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9th advisory board meeting of NIOC Pakistan held on July 10, 2020

ADVISORY BOARD

Tariq Parvez

President Advisory Board, NIOC:
Former Director General Federal
Investigation Agency

Fiaz Khan Toru

Member NIOC AB:
Former Inspector General of Police

Zahid Hussain

Member NIOC AB:
Eminent journalist particularly
specializing in countering terrorism

Samina Ahmed

Member NIOC AB:
Senior Adviser Asia and Project Director,
South Asia for the International Crisis Group

Zubair Habib

Chairman CPLC Karachi, Member
NIOC AB:
For community outreach.

Fasi Zaka

Member NIOC AB:
Communications expert. To steer the
advocacy campaign.

Tariq Khosa

Director

Muhammad Amir Rana

Secretary

Muhammad Ali Nekokara

Deputy Director

Hassan Sardar

Admin & Finance Manager

NIOC DIRECTORATE

NIOC's 9th Advisory Board Meeting

THE ninth meeting of the National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) Advisory Board (AB) was held on Friday, July 10, 2020 at 5 pm through Zoom video conferencing link.

The following AB members participated: Tariq Parvez, President, who joined a bit late due to a prior appointment with a doctor; Zahid Hussain; Samina Ahmed; Jawaid Akhtar; Zubair Habib; and Fasi Zaka.

Consultants/ Lead Researcher Kashif Noon and Communication Strategist Ammar Jaffri also participated.

NIOC Directorate was represented by Director Tariq Khosa, Deputy Director Ali Nekokara and Hassan Sardar. Secretary Amir Rana could not participate as he was travelling from Karachi to Islamabad.

Ian Tennant, Manager Global Initiative Resilience Fund joined for a short time from Vienna on special invitation from Director NIOC.

At the outset, Director NIOC welcomed and introduced Jawaid Akhtar, new AB Member. Jawaid, born in Pakistan, moved to the UK, studied there and joined West Yorkshire Police, 4th largest police force of the UK. He rose to Number 2 position as Deputy Chief Constable before his retirement. He is a recipient of the prestigious Queen's Medal for his meritorious services as a police officer. He has expertise in the area of Organized Crime. Jawaid, in his introductory remarks narrated his experience of working with Police Services of Pakistan and assured of his meaningful contribution to promote the mandate of NIOC against transnational organized crimes.

Director NIOC then introduced Ian Tennant, Manager Global Initiative Resilience Fund whom he met in December 2019 in Bangkok at a GI-TOC regional meeting. Ian, originally from the UK, is based in Vienna to oversee and coordinate the initiatives launched by GI-Resilience Fund in different countries from 2019. NIOC was launched in November 2019 as a pilot project, initially for six months and was later extended till June 2020 due to Covid-19 and its adverse impact on the target completion. The Project had now entered Phase-2 of six months from July to December 2020. Director Khosa thanked the GIRF management for the trust reposed and continued support for the cause of building community resilience against OC in Pakistan.

Ian Tennant, in his remarks, expressed his pleasure at joining the AB Meeting and being introduced to all the NIOC Members. He informed that GI Resilience Fund was launched by GI-TOC in May 2019 and now for more than a year it has launched projects and initiatives in 17 countries. He described the National Initiative against Organized Crime in Pakistan as GI Resilience Fund's flagship initiative that in a short span of time had earned national and global recognition. Responding to Director NIOC's remark of a few professionals in Pakistan making a 'humble' effort to make a difference, he responded that the efforts being

made by NIOC can make great contributions. On account of his prior commitment, Ian sought leave by wishing all the NIOC members success in their endeavours.

Director NIOC took up agenda items of the Board Meeting. He apprised the meeting that final draft of the policy brief on "Terrorism during Covid-19 in Pakistan" had been circulated to all AB members for final review before publication. Useful discussion followed with inputs from Zahid Hussain, Samina Ahmed, Zubair Habib and President AB Tariq Parvez. It was agreed that PB on Terrorism would be finalised within a week so that it could be released before end of July 2020.

Next item discussed was the draft on "National Strategy on Organize Crime" prepared by Lead Researcher Kashif Noon and circulated among the AB Members by Director. The 3Ps Strategy: Prevent, Prosecute and Protect was briefly discussed and its central delivery, coordination and implementation mechanism had to be debated before finalisation. Director requested all AB Members for their early feedback on the first draft of OC strategy.

Community Outreach Strategy prepared by Ammar Jaffri, Communications Strategist was also circulated by the Director to all AB Members. After some discussion, it was agreed that AB Member Fasi Zaka would lead this initiative and fine-tune the strategy. We expect a strategy document vetted by him to be presented within a week.

As part of Advocacy and Community Outreach Plan, NIOC has been holding Roundtable Conferences and Webinars since June 2020. Three Roundtables were held on June 4, June 18 and June 22 on Terrorism during Covid-19, Cyber Harassment during Coronavirus Pandemic and Advocacy for Police Reform Initiative Launch. During July 2020, two Roundtables on Advocacy for Police Reform on 2 and 9 July. Two more Roundtables on the subject are to be held on 17 and 24 July under the supervision of NIOC AB President Tariq Parvez. The Advisory Board endorsed NIOC's plan for Roundtables/Webinars as part of Advocacy and Community Outreach Strategy to be followed during the second half of year 2020.

Manager Administration NIOC was asked to expand and organise the Mailing List for dissemination of NIOC publications.

Director NIOC raised the proposal to identify Champions of Change from amongst the civil society organisations, legislators, media and other sectors so that they can be motivated to pursue objectives against OC Networks. GI-TOC Network includes individuals serving in various government institutions as well. NIOC AB will deliberate to include some motivated officials who are serving in various organisations combating organised crime in Pakistan.

Director NIOC also raised the avenue of collaboration at both national and international levels by building partners for concerted efforts against the menace of OC. NIOC has already become a Member of UNODC-steered Alliance of NGOs working against OC. It is a matter of pride for NIOC to be accorded this opportunity as part of global efforts to meet the challenges posed by OC Networks.

Italian police seize over \$1 billion of 'ISIS-made' Captagon amphetamines

By Jack Guy, Stephanie Halasz, Valentina DiDonato and Gul Tuysuz, CNN

CNN Police in Italy have confiscated a huge shipment of 14 metric tonnes (15.4 US tons) of amphetamines which they say was produced by ISIS in Syria.

Officers tracked three suspect containers to the port of Salerno in southwest Italy and found 84 million pills with a market value of €1 billion (\$1.12 billion) inside paper cylinders for industrial use, the Guardia di Finanza financial police said in a statement Wednesday.

Investigators said the bust is the largest drug haul in the world in terms of both value and quantity.

Commander Domenico Napolitano, head of the financial police for the city of Naples, told CNN that the drugs were well hidden and the scanners at the port didn't detect them.



The pills were found inside paper cylinders at the port of Salerno.

"We weren't able to see them but we knew it was arriving because of our ongoing investigations we have with the Camorra (Italian organized crime group)," he said.

"We intercepted phone calls and members, so we knew what to expect."

The Camorra bring the drugs to Italy and take a cut for helping to distribute them, Napolitano added.

The pills carried the "Captagon" logo, which "distinguishes the 'drug of Jihad,'" according to the statement.

"It is known that ISIS/Daesh finances its terrorist activities in large part with the trafficking of synthetic drugs produced largely in Syria, which has become the leading world producer of amphetamines in recent years," police said.

"According to the DEA (US Drug Enforcement Administration), ISIS makes wide use of these drugs in all the territories over which it exerts influence and controls its sale."



Police said the pills were destined for distribution in Europe.

The group is also able to easily produce large quantities of synthetic drugs to sell on global markets, raising huge amounts of money, added police.

The investigation and bust were carried out on a decree from the Naples public prosecutor, the statement added. Police believe the drugs were intended for distribution in Europe by various organized crime groups.

"The hypothesis is that during the lockdown, due to the global epidemiological emergency, the production and distribution of synthetic drugs in Europe has practically stopped and therefore many traffickers with different organized crime groups have turned to Syria, where it does not seem to have slowed down," police said.

Brigadier General Gabriele Failla, head of the financial police in Naples and the surrounding province, told CNN that he believes a number of criminal groups may have banded together to buy the huge shipment.

Traffickers don't normally send so many drugs at once because it's too risky, said Failla, and no single group could deal with so many pills at once.



Counterfeit Captagon pills contain amphetamine and other chemicals.

"This is a remarkable evidence of the 'nexus' between terror financing and organized crime interests," he added.

Captagon was originally the brand name for a medicinal product containing the synthetic stimulant fenethylamine. It is no longer produced or used, but drugs carrying the Captagon name are regularly seized in the Middle East, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

The drug is a common stimulant in the Middle East, and is also used in some countries bordering the European Union, the organization said.

"In addition, some recent media reports have linked this drug to perpetrators of terrorist acts in Europe or terrorist groups based in areas of conflict in the Middle East," the EMCDDA added.

In 2015, CNN reported on a US official who believed that some jihadist fighters were using Captagon, which can cause a surge of energy and a euphoric high.

In addition to reportedly taking the drug themselves, militants in Syria on both sides of the fighting may also be profiting from the production and trafficking of the pills, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

"(Islamic State) and al Nusra Front are also believed to facilitate the smuggling of chemical precursors for the production of Captagon," UNODC chief Yury Fedotov said at a press conference in June 2015.

The counterfeit Captagon tablets contain amphetamine as well as other chemicals, according to the UNODC.

Human Rights, Rule of Law and the Renewed Social Contract in the COVID-19 reality

(Speech by UNDP Administrator)

THE COVID-19 pandemic is shaking the very foundation's of our societies. It is exposing inequalities, weak health and social security systems and the digital divide.

It is also compromising our existing governance , human rights and security challenges.

We have seen governance by coercion, control and consent in various combinations.

Indeed, structural discrimination were starkly illustrated by the disproportionate impact of the virus on marginalised groups.

It shows that the enjoyment of rights is neither a " given " -nor a is it equal.

We must remember that the pandemic did not occur in a vacuum.

We were already seeing searing divisions in the political discourse; racism and exclusion, and the erosion of trust.

We have seen increasing demands for socio-economic justice and accountability for Human Rights violations.

It could be said that the COVID-19 crisis has played out in this "theatre of risk".

THE WAY FORWARD

So, we move forward from the pandemic and support the socio-economic recovery, we are at a critical turning point- which I believe we must turn into a positive "tipping point".

It is clear that securing the rule of law and human rights is key to achieving the transformational change we need----based on principles of trust, accountability and justice.

This ultimately means forging a new, MORE INCLUSIVE "social contract".

WE MUST SUPPORT PEOPLE-CENTRED JUSTICE, REDUCE VIOLENCE---AND BUILD INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONS.

We need to prioritise innovation--including using digital technology in the rule of law and human rights arenas. Notably, service provision during the pandemic has been enabled by the adaptability of online platforms and apps.

Cabinet to amend law to comply with FATF demand

By **Zafar Bhutta**

ISLAMABAD: The cabinet, in its meeting on Thursday, is set to approve amendments to the law to comply with the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) demand to expand cooperation with foreign countries in providing information about owners of companies in a bid to stop money laundering and terror-financing.

The Asia-Pacific Group (APG), in its report on Pakistan, had pointed out that there were limited provisions in place for international cooperation by Pakistan in relation to the basic and beneficial ownership information on the basis set out in Rule 37 and Rule 40.

Section 42D of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) Act provides "the Commission may, on a reciprocal basis, cooperate with and provide assistance under this Act or any administered legislation to a foreign regulatory authority."

It said Section 42D (7) adds "any assistance provided under this section to any foreign regulatory authorities or international organisations may be refused by the Commission on the grounds of national security and public interest." The APG - an FATF body - also pointed out that there were no mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of assistance Pakistan received from other countries in response to requests for basic and beneficial ownership information or requests for assistance in locating the beneficial owners residing abroad.

Sources told The Express Tribune that now a summary had been tabled before the cabinet for approving amendments to the Companies Act 2017 and Limited Liability Partnership Act 2017 in order to address the gaps identified by the APG regarding money laundering and implement the FATF recommendation relating to the transparency of legal persons.

The cabinet has been informed that the SECP has proposed amendments to the Companies Act 2017 and the Limited Liability Partnership Act 2017 to address these issues.

The proposed amendments have been approved by the SECP policy board and have also been shared with foreign consultants by the SECP to further synchronise the amendments with the FATF suggestions.

The proposed amendments have been vetted by the Ministry of Law, and the Ministry of Finance has endorsed the amendments.

The cabinet will also consider another summary relating to money laundering to ensure compliance with the APG recommendations.

Two offences have not been included so far as predicate crimes in the money laundering offence - grievous bodily injury and marine piracy - and the latter is not yet a criminal offence.

The APG pointed out that Pakistan's money laundering offence was generally compliant with the standards except for deficiencies in the scope of predicate offences. The Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) has said that one of the FATF-designated categories of offences ie grievous bodily injury, is not part of the Schedule of the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010. This gap has also been highlighted in the APG Mutual Evaluation Report.

The FMU has requested that the case should be processed for approval by the federal cabinet under Section 42 of the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 for the addition of predicate offences recommended in the APG's Mutual Evaluation Report.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 7th, 2020.

Politics of JITs

By **Zahid Hussain**

THERE is nothing in the three JIT reports recently made public by the Sindh government that is not known. The latest debate on the reports is more political gamesmanship than a serious move to address the problem of heinous crimes and bring those involved to justice.

Brought down from the shelf where they were gathering dust, the reports may provide some insight into the sordid nexus between crime and politics. But they may be only half true; some actors in the play are never exposed. There are scores of JIT reports on incidents varying from political murders and financial crimes to terrorist attacks that are just put on the backburner and forgotten until they are required to serve certain political objectives.

Apparently, the Sindh government was compelled to release the reports after the tirade launched by a federal minister accusing the PPP leadership of patronising criminals responsible for the pervasive lawlessness and violence that had gripped the country's biggest metropolis until recently.

While challenging the veracity of the JIT report released by the Sindh government, Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi conveniently ignored some partners in the crime who seem to have been declared kosher as they are now aligned with the powers that be.

The powerful nexus of crime and politics has little to fear.

One of the JIT reports that has been the main focus of the contention involves the notorious gangster Uzair Jan Baloch also known as the leader of the Lyari gang war. The man who had been in the military's custody for some years before being handed over to civilian law-enforcement agencies for trial has allegedly confessed to having been involved in the murder of more than 150 people. He has also been accused of spying for a foreign country. The story of Uzair Baloch seems right out of a Bollywood crime thriller.

These are very serious charges indeed. But several dots are missing in the plot. Surely the PPP leadership has a lot to answer for in connection with its alleged patronage of a most feared criminal who was responsible for turning part of Karachi into a killing field. While his past association with the PPP appears irrefutable, there are also some reports of his links to influential political figures from other parties as well as to intelligence agencies.

His arrest from the outskirts of Karachi by the Rangers in 2016 after his mysterious disappearance from Dubai where he was detained for a considerable period gave currency to all kinds of conspiracy theories. Some reports suggested that he had been in the custody of the security agencies for several months before the official announcement.

Unsurprisingly, the PTI is silent on the alleged role of Zulfikar Mirza in the Lyari gang case. The then powerful provincial home minister Mirza was the main patron of the Aman Committee. Mirza, who has now turned against his old friend and former president Asif Ali Zardari, would not make any bones about his close association with Uzair Baloch.

It is quite puzzling that the security agencies didn't question Mirza for giving protection to a proclaimed offender. The former home minister is on record as having admitted that hundreds of gun licences were granted to members of the Aman Committee, which was basically turned into the militant wing of the PPP.

Mirza fell out with his old friend after Zardari reportedly took away two sugar mills that the former president had bestowed on him. He was also unhappy over the betrayal by his party of Uzair Baloch against whom the Sindh government had at one point issued a warrant of arrest. Mirza is now aligned with the PTI government and his wife is a federal minister.

It is not just the PPP that patronised Uzair Baloch and the Aman Committee. At one point, according to some media reports, a senior PML-N leader also approached him to bring him into the party's fold. He reportedly tilted towards the PTI at the end, but apparently it remained a one-sided affair. Some Pakistani intelligence agencies are also reported to have used him for keeping a tab on Baloch separatist groups operating from the area.

Politics and crime form almost a symbiotic relationship. Both are driven by the same impulse – the acquisition of money and power. Politics needs money to buy influence, and crime needs the protection of politics to run its enterprises. Yet nothing could be more shocking than the alleged nexus of crime and politics in the case of the 2012 Baldia Town factory inferno that claimed more than 250 lives.

The JIT report on the incident, though it had already been leaked earlier, provides an insight into the criminalisation of politics. There is evidence that activists belonging to the MQM set the factory on fire after the owners failed to pay extortion money. The crime was allegedly committed on the instructions of the party leaders. The revelation about the MQM being linked to the factory fire is just the tip of the iceberg. The party has faced countless criminal charges ranging from murder to extortion in the past. A faction of the party is now part of the PTI ruling coalition; that may be reason for the PTI not highlighting the incident.

It is not only Karachi where crime and politics fuse; the situation is not significantly different in other parts of the country either. Pakistan is fast turning into a country where the state is so weak that it is unable to fulfil even its minimum responsibility, exercise authority or offer citizens a modicum of security and order. The powerful nexus of crime and politics has little to fear.

It is, however, despicable the way the JIT reports are used now to settle political scores. Rather than taking the issue seriously, these have been turned into a tool against rivals in a political power game. We have often seen in the past how serious crimes directly involving political parties and their supporters have been hushed up for reasons of political expediency and then how the matter has been revived to settle scores. There is strong apprehension that Uzair Baloch may also end up as a pawn in the political chess game.

Published in Dawn, July 8th, 2020

Only 14 cyber crime convictions in five years

A total of 1,325 cases were registered until Jan 31, 2020, after enactment of PECA, 2016

By **Rizwan Shehzad**

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Interior's revelation before the National Assembly that the cybercrime cases were on the rise and the authorities concerned could manage to convict only 14 accused in the last five years evidently depicts that justice moves at a snail's pace in Pakistan.

Interior Minister Ijaz Ahmad Shah informed the lawmakers during the July 16 session of the assembly that a total of 1,325 cases were registered until January 31, 2020, after the enactment of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016.

Before the enactment of PECA, the interior minister stated in his written reply submitted during the Question Hour session that a total of 1,103 cases were reported with the National Response Centre for Cyber Crimes (NR3C) from year 2007, adding that complete charge sheets (challan) were submitted in 546 cases, interim charge sheet in 435 cases, while 344 cases were still under investigation.

"The total cases convicted under PECA, 2016 is 14," the reply stated.

The details were shared in response to questions raised by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) lawmaker Chaudhary Faqir Ahmad.

Ahmad had asked about the total number of registered cases under PECA since its inception, cases reported to NR3C and the conviction rate.

"The abysmally low rate of cybercrimes conviction can fairly be attributed to the government," Aaliya Zareen Abbasi, a lawyer who specifically deals with the cybercrime cases said.

"The government is not allocating fair resources. Resultantly, the crime has been doubled and there is alarming number of pending cases," she added.

The lawyer's apprehension regarding the increasing number of cases was also supplemented by the interior minister's reply to another question in the session.

To the query of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI's) lawmaker Nuzhat Pathan if cybercrimes were increasing and the total number of incidents of cybercrimes registered during the last four years, the minister's reply surprised many.

"Yes, the number of the complaints has been increasing day by day. A total of 50,505 complaints had been registered during the last year out of which 11,389 complaints were converted into enquiries and total 1,071 cases were registered till September 30, 2019," Shah stated.

He revealed that "982 accused have been arrested" in the total registered cases.

"It is due to immense pressure on the cybercrime cell of FIA and the state is not making effective investment in the field of enhancing manpower as well as rendering training to the NR3C staff," Aaliya lamented.

"Even the prosecution defending the state lacks required trainings and expertise to deal with the technicalities involved resulting in a massive delay in conclusion of trials of cybercrimes," she said.

Aaliya observed that the courts were suffering due to lack of training to analyse digital evidence, particularly, in the absence of specific procedure to deal with such matters.

"Imparting specialised training, hiring professionals and enhancing manpower for the law enforcement agency specifically working in cybercrime is the need of the hour," she said.

The interior minister said that the government had approved the expansion of cybercrime wing of FIA through Phase-III of NR3C.

He said that 10 new cybercrime reporting centres had been notified and operational in Islamabad, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Multan, Abbottabad, DI Khan, Sukkur, Hyderabad, Gilgit and Gwadar.

Shah observed that 407 cybercrime investigators, forensic experts and technical staff had been recruited and upgradation of existing digital forensic laboratories and technical investigation tools to meet the growing challenges of cyber world had also been completed.

He maintained that the procurement of latest investigation and forensic gadgets for effective cyber investigations was under process.

Currently, he said, 131 regular and non-development posts were approved.

Moreover, he said, a project titled "National Response Centre for Cyber Crimes (NR3C) Project Phase-III" was approved in 2018 with 416 contractual posts. Until now, 354 personnel had been recruited on contractual basis.

Despite the low conviction rate, the government had increased the salaries of FIA employees in March observing that it was the only organisation which dealt with transnational organised

ONLY 14 CYBER CRIME CONVICTIONS IN FIVE YEARS

crime, including corruption, human smuggling/trafficking, corporate and banking crimes, money laundering, terror financing, cybercrimes and others.

Published in Express Tribune , July 20, 2020

Sleeper cells active again?

THE existence of sleeper cells is often the caveat to declarations about militancy having been eradicated. That is especially the case in a complex urban scenario where violent extremism has spread its tentacles deep within society. Recent developments in Karachi appear to illustrate this phenomenon. On Wednesday, Sindh Police's Counter Terrorism Department claimed it had arrested five men suspected of having links with the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, a sectarian outfit responsible for having murdered thousands of Shias across the country. These individuals, according to the CTD, have revealed that four teams of hitmen had become active on the directions of two incarcerated LJ leaders who had told them to target religious personalities and policemen. The detainees themselves are said to have 'confessed' to the murder of six people. A list of potential targets has allegedly also been recovered from them.

After a considerable period of relative calm, Karachi's crime graph of late has shown an uptick in targeted killings, with policemen comprising the majority of victims. At least four cops have been attacked this month in separate incidents, with three of them losing their lives as a result; the most recent incident occurred yesterday when an ASI was killed in the Lines Area. While law-enforcement agencies have yet to definitively link these murders to the alleged confession of the men they have apprehended, the implications are ominous. The LJ is among the most dangerous extremist groups ever to have existed in Pakistan. Not only is it virulently sectarian, it has also at times joined hands with global terrorist organisations, at first Al Qaeda and later – through its 'international' chapter – the militant Islamic State group, to carry out horrific, high-casualty attacks. The LJ's shadowy nature and its tendency to operate through splinter groups makes it more difficult to trace. Law enforcement must be on its toes to ensure that this outfit does not find a conducive environment to once again become the hydra-headed monster it was.

The claim about LJ leaders having issued orders from behind bars to their foot soldiers on the outside is a plausible one. While security features have been enhanced in Karachi's Central Jail, the main chink in the armour is not the infrastructure but the ill-paid human resource. Prison personnel have been known to smuggle in mobile phones and SIMs to the inmates; in the past, raids on prison barracks have turned up shocking amounts of such contraband. In June 2017, two high-profile LJ militants – one of whom had committed nearly 60 murders – escaped from Karachi Central Jail. A subsequent investigation determined that over a dozen prison officials had "abetted and facilitated" the jailbreak. Unearthing sleeper cells requires a revival of the old

'beat' system and the community policing model. Interaction between law enforcement and society at the grassroots is vital to nip this threat in the bud.

Published in Dawn, July 24th, 2020

An Expert Explains: Why it is necessary to watch the emergence of ISIS in the region

It is widely believed that over 100 Indians had migrated to the Caliphate, while it was gaining traction among foreign fighters across the world.

Written by **Anju Gupta**



In recent times, online entities called the Islamic State Hind Province (ISHP) or Islamic State-Kashmir (IS-K) have surfaced, with focus on propoganda and recruitment of Indians, or of fighters from the region, for attacks on Indian interests. (File Photo)

Following a coordinated suicide attack on a gurdwara in Kabul on March 25, in which several Sikhs were killed, Daesh (ISIS) claimed its second ever attack on Indian interests in Afghanistan. Identifying the lone attacker as Abu Khalid al Hindi (Muhammad Muhsin from Kerala, who had gone to the Gulf in 2018), ISIS termed it “revenge for Muslims of Kashmir”.

Subsequently, Afghan security forces arrested the Amir of Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP, the ISIS branch in Af-Pak) – a Pakistani national, Aslam Farooqui Akhunzada – and others, including Kashmiri militant Aijaz Ahangar, wanted for two decades. ISKP posted a picture and a video of an Afghan officer in their custody, and pictures of his “beheading” on May 4. The Afghan Taliban called Aslam a “stooge” of Afghan forces, but his organic links in the region have been known even before ISIS was born. The chain of events does necessitate closer scrutiny of the ISKP threat in the region.

ISIS and Taliban

Less than a month after the fall of the Caliphate (March 23, 2019), ISIS mounted spectacular attacks on targets in Sri Lanka. In March 2020, in Kabul, ISIS claimed mortar attacks on a high-profile political gathering, President Ashraf Ghani’s inauguration, and on US troops in Bagram base twice. Was the March 25 attack an “anniversary attack”? Did ISIS intend to target “enemies” using a local radicalised group as it had sought to do with the July 2016 bakery attack in Dhaka or the April 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka? In a country where ISIS presumably has a handful of targets, it is curious as to why it endorsed the targeting of a minuscule minority.

Moreover, in recent years, especially after the US-Taliban agreement, the Taliban have repeatedly claimed to have finished ISKP in Afghanistan. In a recent issue of the weekly *al Nabha*, criticising the agreement, ISIS has exhorted supporters to target “enemies” as their resources are tied up with Covid-19. Over the last few weeks, a few lone wolf attacks have been reported across Europe. Thus, the targeting of a gurdwara is surprising. Moreover, the claim of using a single foreign fighter, the modus operandi, and weak propaganda doesn’t indicate a signature attack by ISIS. However, owning up to the ISKP attacks could suggest a possible shift in post-Caliphate strategy.

The Wilayat Khurasan – comprising parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia – is a concept born in January 2015, when ISIS designated a former Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander from Orakzai, Hafiz Saeed, as “Wali” and a disgruntled Afghan Taliban commander, Abdul Rauf, as “deputy Wali”. Following the killing of TTP Amir, Hakimullah, in a drone strike in November 2013, Hafiz Saeed and TTP spokesperson Sheikh Maqbool had drifted away from TTP towards the ISI. The intra-Mehsud fight within TTP led to the emergence of Mullah Fazlullah as the Amir, which led to an exodus of some commanders who were being courted by the ISI to turn them towards targeting Afghanistan.

In October 2014, Hafiz Saeed and Sheikh Maqbool suddenly pledged allegiance to ISIS. Around that time, the ISIS ideology was gaining traction in Pakistan; not so much in Afghanistan. The group did attract Pakistani and Afghan foot soldiers. The group went online for propaganda and recruitment of foreign fighters who found it difficult to go to Syria-Iraq, especially from Pakistan,

India, Bangladesh and Central Asia. However, this recruitment was very small, except from Pakistan. Accounts from the West described the group as ISKP. Online recruiters from Kashmir surfaced as Abu Usman Al Kashmiri, a kuniya (a kind of name) used by Aijaz Ahangar, and as Huzaifa-al-Bakistani, a kuniya used by his son-in-law, reportedly killed in Nangarhar.

In no time, hundreds of local fighters of ISKP displaced the mightier Taliban from Nangarhar while, across the border the Pakistan Army had a formidable presence to control cross-border movement for its own security. It has taken close to five years for ISKP to be dislodged from a small area. Some ISKP nodes did surface in Kunar province, where Pakistan has for years alleged the presence of TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar bases. The geographical spread of ISKP, its selective and big attacks (promptly denied by Taliban) and its “near peaceful coexistence” with Taliban cannot be misread.

Four ISKP Amirs have been killed and a fifth is now under arrest. The group has never gained much traction in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Except claiming a few big attacks in Kabul and Quetta, ISKP has not shown any keenness to expand its areas of influence. Post-Caliphate, no mass movement of regional foreign fighters back to the fold of ISKP has been reported. Some central Asian fighters of dubious connections have surfaced, especially in the north and Nangarhar, recruiting Tajiks and Uzbeks for local and overseas operations. However, the local impact of such groups is marginal.

Aslam Farooqui is one of the first Pashtun commanders of tribal areas of Pakistan who, along with Moulvi Nazeer and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, aligned with Taliban to fight against US-led ISAF, with active support of the Pakistan Army way back in October 2001. He was also one of the founders of the TTP network that turned the heat on the Pakistan Army for targeting their fiefdom. However, Aslam Farooqui was reported to have made a “deal” with the Pakistan Army around December 2012. Like all such deals in Pakistan, this too was denied as soon as it became public.

In the region, the signs

It is widely believed that over 100 Indians had migrated to the Caliphate, while it was gaining traction among foreign fighters across the world. Subsequently, it became known that a group of Indians from Kerala, including women and children, had migrated to Afghanistan around 2016-17. Some children were born there. A total of 60-plus Indians were believed to be living in territory controlled by ISKP in Nangarhar. Between October and December 2019, over 1,400 people with ISKP, including fighters and their families, surrendered before Afghan forces in Nangarhar. These included fighters from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Some Indian women and children were in this group. A few Indian fighters are believed to have been killed, with no solid proof as

yet, while a few are still missing. With the surfacing of Mushin, it appears that a few more Indians may have joined ISKP.

In recent times, online entities called the Islamic State Hind Province (ISHP) or Islamic State-Kashmir (IS-K) have surfaced, with focus on propaganda and recruitment of Indians, or of fighters from the region, for attacks on Indian interests. The activities of ISHP and IS-K are closely linked to ISKP. The arrest of a Kashmiri couple by Delhi Police Special Cell in early March, being linked to ISHP/IS-K, may have been an attempt to test the waters with Indians – those driven by personal grievances, radicalised in the name of ISIS – to hit targets in Delhi or elsewhere.

Although the source of ISKP/ISHP/IS-K is known, this does not reduce the threats posed by them. Since ISIS is currently claiming all “verifiable” attacks, these entities have a ready-to-use platform for propaganda for recruitment. Moreover, through the Covid-19 phase, ISIS is becoming quite active in cyberspace. While ISIS would happily own up to many attacks by the likes of the ISKP network, it may not miss the opportunity to rope in and guide such networks to attack targets in the region. Thus, apart from stemming radicalisation, it is critical to closely watch threats emerging in the region, especially for India and the West.

Regional militant sanctuaries

By Zahid Hussain

THE dreaded militant outfit that once held sway over Pakistan's former Fata may have been driven out from its stronghold and splintered, but its sanctuaries across the border in Afghanistan remain a security threat for the region. A recent spike in the attacks on Pakistani security forces in North Waziristan district and reports of reactivation of terrorist cells must be a cause of concern.

A recent UN monitoring team report has revealed that most of the 6,000 to 6,500 Pakistani militants in Afghanistan belong to the various factions of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. They are now operating from their bases in eastern Afghanistan. While many recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan have been traced to TTP splinter groups, some of the fugitive militants have joined the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group and are not only fighting the Afghan and American forces but are also engaged in a turf war with the Afghan Taliban. The original leadership of the Khorasan chapter of the outfit came from the ranks of TTP fugitives in Afghanistan.

There has been a marked escalation in the terrorist attacks claimed by the group, whose origins lie in the Middle East, following the February peace deal between the US and the Afghan Taliban. It has recently carried out some spectacular terrorist attacks in the Afghan capital Kabul, targeting civilians in an effort to disrupt the Afghan peace process. The UN report estimates the membership of the IS in Afghanistan at 2,200.

Although its numbers have depleted in the last few years, IS has shown that it has the capacity to penetrate high-security zones via suicide bombings. Despite losing territorial control in parts of the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar to the Afghan Taliban, IS has proved its effectiveness at carrying out attacks.

The rise in activities of the mutated TTP factions on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border raises some serious questions. Such a large number of trained militants dislocated from their home bases and with no resources could easily be turned into mercenaries and would be willing to work for vested interest groups and foreign intelligence agencies. The ongoing war in Afghanistan and regional conflicts make it easier for these mercenaries to be used as proxies. The recent militant attacks in North Waziristan district and other parts of the county seemed well-planned.

Surely the splinter groups do not have the capacity and support base to re-establish their control in their former strongholds. But they can create problems for the security agencies. The danger is more serious with the situation in the former tribal areas, particularly Waziristan, not yet fully settled. It could get worse with the conflict in Afghanistan.

Most of the TTP leaders were either killed or had fled to Afghanistan after the military operations in the former tribal regions. Among them was Mullah Fazlullah who became the leader of the TTP after the killing of Hakeemullah Mehsud in a CIA drone strike in 2013. After fleeing the Swat operation, he had taken refuge in the neighbouring Afghan province of Kunar that had long been the centre of radical Islamic militancy.

The fleeing militants continued to engage in cross-border attacks presumably with the support of their Afghan allies. It is unclear whether Fazlullah had received any support from elements of the Afghan Taliban. The killing of Fazlullah in 2018 in an American drone strike led to the further disintegration of the group.

In this period, many other TTP commanders who had aligned with IS were also killed as the American forces intensified their offensive against the militant group. Their association with IS had also brought the elements of the TTP into confrontation with the Afghan Taliban. There is, however, a question mark hanging over the relationship between the other TTP factions and the Afghan Taliban. It's a complex situation indeed.

Whatever remains of the TTP in Afghanistan has suffered the most serious blow this year when three of its top commanders were found dead in mysterious circumstances outside Kabul. Among them was also Sheikh Khalid Haqqani, once deputy chief of the TTP and a member of the group's leadership council. He was also believed to be one of the masterminds of the December 2014 attack on Peshawar's Army Public School that killed almost 150 students and staff members. The others were Qari Saif Younas and Saifullah Peshawari. Both were top commanders. All three were reportedly associated with IS.

A few weeks later, another TTP factional leader, Shahryar Mehsud, was also killed in a blast in eastern Kunar province. No one has claimed responsibility for those killings but they could have been caused by factional infighting or have been the work of some intelligence agency. The presence of TTP commanders in Afghanistan reinforces Pakistan's allegation that many of the terrorist attacks that occurred in northwest Pakistan were planned across the border. Pakistani security agencies believe that hostile intelligence agencies abroad have been involved in terrorism. It sounds plausible given the ongoing regional conflicts.

Across-the-border militant sanctuaries are often used for proxy wars. The UN report, which states that thousands of anti-Pakistan militants are operating in Afghanistan, only reinforces earlier

reports of the TTP's cross-border operations. It's not only the TTP but also groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army that have allegedly found safe haven in Afghanistan.

And it's not just about Afghanistan but also militant sanctuaries inside Pakistan allegedly engaging in cross-border terrorist activities. By not taking action against militant safe havens, countries lose their sovereignty. Pakistan has paid hugely for its wrong policies of allowing militant sanctuaries on its soil in the past. But we can't afford more such adventures at the risk of our own sovereignty and national security.

With the ongoing war in the country, the Afghan government may not have the kind of control needed to take action against militant sanctuaries, but the danger is that outside interests could exploit this situation. One of the most significant points of the US-Taliban peace deal is not to allow Afghan soil to be used for action against other countries. It will also be a part of the political settlement in the war-torn country. More importantly, there is a need for an agreement on the issue of regional security.

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Govt gets two FATF-related bills passed through NA amid opposition protest

By Amir Wasim



The government on Wednesday managed to get two Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-related bills passed by the National Assembly amidst a noisy protest by the opposition.

The Anti-terrorism (Amendment) Bill, 2020 and the United Nations (Security Council) (Amendment) Bill, 2020 were both moved by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Babar Awan.

The bills were passed amid sloganeering from the opposition benches, mainly in protest against the Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's speech in the assembly on Tuesday in which he had explained the deadlock between the government and the opposition over a number of legislations.

The noisy protest led the NA speaker to suspend proceedings on three occasions: twice when Qureshi refused to speak amid the opposition's slogans and once soon after the passage of the bills.

In his remarks, PML-N MNA Khawaja Asif said he was speaking to present the opposition's point of view on the foreign minister's speech yesterday.

He said Qureshi yesterday disclosed the details of an informal meeting between the government and the opposition members held at the speaker's residence.

"Nine members of the 25-member special parliamentary committee were having an informal meeting to discuss legislation on FATF and NAB (National Accountability Bureau). The issue was to go back to the main committee, but the foreign minister disclosed the details on the floor of the house which was against ethics and norms," Asif added.

He said Qureshi had "crossed all the limits by disclosing details [of the meeting] which should have been kept secret" because the minister "wanted to do politics".

"He (Qureshi) tried to give the impression that the opposition was only interested in NAB laws and not FATF. There was no need to bring these things on the record," the PML-N lawmaker said.

He criticised Qureshi for not disclosing before the lower house that the two sides had, in fact, reached consensus on the two FATF-related bills yesterday.

"The opposition only wanted to stop the political use of the laws ... We cannot allow 90 days' detention under the pretext of economic terrorism," he said, explaining why the two sides had disagreed on other FATF-related legislation on Tuesday.

"In the past, those who made the wrong laws, they themselves became their victim," Asif said.

The speaker then gave Qureshi the floor three or four times to respond to Asif, but the minister refused to speak due to the opposition's protest.

Speaker Asad Qaiser and Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri asked him to continue his speech, but he said he would do so when there was silence and order in the house.

The speaker then gave the floor to Asad Mehmood of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), but treasury members did not allow him to speak.

When the speaker put the bills for a voice vote, opposition members, mostly from the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), were present in front of the speaker dais to protest.

As the house resumed after the third suspension, instead of Qureshi, federal minister Murad Saeed responded to the opposition, accusing it of attempting to seek relief from the government for their alleged corruption. He said Prime Minister Imran Khan will not grant any such "NRO".

Deputy Speaker Suri then gave the floor to Asad Mehmood again, but the treasury members started chanting slogans of "diesel! diesel!".

Suri asked the government members to listen to the speech silently but they ignored the directions and continued sloganeering and in the midst of the noise, the deputy speaker read out the prorogation order.

The two bills will now be taken up by the Senate. They are not on the agenda of the upper house, but it is expected that the government will issue a supplementary agenda to get the bills passed.

Responding to Asif at a press conference in the evening, Qureshi said the government was open to discussing all pending legislation but urged the opposition to "delink" the FATF bills with the proposed changes to the accountability laws.

Law Minister Naseem while talking to media on Tuesday had confirmed the deadlock in discussions between the government and the opposition and said the FATF-related legislation had to be passed before August 6 as it was a requirement for removing Pakistan from the 'grey list'. He declared that the government would introduce the bills on its own before the deadline.

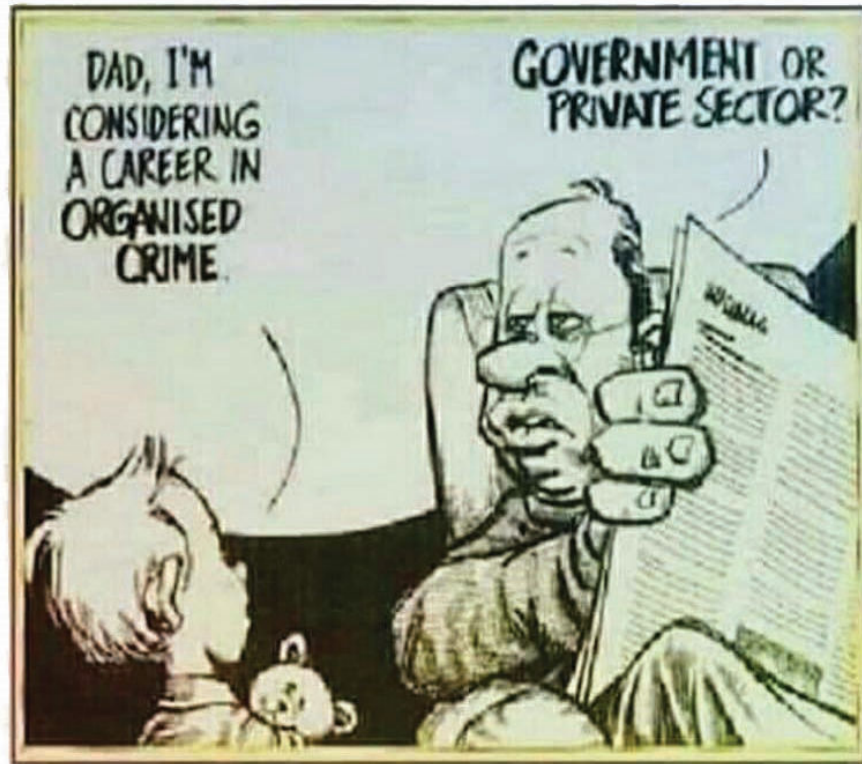
Opposition looks to Senate

Later in the day, PML-N president and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif reached out to PPP's Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman via phone to discuss the future course of action.

The three leaders decided to constitute a committee comprising senators from the joint opposition to deliberate the FATF-related legislation and ensure it is in the "country's best interests".

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BY UNO**
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I personally would suggest government. They never go to jail.