidery and in vibrant colours are high in demand not only in the sub-continent but all over the world. Globalization has replaced cultural values and traditions and brought in new trends in food, fashion and lifestyles. Fashion being the fastest growing industry in the world, the young generation is more influenced by western culture. Therefore, there is an increasing demand for western wear such as jeans and tops, formal suits, skirts, etc. But demand for the sari stays constant at weddings, cultural events and on religious occasions.

As a part of their culture, women in India and Bangladesh are very particular about wearing saris on special events. For instance, brides choose to drape a Lal Benarsi sari on their wedding day. Brides wear yellow saris when celebrating Gaye Holud (applying turmeric on the bride's body) and the guests too wear yellow, orange, red and green saris.

Clothing is influenced by religious beliefs and traditions. Muslim women have modified the way they carry their saris. The Dhakai Sari has much greater length so that it covers the head and body properly. Some Muslim girls also drape the sari with scarves to cover their heads and wear blouses with full sleeves. The dress is also a symbol of class status and social stratification in the community. Men wearing white pajamas (loose pants) and long shirts (kurta), signify their high social status. Similarly, the type of sari a woman wears is a symbol of her status in society. Women wearing a sari made of fine quality fabric (such as muslin) with elaborate designs and intricate motifs represent high status while rough cotton saris indicate the lower economic station of the woman.

The handloom industry in India and Bangladesh has made its mark in using a wide variety of fine quality fabrics in weaving beautiful saris. High quality muslin is the most acclaimed product in this industry around the world. Kings, queens and aristocrats in the past have all preferred to wear clothes made from muslin. Among the many cheerful types of saris, the Daccai Jamdani is one of the oldest, most expensive and delicate muslin drapes made from fine Egyptian cotton with beautiful floral and geometric designs. Its popularity can be traced to the Mughal period. The fabric is made from pure cotton yarn. It is light in weight and usually has a beige background. It consumes substantial time and labour and its intensive form of hand-weaving on traditional loom brocade is inspired by Mughal art which is rich in motifs. Depending on the latest fashions and demands, Jamdani is available at affordable prices since it is now made from woven, mixed cotton and silk, which is not so delicate. It is commonly known as the Tangail Jamdani style sari.

Some other popular saris include Tant sari, Rajshahi silk, Dhakai Banarsi sari, Tassar silk, Mulberry silk, Baluchari sari, Murshidabad sari and cotton sari. Over the years, a lot has changed and new trends have cluttered the traditional attire in terms of exotic hues and new graphic designs as demanded by fashion-conscious women. Though technology and western influences have taken away the pride of the classical and aesthetic attire, the handloom industry has still managed to protect its uniqueness and individuality. S

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ALAMGIR ENTERTAINS

Said to be one of Pakistan's first pop singers, Alamgir performed in Karachi recently. He was visiting from Atlanta. TV producer and filmmaker Samina Aslam of the Flying Carpet Company in collaboration with Alliance de Francaise featured him in a program called "Unforgettable Melodies by Alamgir" and the performance was really unforgettable.

The singer entertained a jam-packed audience at the art gallery, the largest hall at the French centre. Despite his ill health, he performed for almost two hours with the entire audience singing along with him as they were long admirers of Alamgir's songs and were very enthusiastic about the show. Alamgir performed with passion in his usual playful style which was full of vitality. The program was a thundering success.

PTV gave media coverage and released press releases of the show. He was also invited on three different morning shows where he sang beautifully. Alamgir plans to return in October this year and record a series of music programs with PTV.

SHOLA FOR THE WORLD

Shola Karachi Kitchen, already a famous cuisine destination in Islamabad, has widened its culinary spectrum. It is now in West London. Chef Aida Khan is behind the venture. She has a deep passion for food and was quick to learn the clean and healthy aspects of Pakistani cooking from her mother. She has explored the real flavours of Pakistan with her team of chefs, using only the highest quality of ingredients and innovative cooking techniques. 50% of her menu have grilled food which makes it even more appealing.

Aida's way of cooking takes one back to the foundations of Pakistani cooking, the way it has been done in the subcontinent's family kitchens for centuries. Shola is traditional soul food combining the extensive flavours, aromas and authentic spices of Karachi.

Having put Pakistani cuisine on the London food map through Shola, Aida hopes to open more branches across the globe.

LAST OF THE NUDES AND PIGEONS

BY JAVED ANSARI

Jamil Naqsh, the Pakistani artist who had become a recluse, passed away in London on May 16, 2019. He was suffering from pneumonia.

He was the man, who blended cubism with a subtle use of colour, but perhaps his subject matter – voluptuous nude women – made his life in an Islamic country like Pakistan, difficult and he moved to London. He did turn to calligraphy in his later years but that didn't quite make much of a dent in his artistic reputation as the practice of art is not a part of the country's national narrative anymore.

Most known for painting nude women with pigeons, Naqsh lived for art. He was known to be a master of texture and he artfully balanced light and space as the background in his paintings. His work is described as idealized and sensual.

At the prime of his career in Pakistan, in the 60s and 70s, Jamil Naqsh was an artist's artist and a much-revered figure in the art community though his brash behaviour did put many people off.

Naqsh was born in Kairana, India and came to Pakistan at the age of nine. In 1954, he joined the Mayo School of Arts and Crafts in Lahore where he was drawn towards miniature painting. His father, the painter Abdul Basit, introduced him to miniature painting. He devoted much of his two years at the National College of Arts in Lahore to do an internship with Mohammad Haji Sharif, the last of the old-guard miniature painters in Pakistan. He did not complete his training under Haji Sharif because he thought he had gained enough experience and the formal qualification did not matter. It is interesting, though, that Jamil Naqsh came to be known not as much for his miniatures as his large canvases.

Naqsh set up his studio in Karachi on a rooftop garden where pigeons were allowed to move around freely and were welcomed as visitors. In addition to Indian and Pakistani artists, he was also influenced by the works of European old masters like Pablo Picasso and the French neo-classicist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. His work has been exhibited extensively in Pakistan, India, the UK and the UAE and has always fetched high prices.

Naqsh's first major exhibition was held in Lahore in 1962. In 1963, an early series

of his pigeon artworks were shown at the Karachi Arts Council, followed by a series of 51 paintings with the pigeon theme in 1971. Naqsh claimed no symbolism for his ubiquitous rendering of women and pigeons (usually in combination). But these were depicted both realistically and in abstract. There came a time when he was only recognized for his female nudes and pigeons and many a young artists looking for quick popularity sought to imitate his nude forms and abstract techniques though they did not last much longer. The connoisseur always had a special fondness for the original work of Jamil Naqsh.

While most painters returned to figurative art and realism in the late 1980s, Jamil embarked upon a colourful and lyrical series of non-objective work. In the 1990s, he introduced the image of the horse juxtaposed with nude female forms. A large retrospective exhibition of his work was held in 2004 in the Mohatta Palace Museum in Karachi, and in 2006 his work was included in the New Delhi exhibition Euphonic Palettes showing the common heritage of Indian and Pakistani painters.

Naqsh seemed to be moved by the subject of women and the pigeon and relished painting erotic female nudes. In fact, the "Picasso pigeons" exemplified his fondness for Picasso and cubism. Pigeons had a deep personal meaning for him. As a child, he saw them flying in and out of the courtyard of the family house. They reminded him of traditional family life which he was deprived of upon his mother's early death, followed by the violence of Partition.

Naqsh was also an accomplished draftsman. He exhibited great skills in pencil, pen and ink, water colour, oil and mixed media. His early figurative work was slightly abstract, reflecting the influence of another mentor, Shakir Ali. Naqsh's colour schemes were often monochromatic or bichromatic in brilliant blues and reds. Other paintings in lighter, more neutral tones, suggested the influence of painter Ali Imam.

In 1994, Naqsh opened the Momart Gallery in Karachi and several of the young artists he had mentored exhibited their work there. Dedicating the exhibition to sculptor Marino Marini, he exhibited 150 works titled Woman and Horse. In 1999 a group of distinguished art enthusiasts inaugurated an adjacent gallery as the Jamil Naqsh Museum with a permanent collection of the artist's work. In 2013 the venue shifted to a building designed by his son Cezanne Naqsh in Clifton. His daughter Mona Naqsh is also a celebrated water colourist.

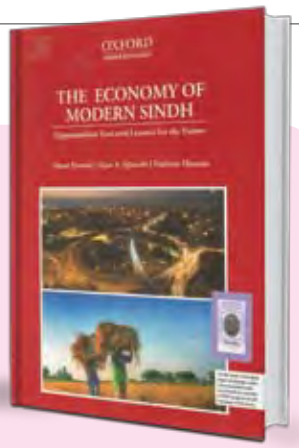
Jamil Naqsh spent the last years of his life quietly in London. With his passing away, Pakistan has lost the last of its great painters. While many of them left behind legacies of their artistic work that collectors and art galleries lapped up for millions of rupees, none of them endeavoured to set up art traditions that could serve as beacons of light for the coming generations. No wonder, with the major artists gone, art too has died in Pakistan. S

The writer is Editor of SouthAsia and a regular contributor on political and social issues.

BOOK

THE ECONOMY OF MODERN SINDH

Challenges of Economic Governance



BY AADIL NAKHODA

Book Title	:	The Economy of Modern Sindh
Author	:	Ishrat Husain, Aijaz A. Qureshi and Nadeem Hussain
Publisher	:	OUP
Pages	:	462
ISBN	:	978-0-19-070047-8

The Economy of Modern Sindh: Opportunities Lost and Lessons for the Future provides an extensive account on the history, geography, politics and, more importantly, the economy of Sindh. The authors, namely Ishrat Husain, Aijaz A. Qureshi and Nadeem Hussain have significant cumulative experience on various issues ranging from economics to governance issues in Sindh. This provides readers with a critical viewpoint on major issues that is often amiss from regular discourse. The authors combine statistics collected through different government agencies, academic studies and policy papers.

Sindh has a population of 48 million, approximately 23 percent of that of Pakistan, and contributes to 30 percent of the GDP of Pakistan. This makes it the second largest province in terms of population and in terms of the contribution to national GDP. However, the authors emphasize that Sindh is losing its share in GDP relative to the population. The authors point out to the stagnating per capita income growth in Sindh of 1 percent annually in the last two decades, which is comparatively lower than the growth of national GDP at 2.5 percent annually. This startling piece of information is enough to suggest a need for a book that critically analyses the conditions that have driven the current economic situation in Sindh. The authors, through their diligent research work, have indeed served that purpose.

The authors cover relevant topics that provide the reader with substantial knowledge on the economic conditions in Sindh. They not only include historical background on each topic, but also detail the possible reasons of the current circumstances and provide extensive analysis on the possible solutions to resolve the issues. For instance, they not only analyze the constraints and the issues reported in Sindh but also bring forward the strategies to address the constraints and to alleviate them. In doing so, they compare the conditions in Sindh to the national aggregates. They further compare the indicators to those reported for Punjab. Benchmarking against Punjab and critically analyzing the differences between the two provinces is useful as Punjab has been comparatively successful in addressing several issues. This also provides valuable analysis to researchers interested in understanding the dynamics in the variations in several indicators reported for the two provinces.

The authors cover several topics that are necessary to provide well-rounded information on the economy of Sindh. They start with a discussion on the geography and economic history of Sindh. They later characterize the population of Sindh by describing it in terms of various ethnicities and detailing the migration patterns, both from other provinces in Pakistan as well as post-partition migration from India. The authors include chapters on social sectors such as education, health, labour and employment and poverty and inequality. Chapters on the economic sectors, such as agriculture, industry and energy and mineral resources are also included. Chapters on irrigation and infrastructure are essential complements to the discussion on the economic sectors; as such complementary investments are essential in promoting both the rural and urban-based economies in Sindh. The authors also include a chapter on public finance, which is now particularly important since the topic has become a provincial subject and a source of debate between federal and provincial governments after the passing of the 18th Amendment.

The authors detail the dire condition of the educational and health facilities in Sindh. Considering the level of education in Sindh, they not only analyze the changes in literacy rates over time but also thoroughly analyze the varying level in access to education across socio-economic groups. They discuss the inequality in access to education, which has resulted in a large proportion of the poorest population in Sindh never attending school. More importantly, the authors undertake a comparative analysis of the educational policies over time, emphasizing on the inability of governments to meet their targets. Similarly, the authors also provide information on the inter-regional disparities in access to healthcare facilities across Sindh. Sindh has severely failed to meet several goals for health-related indicators as set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The authors put forward a stark set of statistics on the poverty and inequality levels in Sindh, noting that six of the ten worst performing districts in terms of human development in Pakistan belong to Sindh. The disparity in income inequality, gender inequality and differences in income levels between urban and rural areas is larger in Sindh compared to the rest of the country. The chapter on industry structure also raises important concerns on industrial development in the province as industrial growth has slowed down in recent years.

The authors recognize the paucity of data availability as a major challenge. This is a major cause of concern for researchers across Pakistan as poor data limits the ability of researchers to advice policymakers on the best possible solutions. The results for the most recent census conducted in 2017 are only provisionally available, limiting the scope of thorough analysis on population. An updated edition incorporating the more recent census data is awaited. The analysis in the chapter on Sindh's industrial structure borrows the data from the Census of Manufacturing Industries 2005-06, compiled almost fourteen years ago, which again signifies the lack of data availability for even the most prominent of all scholars in Pakistan.

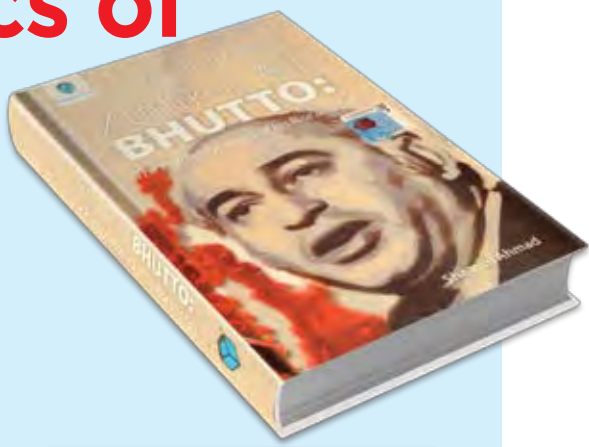
One major omission from the book is the discussion on the quota system in Sindh. Although, this is a controversial topic in itself, a discussion on the utility of the quota system across several sectors and government-run departments would have been useful. The quota system is likely to influence the provision of employment opportunities and economic development across Sindh. Further, a section on CPEC would also have been useful in the chapters on infrastructure and industrial structure, providing the opinion of the authors on its likely impact on the economy of Sindh.

The book can benefit students and policymakers as it can be included as a valuable reading material in courses focusing on the economic issues of Pakistan. S

BOOK

ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO

The Psychodynamics of ZAB's Rise and Fall



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BY DURRIYA SHAMSI

A host of books have been written on the life and politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The strange phenomenon of his rise and fall has not, however, been analyzed from a psychoanalytical angle so far. The book under review has undertaken this task successfully.

Author Shamim Ahmad holds a Master's degree in Psychology. He has attempted to discover the psychical drives which led Bhutto to immense success and, paradoxically, commit grievous mistakes. He met his tragic end despite his out-of-the-ordinary intelligence, his opulent and powerful family background, his scholastic attainments and his cerebral pursuits manifested in his voracious reading habits and the large number of books he wrote.

According to the author, the phenomenon can be explained by his hamartia. This characteristic is defined as a tragic flaw of his character identified as his insecurity resulting from the fact that he was the son of a déclassé mother. His mother, before Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto married her, was a Hindu dancing girl named Lakhi Bai. It can be imagined that Bhutto was scorned by the proud, powerful and prosperous Bhutto clan. As a reaction, it created in him two contradictory impulses: One, to excel by surpassing everyone and two, the insecurity. He achieved eminent success, but it did not cure his insecurity.

Amongst his successes: He became a federal minister at the age of 30, founded a highly successful party at the age of 39 which swept the elections, elevating him to the presidency at the age of 44. After the defeat and break-up of Pakistan in 1971, a thick pall of gloom hung over the country. Bhutto was instrumental in alleviating the gloom with the resolve of picking up the pieces. A great morale booster was provided to the crestfallen nation in the form of the Simla Accord. It was a triumph of diplomacy that Bhutto was able to get many concessions from the conqueror when all the cards were stacked against him.

Another achievement was the framing of the 1973 Constitution with near unanimity. It is a democratic and liberal document which provided many fundamental rights to the citizens and safeguarded against exploitation. It has survived to this day, despite suspensions, mutilations and failed attempts to change its basic character.

The Islamic Summit of 1974 succeeded in forging a degree of unity amongst Muslims never achieved before. Many secret decisions were taken, including building a nuclear device with the financial help of countries like Saudi Arabia and Libya.

As against the conventional view, Pakistan's GDP grew in the Bhutto era. He also established many heavy industries like the Pakistan Steel Mills.

During his rule, myriad cultural and literary institutions like the P.N.C.A, Lok Virsa, National Book Foundation, etc. were founded.

Though Bhutto was propelled to power by the support of the masses, he soon ceased to rely on their support. Instead, he began relying on the bureaucracy and the intelligence agencies. Persons who were his comrades-in-arm like Mairaj Mohammad Khan, Mukhtar Rana, Dr. Mubashir Hasan, Khursheed Hasan Mir et al. were obliged to leave him, because of the change in his behaviour towards them as well the change in the ideology of the P.P.P.

Bhutto's behaviour gradually became hubristic and he became vastly susceptible to flattery. He appointed Zia-ul-Haque as the Chief of Army Staff because he fell prey to the latter's brazen flattery. Zia proved his true self, eventually culminating in Bhutto's hanging.

Bhutto committed many faux pas. Amongst them was the army action in Balochistan and the dismissal of the government of the province. Another big misstep was the elections of 1977 when as many as thirty candidates, Bhutto included, got themselves elected unopposed. This bolstered the P.N.A.'s claim of rigged polls.

The book under review is a work of meticulous research and deals with major events of Bhutto era. However, two very important aspects are conspicuous by their absence. One, Bhutto's role in refusing to participate in the first session of the National Assembly scheduled to begin from March 3, 1971 in Dhaka has not been dealt with at all. Secondly, scant information is provided about Bhutto's mother whose tribulations were the source of Bhutto's hamartia.

In the words of I.A. Rehman, the book fulfills the criteria of a good read as a good piece of writing "should be readable, should add to reader's understanding of life and matters and should also stimulate a meaningful debate. Shamim Ahmad's present study meets all those conditions."

The reviewer is a licensed behavior therapist practicing in the U.S. and a more in-depth analysis on his part regarding the strange phenomenon of Bhutto's rise and fall has not been done from a psychoanalytical angle.

BOOK

God and god of Science

Faith in Unseen Realities

BY SYED KAMRAN HASHMI

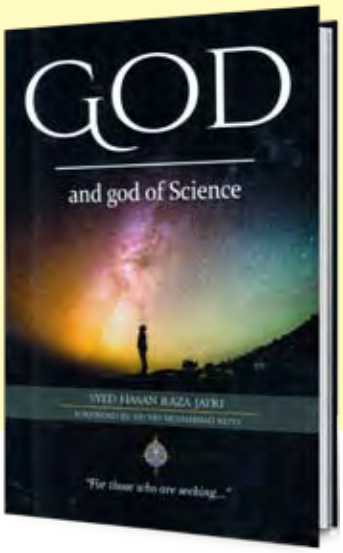
Book Title	:	God and god of Science
Author	:	Syed Hasan Raza Jafri
Publisher	:	Islamic Publishing House
Pages	:	371
ISBN	:	97891927930199

Written by Syed Hasan Raza Jafri, 'God and god of Science' was published last year. A simple and easy read, the book attempts to reconcile monotheism with modern-day science from an Islamic perspective. Where current knowledge and understanding fall short, you can say 'God and god of Science' fills the gaps with Quranic injunctions and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). I say monotheism since the author collectively defends the idea of a single, omnipotent and omniscience God as proposed by Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, one after another, he quotes the Quran, implying that each one of the Ibrahimic religions follows the same righteous path, with Islam just being a little better, more comprehensive and more advanced. This assertion contradicts the majority view as most Muslims believe that after the final message has been revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), the only righteous path for anyone to choose is Islam and no other religion is acceptable in the eyes of God. I do not want to delve into that debate any further since by doing so we will stray from the major subject of the book: The Existence of God as the sole creator of the universe.

A medical oncologist (cancer specialist) by profession practicing in Houston, Texas for many years, Dr. Jafri touches upon a wide variety of topics ranging from particle physics to astronomy and from Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection to Epistemology, Theology and Philosophy, subjects that people both in the scientific community and religious studies are working on. Unlike other religious texts which focus on comparative religion more, 'God and god of Science', as is apparent from its title, proposes to provide counter-arguments to non-believers, mainly atheists and agnostics. And unlike other scholars, in his book the author denotes the Quranic term of 'kufr' and 'kuffar' as lack of belief of atheists. The term has traditionally been used to refer to the pagan views of the Quresh of Mecca.

Dr Jafri definitely understands some basic concepts of physics. For example, he knows the importance of finding a common theory that can both explain the Theory of Relativity, a theory which only explains the movement of celestial bodies and quantum mechanics that explains the movement of subatomic structures. Sometimes, that common theory is called the Theory of Quantum Gravity, a concept well-explained in the book. However, when he expands that argument to the creation of the universe, he uses two different sets of laws, one for the God who does not need a creator because He is God and the other for the universe which needs a creator since it cannot come out of nothing. The whole debate becomes circular afterwards: God created universe but since He Himself is God, He is eternal. After that explanation, the question who created God somehow becomes 'irrational' and 'absurd.'

Being a physician himself, Dr. Jafri also realizes that the Theory of Evolution by natural selection does not answer all the questions of biology like that of the origin of life, the cellular transformation from prokaryotes to eukaryotes, and the process of speciation. What does he do then? He proceeds forward quite literally to reject it by calling it an argument that atheists propose against the existence of God. This is the height of irresponsibility, to put it simply. Any commentator cannot outrightly reject the theory of evolution by natural selection and also think he will be taken seriously either in the scientific or the religious circles. Reason must prevail. Under no circumstances can we condone such impulsive and reckless behaviour.



Moving on, throughout the book, the author has provided numerous quotes from the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) – Ahadees - to support his point of view. And since, his understanding of the philosophical and theological arguments that have been raised from the time of Plato and have continued to baffle contemporary scholars stays shallow, he fails to provide an in-depth analysis of those arguments. Reading certain paragraphs may make you think that he comprehends the concepts of free-will, determinism or occasionalism - proposed by Hassan Al Ashari and supported by al Ghazali - to some extent, but, the more you read the book the more you realize that he, in fact, does not as he bounces from one topic to another to another.

In areas of interpretation, translation and exegeses of the of the Scripture as well, the author does not seem to have a strong grip on the Arabic language or the hermeneutic attempts of early Islamic theologians, logicians or jurists. Without a compelling hold on these subjects, it is very difficult to comment on the 'true' meaning of the Quran. The risk of making anachronistic mistakes runs very high. As such, simple terms like 'madaar' and 'qadr' carry an entirely different meaning at the time when the verses were revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) and now when the same words stand for something entirely different.

Notwithstanding the deficiencies in his arguments, overall, this is his first attempt to enter a field in which there is not much written by Muslim scholars. For that he must be encouraged and congratulated. Against the growing threat of atheism and agnosticism, the Islamic point of view needs to come out, but it has to come out in a more sophisticated and logical way as the polls have consistently shown that atheists are more educated than the believers of any faith.

FILM

PROJECT GHAZI

Tinkering with Challenges

BY MAHRUKH HUSAIN

Pakistani cinema, although still in its nascent stages of development, has even so managed to churn out some entertaining and highly watchable hits over the past couple of years. From Waar to Jawani Phir Nahi Aani and then Parwaaz Hai Junoon, the country's cinema has shown that with the right amount of effort, time and resources, it is possible to produce a high quality film.

That said, there are nevertheless a number of areas where there is immense room for improvement. While cinematography seems to have taken quite a few leaps in the last few years, other aspects of filming such as editing, character development and even story are not being paid the attention that they deserve. The film industry's latest production, 'Project Ghazi', attests to that claim.

While it was indeed refreshing to see a film that, for once, did not focus on family drama, slapstick comedy or lavish wedding songs, it was, however, disheartening to see that Project Ghazi still managed to drop the ball on a number of occasions.

The premise of the film revolves around a special organization that creates an elite force of 'super soldiers' (think: Universal Soldier starring Kurt Russell), each of whom are given advanced combat abilities to help them in war-like situations. Shehryar Munawar's character, Zain, is recruited by Salaar Salahuddin, played by Humayun Saeed, in preparation for a fight to the death against evil super-being, Qataan, played by Adnan Jaffar.

The crux of the story is innovative, yet, as a result of poor execution as well as a lack of attention to detail, it fails to engage and draw in the audience. As the first of its kind, Project Ghazi could have set a new standard for local action films. However, due to low quality visual effects and underdeveloped characters, combined with some over-the-top and completely unnecessary product placements at different points throughout the film, Project Ghazi misses the mark entirely.

It is also important to note that the film suffered a delay lasting one whole year owing to the need to fix technical glitches and improve its CGI. Yet, it is evident that the film needs increased levels of amendments to pass the test.

In spite of everything, the film still manages to redeem itself in the form of both Humayun Saeed and Adnan Jaffar, both of whom perform their roles to the T. Humayun Saeed as the veteran soldier is highly convincing while Adnan Jaffar, with his towering figure and deep voice, pulls off his role of Qataan, the villain, quite well. However, most viewers will be disappointed after watching the finished product onscreen, a fact the film's creators should take note of.

Most of the issues faced by Project Ghazi, unfortunately, plague many other films that have been produced, or are currently being produced, in Pakistan. With the exception of a few, numerous other films seem to lack substance in either the story department or come up short in terms of quality visual effects. Often, direction and editing also seem to be scant. Be that as it may, it would still be a bit unfair to pin the blame entirely on the film's production crew as most of these problems are brought about by factors that are entirely out of their control. These include a lack of proper access to quality resources along with technical assistance that would otherwise help boost the standard of films in Pakistan. In addition, policymaking with regard to the promotion of quality film production has been insufficient as our government continues to put decisions related to the elevation of culture and the arts in Pakistan on the back-burner as they continue to face onslaught after onslaught of political and economic pressures.

Yet, it is still quite encouraging to see young, dynamic directors and filmmakers entering the fray and attempting to make their mark with innovative storylines and eye-catching visuals. It is through their efforts that we have successfully reduced our dependence on over-the-top and overdone acting sequences combined with clichéd storylines and moved towards plots that are more engaging and that explore newer, greater horizons.

Our audience has indeed matured in the past decade. They no longer stand for substandard film direction or half-baked attempts at cobbling together a decent plotline. When they step into the cinema, they go in with the expectation that they are getting value for their money. This includes venturing into new genres of filmmaking yet customizing it to suit local tastes. That is why films like Project Ghazi, in spite of all their weaknesses, are important as they help open the doors to new opportunities for other aspiring filmmakers to take advantage of and create something unique and inspiring. Until then, however, all we have to do is be patient.S

FILM

BADLA

Mystery in Control

BY SYEDA MAHAM RASHEED

Sujoy Ghosh's film 'Badla' is all thrill and suspense. It will keep you guessing throughout but the closing moments are predictable. The film revolves around the two lead characters Amitabh Bachchan and Taapsee Pannu who show tremendous acting skills. Amrita Singh also stands out as a mother with a missing son. She has come back to the screen after two years and steals the show. The director is back again with a revenge drama. The film keeps tensions on the boil with its twists and counter-twists.

Taapsee Pannu, who plays Naina Sethi, is accused of the murder of Tony Luke who played the character of Arjun Joseph. Her lawyer Jimmy (Manav Kaul) hires a senior advocate Badal Gupta played by Amitabh Bachchan to help crack the case and defend Naina, but her confessions to Badal add more twists to the murder mystery. In the two-hour film, not even a single character is well-defined until the end. Every now and then you keep wondering as to who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist?

A dynamic young female entrepreneur (Naina) and a man (Arjun) inside a hotel room are waiting for a blackmailer with a bag filled with money that would be enough for a lifetime. Suddenly, the woman is hit and loses consciousness. Next, she gets up to find herself locked in that hotel room and the man drenched in a pool of blood and dead with money strewn all over him. Someone knocks on the door and it is the police. She is arrested as the suspect for murder as nobody else has gone in or out of the room.

What exactly is her story? Who killed the man? Why was she staying in the hotel? Who blackmailed them? Why was she living with someone else when she claimed to love only her husband and daughter? There are many questions but just one truth… a fact that can save her from going behind bars.

Out on bail, she finds her only hope in the lawyer Badal Gupta. Badal is the man with a track record of winning every case in 40 years of his career but the catch is that he has only three hours to uncover the truth. The story follows an interview between the two, the lawyer and the woman. Both work together to figure out what actually happened. Neither of them trusts the other and both will do anything to reveal the truth about the other.

Taapsee's role has many shades and they unfold one by one. She makes all the shifts seem brilliantly authentic. Bachchan, on the other hand, has a more straight-laced character but his smart nuances and the ability to deliver lines with his elegant baritone makes the performance worth appreciating and applauding. Together, both combine to create the right amount of tension and thrill.

The film is set in a house and works in flashbacks. It has sharp editing by Monisha R Baldawa, powerful music by Clinton Cerejo and beautiful cinematography by Avik Mukhopadhyay. A strong storyline backed by good performances makes 'Badla' a winner. The film is spellbinding and is a must watch kind of film for its surprise factor.

Sujoy Ghosh has previously made 'Kahaani' and 'Kahaani 2' with ease. With the multi-layered plot of Badla, he appears right at home.S

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