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Federal Investigation Agency

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# NIOC's 17th Advisory Board Meeting

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The 17th NIOC AB Meeting was held virtually on Friday 05 March 2021 at 3 pm. The following attended: Tariq Parvez: President AB; Zahid Hussain, Samina Ahmed, Zubair Habib and Jawaid Akhtar: Members AB. Tariq Khosa, Director, Ejaz Hussain, Deputy Director, Kashif Noon, Lead Researcher, Ali Nekokara, Governance Expert, Ammar Jaffri, Community Outreach Expert, Saroop Ijaz, Legal Expert and Hassan Sardar, Manager Operations.

Director NIOC gave an overview and progress of BHC-funded Study on Countering Extremism. It had been finalised by the NIOC Team headed by Mr. Tariq Parvez within four months and was ready to be submitted to BHC Islamabad.

Next project to be completed by NIOC was to come up with a National Strategy against Organized Crime in Pakistan. This would be completed in April 2021.

Kashif Noon was working on a case study of nexus between politics and OC. He was asked to complete it as soon as possible in a fictionalized format.

Secretary NIOC Amir Rana was to submit Monthly OC Review for Feb 2021.

A series of Virtual Group Discussions were to be organized by NIOC. This would be initiated from April onward.

Director asked the AB to consider a topic related to OC for a Study to be carried out during the second half of 2021. One area to consider could be CVE.

# The cyber reality

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**By Faisal Ali Raja**

Undoubtedly, cyber space will dominate the future. It is an expanding domain which is experiencing modification on a daily basis. New things are being introduced with modern interventions giving the space more adaptability and accessibility. As the world embraces the cyber reality, the threat template is also shifting from physical to non-physical space. There are three broader areas in which the cyber domain is going to impact developing countries in years to come. First, an upsurge in cyber-criminal activities may force countries to focus on counter cyber-criminal activities creating a void in cyber security. Interestingly, cybercrime and cyber security are distinct fields but are closely linked. Lack of cyber security enhances chances of high cybercrime.

Second, conventional intelligence collection mechanisms may not work as the cyber space provides an all-encompassing avenue of authentic, speedy and reliable information collection. Third, young minds are required to keep pace with the dynamic state of cyber world and many developed countries have outsourced their cyber security structures to youth with special skills of cyber entrepreneurship. These individuals coin new ideas and come up with new techniques to break codes, hack systems and venture into sensitive cyber networks to introduce viruses, cyber jamming software and remote computer communication retarding techniques.

The cyber space has been a favourite medium for opinion transmission of extremists for their needs, networks and narratives. They need to influence young minds to cultivate them for focused goals. This is a dynamic state of action which finally culminates in radicalising the youth. The networks are live relationship wires which can be activated anywhere depending on the group's requirement. Moreover, national fault lines are exposed and criticised with full force in the cyber space. For example, the number of sectarian attacks in cyber space has increased manifolds since last year.

These include audio and video messages against different sects often resulting into exposing inter- or intra-sectarian susceptibilities. The cyber medium is the most important carrier of extremist narratives of different groups or organisations. The terror actions are also being shifted to the non-physical domain with each passing day. For example, recently former TTP spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan allegedly threatened Malala Yousufzai. Though it was rebutted by the government and was labelled as a fake tweet, such attempts show the extent of cyber space and its far-reaching effects. Even if the account was fake it was employed to spread disinformation and intimidate a person living hundreds of miles away. The Nobel laureate, subsequently, tweeted critical remarks against the government and an investigation is under process too.

The alleged tweet by Ehsan highlights three important factors. First, it enhances the importance of cyber space which can be conveniently used to hurl threats against a personality with an ensuing criticism against a government for a lackadaisical attitude. This not only creates international media ripples but raises questions on the CT action spectrum of a country. Second, militants are no longer required to use the physical medium for action impact. They can now create impressive activity in the non-physical sphere through a simple tweet or message on a social media platform.

Third, a faster and speedier cyber network will present a more complex challenge to a government or a cyber-monitoring department in a developing country as the response time may reduce further for blocking unwanted online content. Here, the electronic evidence collection, its preservation and presentation are areas of concern. An effective model may be evolved through developing a collaborative approach between the FIA and provincial counter terrorism departments (CTDs) for investigation and apprehension of extremist elements involved in criminal cyber activities.

The cyber reality is here to stay and it will keep on presenting a dynamic challenge to any country. We need to wake up to this reality as soon as possible.

**Published in the Express Tribune, March 03, 2021**

## 8 terrorists including 3 TTP commanders killed in North Waziristan IBOs: ISPR



The IBOs were carried out on terrorist hideouts in Boya and Dosali areas of North Waziristan. — Photo courtesy ISPR/File

Eight suspected terrorists including three Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commanders were killed in two intelligence-based operations (IBOs) conducted by security forces in the North Waziristan tribal district, the military's media wing said on Saturday.

The separate IBOs were carried out on terrorist hideouts in Boya and Dosali areas of North Waziristan, according to an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) statement.

Besides the eight militants, the three terrorist commanders killed during the exchange of fire were Abdul Aneer alias Adil (TTP Toofan group), Junaid alias Jamid (TTP Tariq group) and Khaliq Shadeen alias Rehan (TTP Sadiq Noor group), the ISPR said.

"These terrorists remained involved in terrorist activities against security forces, law enforcement agencies and locals of the area since 2009 including IED (improvised explosive device) attacks, firing, target killing, kidnapping for ransom and extortion," the press release added.

It said the slain militants were also involved in recruiting terrorists in the area.

Security forces recovered a "huge cache of arms" from the hideouts.

Last month, four women aid workers were gunned down in the Mirali area of North Waziristan, as a fresh wave of extremist violence rattled the region.

The tribal areas along the Afghan border remain notorious for the availability of cheap guns, narcotics and smuggled goods.

Attacks have decreased in recent years following a series of military offensives against homegrown and foreign militants.

In 2014, the army launched a massive operation to wipe out militant bases in North Waziristan aimed at ending a near decade-long insurgency that cost thousands of lives.

But militant groups are still able to carry out sporadic, isolated assaults.

A recent surge in attacks targeting security forces along the Afghan border has sparked fears that these groups may be regrouping.

**Published in Dawn March 06, 2021**

# Two martyred in attack on Pakistan Navy vehicle in Gwadar



Two Pakistan Navy men were martyred and another was injured in an attack on their vehicle in the Ganz area in the coastal district of Gwadar on Saturday. — AFP/File

**By Saleem Shahid**

QUETTA: Two Pakistan Navy men were martyred and another was injured in an attack on their vehicle in the Ganz area in the coastal district of Gwadar on Saturday.

Official sources said the Pakistan Navy's vehicle was on its way to Ganz from Jiwani when unidentified attackers opened fire on it with automatic weapons.

One sailor of Pakistan Navy and a barber were martyred and another Navy man suffered injuries, a security official said.

The deceased were identified as Sohail, the sailor, and Noman. The injured was identified as Raza.

Soon after the incident, security forces rushed to the scene of the occurrence and took the injured to hospital.

The bodies were sent to their home towns and the injured was later shifted to Karachi.

Assistant Commissioner Gwadar retired Captain Athar Abbas said the area where the attack took place had been cordoned off and combed but no arrest had been reported.

Investigation is under way.

Provincial Finance Minister Zahoor Buledi condemned the attack.

“Strongly condemn the terrorist attack on Pak Navy QRF near Jiwani Gwadar today. May the martyred soul rest in peace and injured Jawans recover very soon,” he tweeted.

On Friday, five labourers were killed and five others, including two security personnel, injured when a roadside bomb went off in the Tandori area between Sibi and Harnai.

**Published in Dawn, March 7th, 2021**

# Arrests made over Bitcoin extortion

Suspects threatened foreign nationals with drug case

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By Nouman Sheikh



Bitcoin transaction volumes on darknet markets rose throughout 2018 to an average of \$2 million daily. PHOTO: REUTERS

LAHORE: Police have arrested several people nominated in the country's first case of extortion in cryptocurrency from two foreign nationals but the main suspect has reportedly fled abroad.

The police said they had arrested the owner of an outhouse where the complainants were held hostage and two other suspects, including one who threatened the victims in police uniform.

The incident of blackmailing and kidnapping for ransom came to light last month. The victims were deprived of foreign currency and around Rs15 million in the form of online currency Bitcoin.

A case was registered at Race Course Police Station against Rana Irfan Mahmood and his unidentified accomplices.

According to the FIR, Swiss national Maria Spari and German citizen Stephen came to Lahore on February 10 on invitation of Irfan, a resident of Lahore, to review investment prospects in the country.

The foreigners stayed at a well-known hotel on The Mall road. They were taken by the suspect in a hotel car for sightseeing.

During the travel, Irfan sent back the hotel car and took the foreigners with him in two private vehicles.

Further along the way, unidentified suspects including three men in police uniform in a vehicle with a blue light stopped the cars and searched them.

According to the report, Stephen was forced out of the car and the suspects allegedly poured heroin on his clothes. The victims were then blindfolded and taken to a place where the suspects threatened to register a drug smuggling case against them, warning that they would face the death penalty.

The intimidated foreigners paid 6,300 euros in cash and also made an online transfer of 1.8 Bitcoins worth Rs14.7 million to the accused through laptops. A fake media team also made a video of the victims and the suspects demanded an additional Rs300 million for not sharing it.

According to SSP Investigation Abdul Ghaffar Qaisrani, the case is the first of its kind in Pakistan and poses a big challenge for the police. Initially, the police got the data of the main suspect, including his passport and mobile phone numbers along with other details.

The information gathered during the investigation showed that the suspect was already acquainted with both the foreigners and had been doing business with them regularly.

Irfan was assisted by a friend from Kohat who has been arrested. The man provided rented vehicles and also sent an accomplice posing as a police constable for the crime. The police have seized the vehicles and a driver of the car rental service. CCTV footage of the incident has also been obtained.

The official said the prime suspect had flown to Germany on the day after the crime and assistance of Interpol was being sought for arresting him. Both the foreigners were taken to an outhouse and the owner of the place, identified as Imran, has been arrested.

The police official said the suspect had revealed that his accomplice posing as a policeman was a jail warden.

The police brought the matter to the notice of the jail authorities and took three people into custody. During the interrogation, the suspect revealed that the jail warden had also beaten the foreigners.

According to the SSP investigation, the police have recovered all the amount paid to the facilitator. However, the amount cryptocurrency has been transferred to another account and the assistance of intelligence agencies is being sought for its recovery, the official added.

**Published in The Express Tribune, March 7th, 2021.**

# How to empower Nacta

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By Khawaja Khalid Farooq

Pakistan's capacity to respond to terrorism and targeted violence depends on its ability to understand these phenomena, and to adapt as they evolve. For that, the National Counter Terrorism Authority, or Nacta, is our best suited institution. Its role in spearheading Pakistan's FATF compliance efforts cannot be underestimated. However, there is much more that it can achieve.

Nacta must work alongside its domestic and international partners to gather, produce and share information regarding current and emerging threats, and use innovative technologies to better anticipate changes and prepare responses.

Nacta should invest in a multidirectional information-gathering and -sharing infrastructure, focused on four key elements: the National Network or intelligence sharing centers, the provincial Counter Terrorism Departments, the FATF regulatory system, and the "If You See Something, Say something" public awareness campaign.

Intelligence coordination provides law enforcement with resources and training to identify and prevent terrorism, targeted violence, and mass attacks. It facilitates national capacity for identifying, evaluating and sharing leads related to those threats as appropriate. In addition, the Nacta Information Network should be the official system for sharing sensitive but unclassified information between federal, provincial, international and private sector partners.

Through this multidirectional approach to gathering and sharing intelligence and information, Nacta enables all levels of government and the private sector to better understand and prepare for threats of terrorism and targeted violence.

The department should, in coordination with the CTDs, and any other appropriate partners, produce an annual product that evaluates the strategic threat environment within Pakistan related to terrorism and targeted violence, and anticipates future threats. A common baseline understanding of threats within Pakistan will support interagency policymaking, agency prioritizations, resource allocations, and intergovernmental partnerships.

In order to encourage new perspectives and challenge long-standing assumptions, the department will continuously evaluate and measure the impact over time of anticipatory intelligence that appears in Pakistan.

The point of anticipatory intelligence is not to predict who will become a terrorist or attacker, but rather to understand the impact that changes in the world will have on the problem set; the trajectory of terrorist organizations or movements that may influence attackers; or specific adaptations in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that these actors will undertake.

A strong methodology for evaluating anticipatory intelligence will allow continual improvements in the department's ability to produce intelligence that highlights emerging trends, changing conditions in the strategic environment, and threats from hostile actors.

Nacta may consult with other departments and agencies, academia and relevant NGOs to fashion a definition of targeted violence that is more precise and actionable for the department's mission.

Following this process, the new definition will be introduced into the Pakistani legal lexicon, and be employed to further shape the mission of the CTDs and its components and offices as it pertains to targeted violence.

This effort will help build a common understanding of the threat for all people and organizations focused on combating targeted violence, allowing for better discussion, approaches to mitigation and resource allocation.

The current national-level statistics on terrorism and targeted violence in all its forms are not comprehensive. Nacta can work with other departments and agencies and, as appropriate, academic and non-governmental organizations, to determine the best methods of collecting accurate and comprehensive national-level statistics on terrorism and targeted violence, including hate crimes. After determining the best methods, the department can prioritize resources toward the collection of this data and encourage its partners to do the same.

Nacta can improve intelligence-driven operations with increased information sharing to produce and disseminate actionable intelligence that can identify and characterize terrorist and related threats to the nation's various modes of transportation, including: aviation, freight rail, mass transit and passenger rail, pipeline, highway and motor carrier, and maritime. The department may seek to close gaps between traveler information available within the aviation transportation and maritime transportation systems to facilitate the same level of passenger/crew vetting across both domains.

The department requires a sound understanding of technological advances that attackers will employ, and those that can help counter terrorism and targeted violence. Nacta may conduct risk-based assessments of technological advances in the near, medium, and long term, examining the promise and peril of emerging technologies, including unmanned systems. The department may collaborate with other federal agencies, organizations, and industry partners to share findings and promote awareness of the risks and potential mitigation measures.

One critical purpose of understanding the strategic environment is to leverage the department's knowledge, including highly specialized knowledge, to support active missions to protect Pakistan. Law enforcement investigations are a critical area into which departmental knowledge about the strategic environment is directly applied.

While personal networks and operational coordination are useful means to share information, Nacta will increasingly supplement these relationships with technology that can share high-volume data – governed by appropriate privacy protections and rules – at a level of speed and

accuracy that human networks cannot replicate. These efforts should achieve or beat the “near real-time” information-sharing goals.

Significant work remains to ensure that Nacta reaches its full potential, enabling other adjudicating agencies to have timely access to the information they need to properly vet travelers and immigrants, and identify threats. Nacta can support additional vetting programs, extending its support beyond the current counterterrorism focus and deepening its capabilities through biometrics and advanced analytics. This will improve information sharing to provide greater intelligence and feedback on vetting decisions to those responsible for vetting individuals for access to Pakistan, or immigration benefits, especially from countries which are not friendly with Pakistan.

The department leverages analytical resources to augment its targeting and vetting initiatives to investigate suspect travelers during the visa application process.

Law-enforcement efforts have identified links between terrorist groups and the sale of counterfeit goods and illicit material in e-commerce. Nacta may work to enhance end-to-end visibility into supply chains, implement technological solutions to more effectively segment risk among millions of daily trade transactions, and better align targeting efforts to detect and disrupt these illicit financial operations. This ties into the FATF and grey list ongoing issue for Pakistan.

These are not mere wish lists; Nacta is the premier homeland security organization of Pakistan, and these roles are all suited for this organization. All this lies within reach of Nacta’s capabilities: we just need to support it in good faith.

**Published in the News, March 08, 2021.**

# The Pakistani Taliban is Back

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By Daud Khattak

Six years after their defeat, the once-dreaded Pakistani Taliban have staged a gradual comeback in their former territories in Waziristan, the rugged tribal region bordering Afghanistan, by carrying out targeted killings, attacking Pakistani security forces, kidnapping government officials, and collecting protection money from local businessmen and government contractors.

The visible uptick in Taliban attacks over the past year in north and south Waziristan is believed to be the result of the re-unification and merger of several Taliban factions and splinters in the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a loose alliance of militant groups founded by the then-Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud in 2007.

Baitullah Mehsud, a veteran of the Afghan “jihad,” was killed in a drone strike in August 2009 and was replaced by Hakimullah Mehsud, another ruthless commander from the Mehsud clan, as the group’s new leader. However, Hakimullah Mehsud’s killing, also in a drone strike, in November 2013 opened cracks in the TTP alliance.

Several factions parted ways with the TTP following the appointment of Mullah Fazlullah, a non-Mehsud and non-tribal, as head of the banned militant group. Already weakened by its internal rifts and the separation of various factions and splinters, the TTP received what was perceived as a final blow when Pakistan launched a massive military operation, Zarb-e-Azb, in June 2014.

The TTP leadership fled across the border to hide in eastern and southeastern Afghanistan. The Taliban under Fazlullah struggled for survival. However, Fazlullah’s death in June 2018, also in a drone strike, once again returned the TTP leadership to the Mehsud Taliban.

Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, who is considered a writer and strategist rather than a hardened fighter, focused on bringing the various factions together under the TTP umbrella again over the next two years.

Besides his re-unification efforts, Mufti moved the TTP headquarters from eastern Afghanistan – Kunar and Nangarhar provinces – to the southeast in Paktika province, where the remote Bermal district provides his men easy access across the border into the former TTP stronghold of south Waziristan.

Being a Mehsud himself, Mufti Noor Wali not only managed to bring in the Mehsud factions of the TTP, but also win over the support of Taliban from Mohmand, Bajaur, and other tribal districts, besides bringing in groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Punjabi Taliban.

In July and August 2020, a Taliban spokesman announced the merger of the Amjad Farouqi group and one faction of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi under the commander of Maulvi Khush Muhammad Sindhi, in the TTP.

In November 2020, the TTP claimed the joining of Maulvi Aleem Khan, another Waziristan-based commander, along with nine commanders, while the same month, another TTP pamphlet suggested that Umar Izzam, known as Ghazi Umar Izzam, from Miami tribe joined the TTP along with his group “Musa Shaheed Karwan.”

The biggest success for the TTP under Mufti, however, was the rejoining of two strong factions – Jamat ul Ahrar (JuA) under Omar Khalid Khorasani and Hezb ul Ahar (HeA) of Omar Khorasani – in August 2020. The JuA is a breakaway faction of the TTP, while the HuA is a splinter of the JuA. Both operate in the Mohmand tribal district and the separation came as a result of the TTP leadership rivalries that followed the death of Hakimullah Mehsud in 2013.

It was the JuA faction of the TTP under Omar Khalid Khorasani that carried out the February 2016 Easter Sunday terrorist attack in Lahore, which killed around 75 and injured about 350 people, mostly women and children.

The re-emergence and re-unification of the Pakistani Taliban in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region is of deep concern not just for Pakistan but also for Afghanistan, India, China, and the United States, which is struggling to end its two-decade-long war in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is already reeling from Taliban violence while India is facing a jihadist threat in the part of Kashmir under the Indian control. The multi-headed monster may also affect China, given the country’s very visible presence and huge investments in Pakistan. In addition, the TTP still has connections with Uyghurs, some of which migrated to Afghanistan from Waziristan in the aftermath of Operation Zarb-e-Azb in June 2014.

The TTP has also expanded its financial resources, with local sources suggesting that group is levying taxes on contractors working on developmental projects such as road construction and the building of schools and hospitals in Waziristan and the adjacent districts.

According to local sources, the Taliban charge 5 percent of the total amounts of contracts from local contractors in Waziristan. The group has recently expanded its extortion network to the neighboring district of Tank and the more distant city of Karachi, Pakistan’s commercial capital.

Image building is another area for the re-organized TTP leadership and unlike his predecessors, Mufti Noor Wali regularly issues pamphlets and statements. Some use nationalist slogans to win the support of his fellow tribesmen.

In one recent Urdu-language statement, when the government security agencies issued a threat warning in February 2021 asking pro-government elders, government officials, and journalists to beware of Taliban attacks, a TTP spokesman quickly reacted, mocking the government for being “unable to ensure safety of its citizens.”

In the same statement, the TTP spokesman said “we would like to inform the people of Waziristan along with other Pakistanis that we are not targeting the common people.” This is in contrast with the policies of the previous TTP chiefs who cared less for the safety of civilians.

Mufti Noor Wali has closer links with the Afghan Taliban, leaders of the Haqqani Network, and remnants of al-Qaeda in the border region. This is in contrast with his predecessor Fazlullah, who was believed to be closer to the Afghan security agencies.

It was Mufti’s closer links with the Haqqanis and Afghan Taliban that, according to an unofficial source, prompted Pakistani security agencies to contact him to start peace talks and put an end to the violence. The source said that while the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban may advise the TTP leadership to declare a ceasefire, they cannot and would not force him to accept their advice.

Although the TTP has yet to prove its presence in the cities, its increasing attacks in Waziristan are reminiscent of its 2007 emergence in the tribal region and their gradual expansion to cities.

Another worrying aspect of the TTP’s re-emergence is the Afghanistan end game. Regardless of whether the Afghan government and the Taliban agree on a durable peace deal or the situation worsens in the case of no deal, the Pakistani Taliban will find solid ground for maintaining their presence and expanding their operations in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

The Pakistani Taliban will be encouraged and inspired to continue their militancy in case the Afghan Taliban, as is expected by some, manages to score a significant role in Afghanistan’s future governments. However, the continuation of the Afghan insurgency, in the case of no deal, would be equally inspirational for TTP fighters and commanders mainly because they will continue to find a cause for their “jihad.”

The last time Pakistan struck a serious blow to the TTP was June 2014’s Operation Zarb-e-Azb which pushed the militants out of the tribal areas and shattered their command-and-control structure. However, that push incurred heavy losses on the tribal people as over a million were displaced and their properties and businesses were destroyed.

Many of those tribesmen still live outside their home areas and hold protest demonstrations demanding compensation for their losses. The re-emergence of the Taliban in areas promised to have been cleared of militants is a source of serious concern.

Despite rendering huge sacrifices as a frontline state in the global war against terrorism, Pakistan has earned a bad name for what is called a “double game” by the country’s security agencies concerning the Taliban.

At a time when international forces are preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan, critics believe the re-emergence of Taliban in Pakistan’s tribal areas points to a new twist in Pakistan’s Taliban policy.

Pakistan won a hard battle against the TTP, sacrificing thousands of lives and suffering huge financial losses. The Taliban's return would not only spoil those gains, but also damage the trust in state power that was restored by defeating Taliban in the region.

Published in the Diplomat, March 09, 2021

## Anomalies spotted in disbursement of \$1.5m to Broadsheet: report



The commission was formed to probe the execution of contract and payments to Broadsheet LLC in connection with investigation into offshore properties of Pakistani politicians. — AFP/File

ISLAMABAD: A report of the one-man inquiry commission comprising retired Justice Azmat Saeed Sheikh found anomalies in disbursement of \$1.5 million to UK-based firm Broadsheet as the record of payment was missing in the ministries and departments concerned.

The commission was formed to probe the execution of contract and payments to Broadsheet LLC in connection with investigation into offshore properties of Pakistani politicians.

The law ministry's spokesperson confirmed that the report had been sent to the PM Office. She, however, did not disclose the contents of the report, saying that the Broadsheet commission was working independently and was not under any obligation to share its details with the ministry.

The commission's registrar disconnected the phone call when approached by Dawn.

The government sources, on the other hand, revealed that the commission had highlighted discrepancies in the payment of \$1.5 million to the UK-based firm and the report also enabled the federal government to de-seal the 12 diplomatic cartons containing the record related to Swiss accounts.

In 2009, then Pakistani high commissioner in the United Kingdom Wajid Shamsul Hasan had reportedly received the 12 cartons comprising original documents and evidence against some Pakistani high-ups in Swiss money laundering case.

In January this year, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior Mirza Shahzad Akbar informed the Senate that the Pakistan People's Party government had in 2008 made a payment of \$1.5m to an unknown firm which he termed a 'wrong firm'.

The commission completed the probe on Monday and submitted its report to the Prime Minister Office.

The report has 61 pages and about 500 more pages are annexed to the report as documents and statements of witnesses.

During the six-week inquiry, the commission recorded statements of 26 witnesses, including four former chairmen of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), -which included three former three-star generals namely retired Lt Gen Mohammad Amjad, Lt Gen Khalid Maqbool and Lt Gen Munir Hafeez. The commission also recorded the statement of former NAB chairman Naveed Ahsan. Former and incumbent federal secretaries also testified before the commission.

The sources said that the report highlighted that the record of payment of \$1.5m to Broadsheet was not available with the finance ministry, law ministry, the office of the Attorney General of Pakistan and the Pakistan High Commission in the UK.

They said the commission had termed it cheating and defrauding the state.

The commission has also recommended that the government is at liberty to de-seal the record of the Swiss accounts against former president and co-chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party Asif Ali Zardari and this may be referred to NAB for further necessary action.

Initially, an inquiry committee was formed to probe the Broadsheet saga, but later the inquiry commission was constituted following an approval by the federal cabinet.

The main objective of the committee was to investigate reports of UK-based assets recovery firm Broadsheet on corruption allegedly committed by over 200 Pakistani nationals, including

politicians, bureaucrats and military personnel, in 45 days. However, for the commission the time limit for completion of the investigation can also be extended.

The Cabinet Division had on Jan 29 issued a notification about the commission of inquiry along with its terms of references.

According to the notification, the commission has been empowered to constitute committees consisting of government officials and experts.

The federal cabinet agreed to form the one-man commission under the Pakistan Commissions of Inquiry Act, 2017, with a broader mandate.

The commission examined the contracts signed by NAB with Broadsheet LLC and other international asset recovery firms to unearth foreign assets made by Pakistanis through the ill-gotten money.

**Published in Dawn, March 23rd, 2021**

## Eight more sugar groups booked for speculative price hike



The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Thursday booked eight more major sugar groups and 40 'satta-agents' (speculative pricing manipulators) for "speculative price hike". — AFP/File

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Thursday booked eight more major sugar groups and 40 'satta-agents' (speculative pricing manipulators) for "speculative price hike".

The FIA has detected Rs110 billion earning by the sugar mafia over the past one year through "speculative pricing" and initiated action against those involved in it.

No arrest has been made so far as the FIA says it is waiting for results of forensic audit of about three dozen mobile phones and laptop devices recovered from the satta-agents.

"It is a massive financial crime and the masses, especially the poor, are its victims. We are taking action against the sugar groups and satta-agents involved in this scam without any exception," FIA Punjab (Zone-I) Director Dr Muhammad Rizwan told Dawn on Thursday.

In reply to a question about laying hands on "big fish" in the sugar industry for their alleged involvement in speculative pricing, he said: "We are receiving evidence in bulk and registered

FIRs against them and 40 pricing manipulators. And once we get the report of forensic evidence arrests will be made.”

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior Shahzad Akbar told a news conference here on Thursday that cases were being registered right now and arrests would be made later.

The FIA director said the agency was also examining the bank transactions in this regard. “Black money is used in the business of speculative pricing and 10 major sugar groups from Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Hasilpur and Bahawalpur are involved in this crime,” he added.

As many as 40 speculative pricing manipulators were booked by the FIA under sections 420, 468, 471 and 109 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), read with sections 3/4 of Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010, on Thursday and their connections were established with Alliance, Al-Moiz, Hamza, Chinar, Omni, Ittefaq, Ashraf, Fecto, Pattoki and Sheikoo sugar groups.

On Wednesday, the FIA had booked estranged PTI leader Jahangir Tareen’s JDW group, the Sharif group related to PML-N president Shehbaz Sharif and his sons – Hamza and Suleman – and Gourmet Bakers & Sweets (Pvt) Ltd, Lahore, under the same PPC sections.

According to the FIR, during the course of inquiry against the sugar mafia, “it has transpired that sugar industry barons, sugar-brokers & their satta-agents, in active connivance with sugar-mills, have transformed into a clandestine sugar satta-mafia and are operating in a collusive but secret-mode, especially through electronic means/WhatsApp groups to dishonestly and fraudulently maneuver, manipulate and artificially hike sugar prices, amidst hoax of impending sugar-stocks shortages (while sugar-stocks are lying ‘unsold’ or ‘sold/un-lifted’ in mills & godowns and demand-supply gap is artificial)”.

The FIA Lahore had in November last registered cases against Jahangir Tareen, his son Ali Tareen, PML-N resident Shehbaz Sharif, his sons Hamza and Suleman and others in the sugar scam under money laundering, fraud and other charges, but made no attempt to arrest them. Jahangir Tareen and Hamza Shehbaz had joined the investigation, but Shehbaz Sharif had sought time to respond to FIA’s queries in this regard.

The FIA had also investigated federal minister Khusro Bakhtiar and his family members in the sugar scam; however, it has yet to give them a clean chit.

When asked about the status of investigation against Mr Bakhtiar and his company, the FIA director said: “Investigation against him is under way.”

Following FIA’s action against the sugar groups and satta-agents, sugar traders have gone on strike in parts of Punjab.

“Sugar mills have nothing to do with speculative pricing as they supply sugar to the market. We are rather against satta and discourage it,” Punjab’s spokesman for the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association told Dawn.

He said that for the last two days the sugar traders had been on strike in the province against the FIA's action which they termed harassment. "The government needs to sit with both sugar mills and traders to sort out the issue of increase in sugar price. This issue can be sorted out amicably, otherwise through this environment of harassment, sugar price will further shoot up," he warned.

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# Radicalisation and Recruitment Online in Times of COVID-19: The Pandemic as a Propaganda Opportunity

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By Youssef Tobi

The jihadist doctrine is an ideological corpus built up by extremist theorists to give their destabilising aims a legal and theological basis, justifying and legitimising terrorist actions. This doctrinal corpus is based on a deviant interpretation of religion and its precepts, alongside a sometimes victimising and accusatory reading of the actions and behaviour of governments, often deemed impious. Whatever is happening in the world is, thus, exploited in order to discredit anything that does not conform to extremist views. The COVID-19 pandemic has been interpreted by the jihadist doctrine in exactly the same way, as a tool to legitimise the discourses and actions of terrorists globally. Lockdowns across the world have been a generalised strategy against the pandemic. Jihadist groups have capitalised heavily on the increased presence in virtual spheres of social media and telecommunications to broadcast their own view of the pandemic.

Three words summarise the jihadist world view, as expressed through jihadist literature: punishment (Thaa'r); sanction (Qissas) and revenge (Intiqam). Doctrines of jihad may differ, but these three concepts are at the forefront of all the actions and propaganda of terrorist groups. Indeed, terrorists assume that the current state of the world is catastrophic and they take it upon themselves to embody God's punishment and sanction to those who don't follow their idea of a righteous path. As the true Muslims are in their view continuously oppressed, jihadists should revenge against the oppressors and conduct a continuous world against them. This oppressor is often impersonated by the tenant of the Western World: States, Religious Groups etc. The COVID-19 pandemic has been framed within this lexicon, as it was quickly interpreted as God's punishment for the unfaithful. Terrorist propaganda insisted, for instance, that the COVID-19 upsurge in China was a chastisement inflicted by God for China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims.

Terrorist groups have a longstanding habit of exploiting security gaps where states have shown fragilities. For instance, when states aren't capable of providing basic services like health or protection, actions are quickly undertaken by terrorist to provide those services and thus gain legitimacy and sympathy within the populations. When it comes to this global pandemic, the same type of strategy was utilised. Terrorist groups have taken advantage of the lack of clear information and consensus on the main causes of the disease and the increased attention on conspiracy theories to promote their own view and simplistic explanation of the disease. Also, the shared anxiety and distrust among populations towards states have created a fertile ground

for anarchist and anti-state theories like those of jihadist groups to spread. Indeed, terrorist propaganda has continuously targeted states and their handling of this health crisis as a mean to validate and strengthen their ideological convictions. This instrumentalisation of the COVID-19 pandemic has been amplified by the generalisation of the lockdowns that have increased significantly the screen time of millions of people. This isolation of people at home has reduced daily activities and, in most cases, confined populations have come to rely on the Internet to overcome the difficulties and boredom of imposed solitude. Individuals who already regularly visited extremist sites, and others who have come across the doctrine propagated by jihadists, have experienced significant increases in the time they spend on the Internet. Using several techniques to attract people, especially young people, to their sites, terrorist propaganda websites have flourished during lockdowns. One of the techniques of jihadist sites is to present their websites as harmless, in order to attract new visitors and start them watching radical content.

Terrorist propaganda and the spread of hate speech online is a pandemic in itself, touching young and fragile individuals, causing massive distress for the societies it affects. Online campaigns should target and identify the audiences most prone to adhere to theories that link COVID-19 and divine punishment, while promoting counter-narratives that explain the science behind tackling and dealing with a global pandemic. The regulation of social media could become a viable strategy to limit hate speech and, thus, promote a more peaceful global community. Indeed, a strict set of rules for online political debates should be issued to avoid upsurges in conspiracy theories, hate speech, and direct calls for violence. Facebook and Twitter's recent stance on hate speeches and their efforts to promote a transparent and safe environment for communication on their platform could prove helpful in the fight against online extremism.

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## Weak prosecution

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**THE detailed verdict of the Supreme Court in the Daniel Pearl case has once again established the poor state of investigation and prosecution in Pakistan. The judgement, authored by Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, pointed out clearly the prosecution's failure to prove the guilt of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh who is the prime accused in the murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl.**

The Sindh High Court had last year overturned Sheikh's conviction and the family of Pearl had appealed to the Supreme Court. The detailed verdict of the Supreme Court is a direct indictment of the prosecution and should put the system to shame. The verdict says that regarding each and every piece of evidence, there was uncertainty on the part of the witnesses and it was a settled matter that the benefit of the doubt would apply to the accused. The verdict states that the evidence furnished during the trial was full of factual and legal defects.

There is little doubt that Sheikh is a dangerous terrorist. His track record of criminality ranges from kidnapping to blackmailing and murder. He has hoodwinked the authority's multiple times and committed horrendous terror crimes. The fact that Pakistan's criminal justice system cannot prove the guilt of such a man even after keeping him in a death cell for two decades speaks volumes for the state of the system. The unfortunate reality is that despite this dismal situation, little or no headway has been made in reforming the system. Investigation and prosecution remain in a shamble, ravaged by corruption, incompetence and habitual manipulation.

Innocent men are sent to the gallows while the guilty often walk free. It is this grim reality that has benefited Omar Sheikh. The judiciary and the executive both share the blame for their inability and unwillingness to cleanse the criminal justice system of the rot that has now seeped deep. The setting aside of Sheikh's conviction has elicited a strong reaction from the United States and other countries. It is a blot on our justice system. Yet few voices are heard demanding an overhaul of the system so that such travesties of justice do not become the norm. Such is the apathy, however, that this case is also being dealt with in a normal manner and shall soon be buried under heaps of similar failures. Nothing could be more unfortunate for Pakistan.

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# Body formed to review social media rules

By Malik Asad



Minister for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari will be the chairperson of the inter-ministerial committee. — Dawn News TV/File

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has constituted an inter-ministerial committee to review the controversial social media rules.

As per a directive issued by the Prime Minister Office on March 29, Minister for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari will be chairperson of the committee comprising Parliamentary Secretary on Law and Justice Maleeka Ali Bukhari, Senator Syed Ali Zafar, Secretary of Information Technology Shoaib Ahmad Siddiqui and Chairman of the Pakistan Tele-communication Authority (PTA) retired Maj Gen Amir Azeem Bajwa.

A statement issued by the office of Attorney General Khalid Jawed Khan on Tuesday said that the Information Technology and Telecommunication Division would function as the committee's secretariat. It will submit a report along with its recommendations in the matter to the prime minister within 30 days.

The committee will commence work and its secretariat would intimate public at large of the date and venue for consultations with all stakeholders, including the petitioners who have challenged the social media rules in the Islamabad High Court.

The petitioners – Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists secretary general Nasir Zaidi, the Awami Workers Party, Dawn’s Employees Union, Amber Rahim Shamsi and citizen Mohammad Ashfaq Jatt – contends that the rules are contrary to the freedom of expression as guaranteed in the Constitution.

The IHC chief justice had during a hearing of the petition in January observed that the government did not consult the stakeholders before promulgating the rules.

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# Time to put our own house in order

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By Syed Akhtar Ali Shah

The statement of the Army Chief, General Qamar Bajwa, to put our own house in order has generated a keen debate in the print and electronic media. It is, however, essential that before venturing into further debate, we investigate the major fault lines of governance in order to suggest a proper remedial solution. In my analysis, the fault lines identified below need to be addressed in this regard.

The first major fault line was our appeasement of the religious groups during the process of constitution making ever since the birth of Pakistan thus encouraging religiosity in the body politics. The Muslim League made itself a virtual hostage to the religious groups by equating Pakistan with Islam and related religiosity. The extremism we observe today is the direct result of this early step that was taken after Jinnah's death. Second is our history of suppression of multiculturalism and pluralistic discourse, by imposing government-sponsored ideologies and negating cultural identities.

The third fault line is the decision of mobilisation of armed militias and stirring Jihadi rhetoric and the abortive attempt for taking over Kashmir in 1948. The fourth one relates to the practice of extensions granted to General Ayub Khan from time to time and arrogating to him an overarching role in the political affairs of Pakistan. Fifth, it has been the feudal, bureaucratic and military nexus, using all means to wield power, ignoring the sentiments of the majority. The sixth fault line was becoming the most allied ally of the United States, by signing SEATO and CENTO to contain communism (read: the Soviet Union).

The seventh fault line was the abrogation of the constitution of 1956 and imposition of martial law, in negation of the rule of law. Ayub Khan centralised all powers in his person. Despite celebrating a decade of development thanks to generous US aid, regional and class disparities widened, resulting in mass agitation all over the country.

Then there was the refusal to accept the results of the 1970 general elections. After losing East Pakistan in utter humiliation, Yahya Khan had no other option but to hand over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for the rest of the country.

With the handing over of power to a popular party, a new era of constitutionalism began resulting in the Constitution of 1973. In those circumstances, given that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the National Awami Party (NAP) were both progressive and liberal parties, should have been natural allies, but unfortunately, they fell apart over the Balochistan policy. Bhutto dismissed Balochistan's government followed by a military operation. Consequently, the NAP-JUI government also resigned as a show of solidarity. This was the ninth fault line. Although Bhutto was a charismatic leader with progressive thoughts, he also used rhetoric and jingoistic

sloganeering such as “we would eat grass but fight for a thousand years”, to whip up public sentiment. Such jingoism led us to Jihadi tendencies which became the tenth fault line.

The use of the military in Balochistan again propped up the interventionist role of our armed forces. Instead of consolidating political institutions, Bhutto unfortunately was driven more by self-preservation tendencies. The crackdown against the opposition, banning of NAP and imprisonment of their leaders are just a few examples in this regard. At the time of his anti-US stance, he required the support of all political forces. This gave his political opponents a chance to organise a movement, with the alleged support of the US, which ultimately resulted in the martial law of Ziaul Haq.

Under the Reagan Doctrine, Pakistan’s alliance to sponsor a proxy war in the garb of Jihad in Afghanistan to dismantle governments and ultimately installing the Taliban government was the eleventh fault line. Embracing Jihadi non-state actors in order to pursue national policy objectives militarised a large segment of the society, tearing apart the social fabric.

Allowing foreigners of all hues and creeds to use our land for waging wars on our neighbours and resulting in acts of terror in the outside world, climaxing in the attack on the World Trade Center or the events of 9/11, was the twelfth fault line. This had brought us to the brink of war with other countries and developed the perception of Pakistan being an “epicentre of terrorism”, possessing “safe havens” for terrorists and “no go areas”.

During subsequent years, the country witnessed the toppling of the elected governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif and political engineering with no respect to the Constitution, the propping up of non-state actors resulting in self-inflicted harm in the form of insurgencies, and the worst episodes of terrorism. Even the last general elections were allegedly manoeuvred by using arm twisting methods in favour of one political party. As a result, Pakistan today is a divided house on almost all national issues.

The lessons drawn from the aforementioned fault lines are that it’s the constitution that binds the various segments of a society in the form of a social contract. It sets legal authority and parameters for all institutions and functionaries of the state. Political parties act as vehicles of expression for the people. Strong political conventions based on democratic values and norms provide strength to the political system. Such arrangements call for the supremacy of the constitution and civilian rule. The house can only be put in order by following the constitution and democratic conventions, focusing on socio-economic development, mending fences with neighbours, shunning extremism, curbing armed militias and violent non-state actors and adopting the policy of peaceful co-existence.

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# Miscarriage of justice

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THE legal system in Pakistan leaves much to be desired, with cases at times dragging on for decades, while litigants endlessly wait for justice. However, when it comes to capital punishment – which is irreversible and which this newspaper does not support – the lacunae in the justice system become even more apparent, as they concern matters of life and death. One recent case has again highlighted the need for urgent reform of the justice system as a whole. As reported on Tuesday, convict Mohammad Anwar’s death sentence was commuted by the Supreme Court in a murder case after he had spent 28 years in jail as it found him to be a juvenile at the time the offence was committed. He was arrested in 1993 and sentenced by a lower court in 1998; thereafter, his case sluggishly made its way through the judicial system. In the meantime, a presidential order was notified in 2001 granting special remission in capital punishment cases to juveniles under the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance 2000. Though Anwar applied for his death sentence to be converted to a life term soon after the presidential order was issued, after a lengthy back and forth his juvenility has just been confirmed.

Though the man has been mercifully spared the gallows, a large chunk of his life has been spent behind bars when the law provided for remission. Anwar’s is not the only case of its kind and if Pakistan’s legal system is carefully examined, many more such grave miscarriages of justice may emerge. As this paper has argued before, juvenile justice laws need to be better implemented so youngsters are reformed and given another chance at life. Moreover, the case quoted above also highlights the need to speed up and improve the investigation and trial process. There can be no justification for keeping a person behind bars for nearly three decades only for the law to later realise that the statute books contained a remedy.

**[Editorial in Dawn, March 31st, 2021](#)**