

Saroop Ijaz



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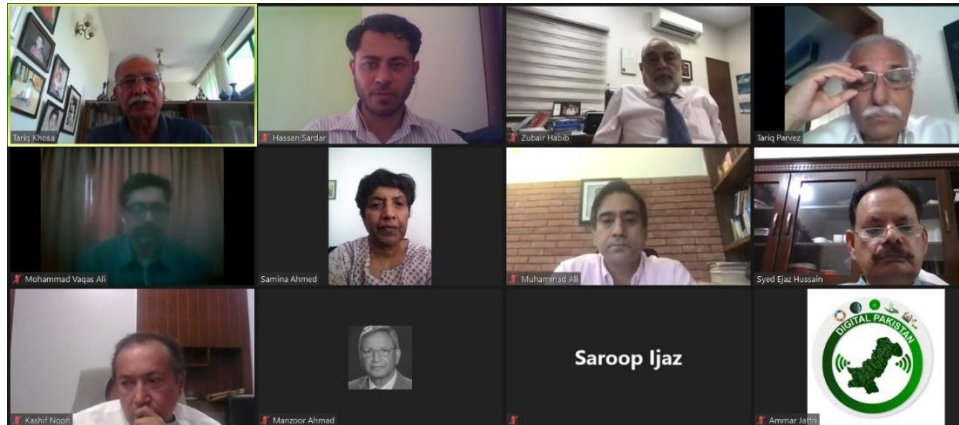
Saroop Ijaz

Legal Expert

NIOC DIRECTORATE

CONSULTANTS

NIOC's 22nd Advisory Board Meeting



THE 22nd Advisory Board Meeting was held on Monday 09 August 2021. The following participated: Tariq Parvez, Samina Ahmed, Zubair Habib, Manzoor Ahmed, Tariq Khosa, Ejaz Hussain, Ali Nekokara, Saroop Ijaz, Ammar Jaffri, Kashif Noon, Mohammad Vaqas Ali and Hassan Sardar.

Director NIOC Khosa apprised the Board about initial work undertaken to prepare timelines for SOC Study. Interview with National Expert on OC ADG FIA Ehsan Sadiq was the highlight of July activities. Director outlined the work plan for August in which team interviews with ADG FIA Immigration and Anti-Human Smuggling and civil society activist Ali Cheema were planned.

Director NIOC informed about the UNTOC Review of Pakistan to be carried out by two African countries. He had taken up with the Ministry of Interior to appoint the Focal Person for UNTOC review. NIOC would be willing to build a coalition of CSOs and NGOs for the review process and input of the community.

NIOC completed the study on Connectivity and Criminality, especially in the context of CPEC. The study was carried out for three months (May-July 2021). It was appreciated by both national and international stakeholders.

It was also decided to organize a Stakeholders' Roundtable on Serious and Organized Crimes in September 2021. Ejaz Hussain and Ammar Jaffri will organize the virtual event.

NIOC will issue a policy brief on first-ever National Cyber Security Policy. Ammar Jaffri will put together the policy brief in September 2021.

Cyber police

WHY is it that we only act after we have been caught with our pants down from a threat we long knew existed? This is exactly what the premier regulator of telecommunications and – by extension of which – the internet, has decided to do by suggesting that it will form a new cybersecurity agency in the country to counter the threat from cyber attackers. The move is the state’s attempt to respond to reports that India employed digital spyware created by Israeli cyber penetration firm NSO to hack Prime Minister Imran Khan’s phone.

The question is: why we have failed to move on this sooner? The threat of cyberattacks is not new. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, which will shape up the mentioned agency, has been facing attacks for well over a decade. Website belonging to the PTA and those of numerous other government agencies and services have been hacked repeatedly over the past 10 years. When the Pakistan Electronics Crime Act, or PECA, was being drafted, rights groups had pointed out the need to include provisions for safeguarding public data online. Despite the alarms raised, little was done.

Then there is the issue of capability. Our digital regulators have time and again been proved to have been incapable of regulating the internet, simply because it is a beast beyond their control. Even in terms of clear criminal activity, the Federal Investigation Agency, which is designated to tackle cybercrime, told this very committee that it takes action in just 34% of reported cases owing to gross understaffing; and that for a lot of complaints they receive, they have to interact with multinational organisations which are not always obligated to comply with the local laws.

An unregulated, unaccountable and all-powerful security organisation will only do as much as some other bodies are already doing: damage control after the event. We need a robust agency that safeguards our interests online, but we need a body that is constitutional, has public oversight, and acts in public interest.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 2, 2021

Migrant pushbacks

SYED MOHAMMAD ALI

THE tumultuousness caused by conflict, climate change, lack of opportunity and varied forms of persecution is compelling an ever-growing number of people in poorer countries to move. This movement of people either takes the form of internal displacement or else it implies crossing national borders in the search for a better life. While neighbouring countries often bear the bulk of refugee and migrant flows, the recent spike in desperate people trying to reach Europe from Africa and from war-torn countries like Syria and Afghanistan has received a lot of international attention. In response to this so-called 'migrant crisis', many rich countries have begun hardening borders which has had made migration less safe for people seeking sanctuary abroad.

The irregular movement of people across borders, often in the same group, and over the same routes, includes a range of people including not only economic migrants but asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless people, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children. Governments in countries averse to the unregulated inflow of migrants are increasingly relying on 'push-backs'. Pushbacks are government sanctioned measures which enable refugees and migrants to be forced back over a national border without consideration of their individual circumstances, without any possibility to apply for asylum, or to even challenge the measures being taken against them.

Forcibly pushing back refugees and migrants is an inhumane practice that violates international law as it risks sending people back to face persecution, or even more dire threats. Yet, pushbacks are now being practised by many rich countries around the world. Infamously, Australia has been regularly pushing back migrant boats before they reach Australian shores. Australian authorities also try to actively resist transparency and oversight on how asylum seekers are intercepted and turned back at sea.

Australia is not the only country using brutal pushback tactics. The Guardian recently reported that nearly 40,000 asylum seekers have been prevented from crossing European borders. A Trump administration program forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico turned into a sweeping rejection of all forms of migrants, despite threats to the migrants' safety. The extent to which the Biden administration will be able to undertake meaningful overhaul of such pushback policies remains to be seen.

The increasing reliance on militarisation, extraterritorial border control, and deterrence to try and control migration has dire consequences. The ongoing pandemic has made matters worse by severely disrupted global mobility, even stranding legal migrants, and severely reducing their

earning, which has pushed millions of families to the brink of desperation. Covid-19 has not put an end to illegal border crossings into richer countries like the EU, but the circumstances of these already vulnerable people have become worse.

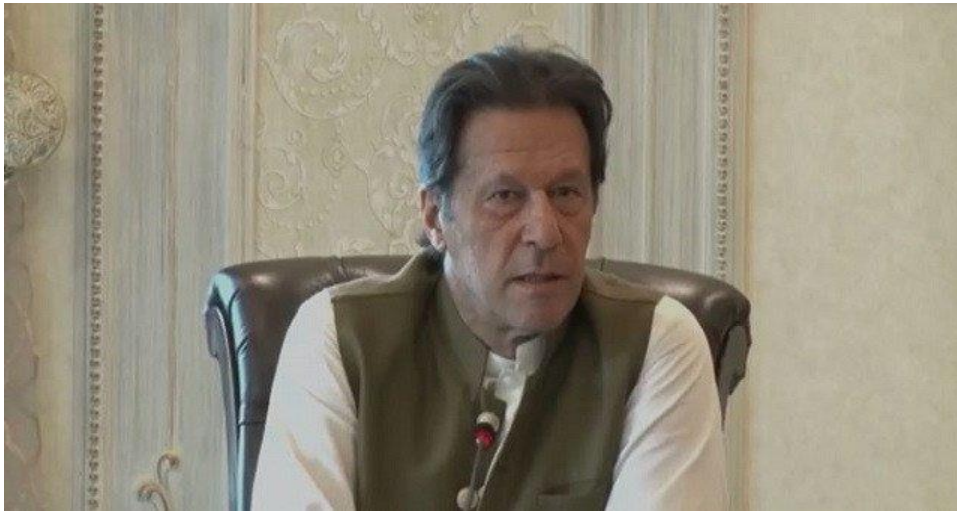
The UN's Special Rapporteur on the human rights has documented a widespread pattern of human rights violations taking place due to migrant pushbacks amongst most migration routes around the world. The UN system must take appropriate action to address this problem by establishing an independent monitoring mechanism on pushbacks and collective expulsions and by taking countries which enact such policies to task.

There is an evident need for countries around the world to synchronise their domestic legislation with international human rights law which in turn will help prevent the forcible return of refugees. International pressure must also be applied to decriminalise irregular entry of vulnerable people across national borders. Moreover, states should not be allowed to use punitive measures to deter search and rescue of asylum seekers in peril, or preventing humanitarian assistance at borders, which is what we have been seeing of late in the US and across much of Europe.

In the absence of international scrutiny and lack of public awareness of migrant pushbacks, there is a climate of impunity under which migration authorities react, especially at the behest of populist and xenophobic leaders.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 6, 2021.

PM orders updating of NAP to make it more effective



PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan on Thursday directed for updating the National Action Plan (NAP) of 2014 in order to make it more effective to cater to the needs of present-day challenges, especially espionage, subversion and cyber security.

The prime minister chaired a high-level meeting, where the country's top civil and military leadership reviewed the overall law and order situation and implementation status of NAP 2014 that was formulated to ensure security in the length and breadth of the country.

The meeting was attended by Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, Law Minister Farogh Naseem, Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt-Gen Faiz Hamid, Director General Military Operations (DGMO) MajGen Nauman Zakria, DG Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) Maj-Gen Babar Iftikhar besides senior civil and military officials.

While reviewing the law-and-order situation in the country, "especially, in tri-border areas of Punjab and Balochistan", the prime minister directed for the establishment of an Inter-Provincial Border Committee to address boundary issues using the Survey of Pakistan 2021, officials said.

It was also decided that civil and police administration in the area would be strengthened further to improve the security situation in these areas.

The meeting approved, in principle, a five-year socio-economic development plan for the less-developed areas of Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur to bring them at par with other parts of the

province, especially, in the area of infrastructure development, provision of water, health and education.

While reviewing the NAP implementation, it had been decided that the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s Cyber Crime Wing would be reorganised to make it more effective, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid told The Express Tribune.

Dilating on the reasons behind establishing the border committee, the interior minister said that the committee was formed as there were several boundary-related issues that needed to be resolved.

“Even the boundary of Islamabad and Rawalpindi has not yet been decided,” the minister added.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said that cyber terrorism was the main focus of the meeting as there had been several incidents, where people from abroad, especially India, ran campaigns on social media in Pakistan.

“TLP's whole campaign was run from India,” Chaudhry said, referring to a recent country-wide protest by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan. “They [foreign elements] have to be stopped,” the government's spokesperson added.

However, the minister stressed that currently, the Cyber Wing of the FIA was more “bureaucratic” therefore it needed to be made “smart” by inducting young people, who were more tech-savvy and had a better understanding of cybercrimes. Chaudhry also stressed the need for curbing hate speech and stopping the spread of disrespectful material through social media, especially in the month of Muharram.

He added that narration-building was crucial to eliminate extremism. The government will focus on it in the coming days.”

The information minister said the threat of a new phase of terrorist activities in Pakistan because of the Afghan endgame was also discussed in the meeting. He said that the border control, as well as Afghan government's inadequate role about border issues, was discussed.

Responding to a question about the implementation of NAP, Chaudhry said that several points of the plan had already been implemented but some points such as legal and madrassa reforms had not yet been implemented.

Following the discussion, the minister said, three different committees were formed; each would be headed by the interior, information and foreign minister.

NAP was formulated a week after the deadly attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014.

“After the attack, a national consensus was evolved to come down hard on the terrorists through a concerted national effort,” he said. “Subsequently, a 20-point NAP was chalked out by the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the interior ministry in consultation with

the stakeholders to counter terrorism and extremism. It was approved by parliament on December 24, 2014," he said.

"After the National Internal Security Policy of 2014, it [NAP] was the second consensus policy document approved by the government, which spelt out the specifics for the counter-terrorism drive in the country."

An official statement of the meeting read that the participants expressed satisfaction over the achievements made so far and decided to update the plan to make it more effective to cater to the needs of the present times.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 6, 2021

Law: The Obstacles to Punishment



IN her decades-long service as a medico-legal officer and, now, additional police surgeon at a public hospital, Dr Summaiya Syed Tariq has seen everything.

From examining pierced headless bodies after bomb attacks, acid attack survivors to tortured maids at the hands of otherwise ‘respectable elites’ of the city, she has seen the bitter tragedies of life quite closely. Tragedies that are often trivialised to ‘cases’ that have been ignored and reduced to dust, without any action from state and society.

One such ‘case’ also lies forgotten, but not by her.

In 2016, Dr Tariq was assigned to examine a pregnant minor from Karachi, recovered from Punjab. Initial investigations revealed that she had been kidnapped from outside her house days after her family refused a proposal.

“She had been passed around like a candy as revenge for her family’s refusal to bow,” says Dr Tariq. “She came to us completely broken, some six months later. Her body bore marks of extreme torture and we referred her for counselling.” But unfortunately, it was too late by then.

While the body started to heal, the girl’s mental health deteriorated with every passing day. And as the pain became too much to bear, she chose to end her life.

This particular case is not an exceptional one.

The accumulative medico-legal statistics of Karachi's three public hospitals (Abbasi Shaheed, Civil Hospital and Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center), released by the office of the police surgeon, Karachi, show an alarming increase of gender-based assaults, between 2013 to 2020 – a 40 percent increase in rape cases of females and over 200 percent increase in sodomy cases of males within seven years. While the increase may partly be because of a greater willingness of people to report such crimes, the statistics paint a horrific situation, which is by all accounts not even the full picture.

“This is just the tip of an ice berg,” says Dr Tariq. “In the entire metropolis, the real number will be 10 times more.”

A close inspection of the data reveals its limitations as well. It does not include the age of survivors – which could help researchers assess how many of them were minors – nor demographic locations of the site of the crime, which could help the law enforcement authorities to ascertain the hotspots.

Interestingly, the Karachi-based War Against Rape, in its 2020 report, states that the conviction rate on rape cases is less than three percent.

“The failure of our criminal justice system in providing speedy justice to victims of gender-based crimes and rise in sex crimes are correlated,” says Wasim Raza Naqvi, a human rights lawyer.

“There is a sense of impunity because of structural gaps within the system. It is not that the laws are not there or new laws are not being made, but their lack of implementation in true letter and spirit on provincial and federal levels is the biggest issue. Multiple pro-women bills were translated into laws between 2006-16 but to little effect.”

A research report by the Legal Aid Society, focusing on the gap analysis on investigation and prosecution of rape and sodomy cases, by taking into account as many as 50 cases, shows rampant procedural gaps within the legal system – with delays in trial time being at the top.

“The legally mandated trial time in cases of rape, sodomy and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual abuse, is three months,” reads the report. “However, the actual trial time takes much longer. Different courtrooms were revealed to have different methods of dealing with rape cases. In Gender Based Violence (GBV) Courts of Karachi East, cases are run on a day-to-day basis with the GBV Court operating on a daily basis. In Hyderabad, one day a week is appointed for GBV Court i.e., Tuesday, which may result in trials taking slightly longer to conclude.”

The average time taken from the framing of charges to a final order from the trial court is 9.6 months. This shows an astronomical delay of six months in the conclusion of trial.

The total procedural time (investigation plus trial) is revealed to be an average of 15.5 months, while on average each case took a total time of 16.8 months to reach a conclusion – contrary to the laws of the country that call for the judgment to be reached within three months, says the report.

As Legal Aid Society CEO, Barrister Haya Emaan Zahid points out at a digital session that, with rampant delays in court cases, there are more chances to lose out critical evidence, for witnesses to resile from earlier statements, more pressure on the victim to compromise, and for cases go off the grid.

Botched police investigations in relation to chemical examinations also causes blatant travesty of justice, the case of Faiz Rehman being a sad example. Rehman lost his six-year-old daughter to rape and murder in January 2016. Hearings continued for nearly three years and, in the end, the court exonerated all 19 suspects on the benefit of doubt, as it declared that DNA results had been contaminated.

“The prosecution [had] miserably failed to make out its case even by producing any circumstantial or documentary evidence or any other proof which [played]/ assigned any concrete role of the accused persons to give complete picture of the alleged crime,” said the judgment.

Dr Tariq says that while investigative officers rely heavily on the DNA evidence for sex crime cases, it is also a fact that the medico-legal collection of samples are often faulty, delayed or not preserved properly – which ultimately leads to the loss of other corroborative evidences.

“Sexual assaults are multi-dimensional, requiring at least three different departments to work together, such as the police, the medico-legal department and the judiciary,” says Dr Tariq. “Our dismal conviction rate is enough evidence to mandate revolutionary reforms at all levels.”

She adds that it’s not all doom and gloom, as things are moving in the right direction – albeit slowly. There is a plan to include 200 specially trained GBV police investigation officers in Sindh.

As the state and society battles with rising sex crimes, aiming to minimise the structural gaps present in the criminal justice system, the sex crime rate appears to be growing exponentially. A few days after the minor’s suicide, Dr Tariq was treating a barely five-year-old kid, who had come to the hospital facility in extreme pain, with blood dripping from his trousers. His examination revealed sexual assault and extreme injuries to his privates.

“The stories are all the same,” she says in a grim voice. After a heavy silence she adds, “May those who were subjected to evil find peace. They deserved a better life that was snatched away from them.”

SOURCE: DAWN, EOS, AUGUST 8, 2021

UN Security Council condemns Dasu attack



THE UN Security Council (UNSC) has condemned the July 14 terrorist attack in Dasu, reassuring Pakistan of its continued support in the fight against terrorism. In a statement issued in New York, the council urged all states to cooperate with Pakistan in bringing perpetrators to justice. “The members of the Security Council condemn in the strongest terms the cowardly terrorist attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan, on 14 July, which resulted in the deaths of nine Chinese nationals and three Pakistanis and many injured,” the council said.

“The members (also) expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the governments of Pakistan and China, and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.” The 15-member Council reaffirmed its rejection of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, adding that it constituted one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

“The members of the Security Council underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice,” they said in the statement. They urged all states, “in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the governments of Pakistan and China, as well as all other relevant authorities in this regard”.

The Council reiterated that “any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed”.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 8, 2021

Economic lessons taught by Covid-19 pandemic



THE post-pandemic world is filled with uncertainties. Who knows when a new variant of the novel coronavirus would hit and where?

And who can predict precisely how a new wave of Covid-19 would affect national, regional and international economies? It seems a new world is emerging. Economic development patterns are changing. Economic growth models are changing. And, consequently economic policy priorities are also changing. Some nations are more adventurous by nature.

Others are not. The first lesson the world has learnt during the pandemic is that it has to respond collectively to every challenge, which can potentially affect all nations. This means no nation – big or small – can now afford to go solo in braving a global challenge like the Covid-19 pandemic. So, the first thing Pakistan’s policymakers must do – and it is good to see they are already doing – is that they must benefit from the world experience in containing the spread of the pandemic and in containing the economic fallout of the pandemic.

There is no need, as they say, to reinvent the wheel. Most nations affected by the pandemic have resorted to fiscal expansion and easing of monetary policy to overcome the challenges of Covid-19. And, Pakistan has also done that. This policy must continue till the time the challenge of the

pandemic is over – or subsides substantially. Most of the developing nations are now trying their best to earn – or borrow from external sources – to meet pandemic-induced imports and social safety net expenses.

As they spend more on imports and on social sectors, they also try to push up exports and revenues to avoid unmanageably large trade and fiscal deficits and sovereign loan defaults. Pakistan is doing the same. It is focusing on sustainable growth of exports as well as remittances and, at the same time, pursuing policies of both tax and non-tax revenues. In the post-pandemic world, countries with a narrow tax base are struggling more in boosting economic growth than the ones with a relatively large tax base.

Pakistan is not doing enough on this account, though its higher tax collection in the last fiscal year has followed some expansion in the tax base. There is an urgent need to expand the overall tax base through increase in the collection of direct taxes. Indirect taxes are already too many and, technically speaking, the entire nation pays indirect taxes in one form or the other – at one stage or another.

Digitalisation

In the post-pandemic world, different sectors and subsectors of the economy are being reprioritised and each sector and sub-sector is undergoing tremendous change. Gone are the days when developing countries could afford a slow-paced digitalisation. Now, because of the pandemic-triggered lockdowns and social distancing, e-learning and e-commerce are gaining momentum. This momentum needs to be maintained.

Pakistan lags far behind both in e-learning and in e-commerce. The country must accelerate all efforts to maintain a system of online education parallel to the education through in person interaction. And, it must also exploit all the opportunities emerging in e-commerce like trading through Amazon or via Facebook Marketplace. All local portals of online trading have already achieved a new milestone in their outreach during the pandemic days.

With the enlisting of Pakistani businesses on Amazon and on Facebook Marketplace, the country's own online markets (like daraz.pk and food panda) as well as individual entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and even large industries can boost their domestic and foreign sales. The government only needs to come up with more supportive policies.

Wealth sharing

Economic growth and development remodelling has emerged as a big challenge in the post-pandemic world. Resource redistribution, which is taking place to contain the economic fallout of the pandemic, needs to be maintained and even pushed forward. Over the past two decades of this century, the global wealth has become more concentrated in fewer hands, and income disparity has been on the rise.

The pandemic has exposed this global economic fault line and forced wealthier nations to share their wealth more equitably with other nations – and within their own segments of the population. This is true in developing nations’ context too. Policymakers must realise this and work hard to ensure a more inclusive growth model and introduce more resilient economic development models. That is not possible without quickly closing the gender gaps, skill gaps and poverty gaps.

The sooner Pakistan and similar countries empower their youth, particularly young women, and equip them with new sets of skills and technologies needed for a new growth and development model the better. Sadly, this objective is not being pursued in many developing nations, including our own country, and global social development goals have almost been forgotten. (We haven’t even identified fully the sources of investment in the now-needed sets of skills and technologies).

Going forward, such countries will have to pay the price for it as their ability to respond to future uncertainties would become weaker day by day, and their social agility required to steer the post-pandemic economy in the right direction would also be hit hard. These are serious issues but no serious discussion is taking place around them.

Building specific capabilities to respond to the future global economic challenges and ensuring social agility to augment these capabilities is not possible without amending the political systems accordingly. Fragile democracies like that of ours need to strengthen the democratic institutions in light of the post-pandemic ground realities at home and abroad. In the post-pandemic world, managing the economy has become far more important.

We need an entirely new, practical approach in everything related to the economy. That is not possible unless we first determine what economic lessons the pandemic is offering and then learn them well.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 9, 2021

As U.S. Leaves Afghanistan, History Suggests It May Struggle to Stay Out

A decade ago, a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq opened the door for the Islamic State. Will the withdrawal from Afghanistan do the same for the Taliban?

BY BEN HUBBARD



AFTER gruelling years of watching United States forces fight and die in a faraway land, the president appealed to growing war weariness among voters and brought the troops home.

Not long after, an extremist group stormed through areas the Americans had left, killing civilians, seizing power and sweeping away billions of dollars' worth of American efforts to leave behind a stable nation.

That's what happened after President Barack Obama withdrew American forces from Iraq in 2011: the jihadists of the Islamic State established an extremist emirate, prompting the United States to dispatch its military, yet again, to flush them out.

It is also now a possible scenario in Afghanistan, where President Biden's order to shut down America's longest war has led to swift advances by the Taliban, the same extremist group the United States invaded Afghanistan to topple after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The challenge of achieving American interests in complex and distant societies like Afghanistan and Iraq has bedevilled policymakers from both parties since President George W. Bush declared the "war on terror" nearly two decades ago.



In the years since, even how those interests are defined has swung wildly, driven at some times by a desire to spread democracy and human rights and at others by exasperation that costly efforts by the United States have borne so little fruit.

The result, according to some analysts and former United States officials, is a perception among both friends and enemies that you can never guarantee how long the United States will stick around.

"In my experience, we just have a lack of strategic patience as a nation and as a government," said Ryan Crocker, a retired United States diplomat who served as ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan. "Sadly, in the region, our adversaries have come to count on us not staying the course."

Mr. Biden has decided the time has come to leave Afghanistan, despite the risk that future developments could suck the United States back in.

In a speech last month defending his policy, Mr. Biden argued that it was not the United States' job to fix the country.

“We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build,” Mr. Biden said. “It’s the right and the responsibility of Afghan people alone to decide their future and how they want to run their country.”

After two decades, he argued, keeping the troops deployed just a little longer was “not a solution, but a recipe for being there indefinitely.”



That policy has come under pressure in recent days, as Taliban forces seized six provincial capitals and exposed the weakness of the Afghan forces meant to take over after the United States completes its withdrawal at the end of the month.

During their advance, the Taliban have been accused of using assassinations and bombings to subvert talks aimed at creating a power-sharing government. Rights activists fear they will reimpose restrictions on women, barring them for working and moving around independently. And security experts warn that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State could use Afghanistan to plot new attacks abroad.

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES, AUGUST 10, 2021

Quetta again

AT least two policemen were martyred and at least 21 people injured in a terrorist attack in a high-security area in Quetta. The improvised explosive device was planted on a motorcycle and took place at Zarghoon Road, near University Chowk, and appeared to be targeting a police van. According to investigators, the bomb used about 4kg explosives and appears to have been detonated using a timer. At least nine of the injured people were civilians, while the rest were policemen, says a police spokesman.

The outlawed Baloch Liberation Army has claimed responsibility for the attack, and although the government and security forces have not confirmed their own suspicions on the record, it would be no surprise if they pointed to the same suspects. Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan condemned the attack with the usual political bluster. “We will never allow terrorists to succeed in their nefarious designs,” he said, ignoring the fact that terrorist attacks have taken the lives of dozens of civilians and even more security officials this year.

As their label suggests, the terrorists have very much succeeded in terrorising Pakistan. Jam Kamal and leaders in Islamabad need to get their act together. They need to stop announcing that the public supports the security forces in their anti-terrorism efforts and actually legislate so as to combat terrorism. Also, while the CM may be arguing that the terrorists achieve their broader separatist goals, the fact is that even they know that. At this point, it is increasingly clear that these groups are only in operation to destabilise Balochistan. That, in turn, only serves the interests of India, and to a lesser extent, the Afghan government.

The fact that these attacks keep occurring shows the need to intensify security and diplomatic approaches. We will skip Afghanistan for now because Kabul could lose control over the Balochistan border in a matter of days. As for India, simply calling out the country’s alleged support of terrorism or announcing we have presented dossiers showing its involvement with terrorist groups is not enough. If India doesn’t back down, we need to push harder to get the world powers to punish them.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 10, 2021.

Left hanging

SHIMAILA MATRI DAWOOD

A MOUNTAIN is not so hard or as solid a structure as one may expect. Stranded for hours this Eid on the narrow winding roads straddling Pakistan's northern towns, I had time to contemplate the masses of precariously arranged boulder and rock, long shorn from the main edifice, threatening to hurtle towards me. The crests of the Karakoram cavort playfully with the clouds, but negotiating them as a climber or traveller is no child's play. Even a gentle mid-summer night's drizzle can unleash loads of loosened stone down its sides, ready to crush anyone caught underneath.

Human hearts, on the other hand, can be far more cruel than killer rocks. Public officials unmoved to act when incidents of child rape, sodomy and murder proliferate, when tiny abused bodies are regularly found discarded in open sewers or garbage heaps, should not be called stones, for as our scriptures tell us, even stones sometimes split for fear of God.

They're accomplices.

When seven-year-old Zainab Ansari's body was thrown into a kachra kundi (garbage dump), Pakistanis vowed justice. Two years later, the human rights minister announced the Zainab Alert Response and Recovery Act. ZARRA is responsible for what its name suggests: creating and overseeing a missing child alert system; liaising with provinces to ensure a police rescue and response mechanism; and maintaining a digital, national, missing child case database. FIRs must be filed for children reported missing to ZARRA offices or district police and uploaded within two hours. But more than three years since her brutal murder, only Zainab's killer, Imran Ali, has been executed; the rest of these actions have been left hanging.

And so the kidnapping, torture, rape and murder of children continues undeterred. Six-year-old Maham from Korangi, Karachi, was much too young to have heard of Zainab. The officers in charge of Zaman Town police station certainly had, but criminally delayed filing an FIR when the distraught family came to them for help. An unofficial roznamcha entry, not necessitating a police rescue action, was recorded instead. Maham was found dead in a garbage heap the next morning. Mirroring the botched handling by another police station of a similar case, that of five-year old Marwa, an FIR was finally registered at 6:45 pm the evening of the following day. The bodies of both girls were found by citizens, not police; Marwa's body was so mutilated she had to be identified by the dress she was wearing, bought to celebrate Independence Day.

The public, quick to praise the SSP in Maham's case for the arrest of a rickshaw driver, father of four, ignored that a child was now dead, and on his watch. No further updates were proffered

on the whereabouts of 11-year-old Samra, also missing at the same time, or of the seven-year-old boy whose decomposed body had recently been fished out of the sewers. No one knows if any more rapists are on the loose or if anyone is even looking for the missing child or the killer.

The truth is no state agency can tell you how many children are missing or abused in Karachi, or anywhere in the rest of the country. This job is conveniently left to NGOs that maintain databases, publish reports and offer limited response mechanisms. The Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, recently amended, mandates the protection of missing and street children. The reality is that the shelter it runs in Korangi is empty and its chairperson is reportedly known more for sanctioning funds for vehicles than results.

Despite posters advertising NGO-run helplines, clearly displayed around three of the (unmanned) women and child police desks in Karachi that we visited last year – a scheme of the previous IG – policemen on duty were completely unaware of them. Unclaimed children brought in by concerned citizens, I was told, are sent to Edhi. Orders were issued by AIG Sindh to report all missing children to CPLC's much-lauded Zainab Alert App (no link to one of the same names run by the PM's Citizen Portal; neither actually issues public alerts) but Maham's was not, and most missing child cases slip under its radar entirely.

The state's job of protecting missing children, often viewed by those in charge as impossible as climbing the Karakoram, is actually quite simple. To start, it is to make ZARRA functional; to appoint a robust DG, one who actually wants to perform. Data received and digitally recorded in one place facilitates oversight. The technology is available, the training of responders possible.

Only when the state removes the stones from its heart and births systems and a resolve as strong as a rock can, we hope to offer Pakistan's child victims what we fail to give all: a future. One in which big hearts and little hands, like Marwa's, wave green and white flags, with its star firmly ensconced in the cradle of its crescent.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 12, 2021

Pakistan's gender violence pandemic

SYED MOHAMMAD ALI

THE brutal murder of Noor Mukadam has hit a nerve in Pakistani society even if the mainstream and social media's obsession with the horrific incident has dissipated. This incident is, however, not the first of its kind. We recurrently read stories of similar acts of brutality occurring across different parts of the country and amongst families of different levels of prominence. It is about time for the Pakistani society to wake up to reflect on the toxic culture of misogyny prevalent in our midst which national and international observers have aptly described to be of epidemic proportions.

Collectively, Pakistani society may consider itself to be conservative, religious, or traditional, but it has no right to endorse norms and values which place half the population of the country in a very vulnerable position. An average person may like to think that Pakistani women enjoy respect and the standing granted to them by our culture and religion. The truth seems to be at odds with this complacent sense of actual ground realities.

Pakistan has unacceptably high rates of domestic abuse, which some international organisations estimate to range between 70 and 90 per cent. Gender violence is not the only problem in our country. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for 2021, Pakistan's overall gender disparities are shocking. Gender disparity is no doubt a global problem. Given current trends, it will take nearly 136 years to close the gender gap around the world. The untenable situation in countries like Pakistan is a major reason why it will take so long for an average woman to achieve parity with men.

The index used by the WEF's report benchmarks the evolution of gender-based gaps among four key dimensions, namely economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Pakistan ranked 153 out of 156 countries on this index which was just above conflict-ravaged Afghanistan. We may dispute the validity of such a dismal ranking but there are many other indicators such as disparity in girls' education, the high mother and child mortality rate, the employment gap between men and women, which demonstrate that Pakistan has a very long way to go to do right by its female population.

The lack of women's empowerment, along with prevailing patriarchal attitudes, myopic interpretations of religion, and the government's failure to tackle violations combine to pose serious threats to the safety of women. Women are treated like personal property and routinely subjected to violence in the name of honour. The current pandemic has also amplified pre-existing gender gaps and led to rising rates of domestic abuse. While comprehensive and nationwide data is unavailable, statistics released by Punjab Safe City Authority (PSCA) and Punjab Unified

Communication and Response (PUCAR-15) had shown a spike in domestic violence during Covid-19 lockdown last year. PUCAR-15 statistics alone indicated a 25 per cent rise in domestic violence reports during lockdown across the Punjab.

Gender violence is a lingering and complex problem, and it will not go away by wishing it away or ignoring it. Sporadic demands to publicly execute criminals who engage in particularly horrific acts of gender violence – such as the torture and beheading of Noor Mukadam – will serve no meaningful purpose. A public hanging does not act as a sufficient deterrent against reprehensible crimes. Such punishments instead only serve to further brutalise our society.

Pakistan needs to establish an effective system for the protection, relief, and rehabilitation of victims of violence. A much-lauded domestic violence bill was shelved in early July after objections raised by the Council of Islamic Ideology, despite it being passed by the National Assembly. It is time that momentum was built to push through this bill and to call for more effective implementation of other existing legislation to protect gender rights and to take perpetrators of gender-based crimes to task.

Instead of refuting varied forms of empirical evidence, our society needs to do some soul searching to see why Pakistan remains at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to ensuring women's rights and protecting them from physical and mental abuse, including the most horrific acts of violence.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 13, 2021.

In a first, woman judge to be elevated to SC



IN a first in the country's judicial history, the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) is going to elevate a woman judge to the Supreme Court when it meets on Sept 9.

Justice Ayesha A. Malik is fourth on the seniority list of the Lahore High Court. If elevated to the apex court, she will remain judge of the Supreme Court until March 2031.

At present the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court is complete with 17 judges. Justice Ayesha will fill the vacancy when senior puisne judge Justice Mushir Alam will reach superannuation on Aug 17.

"After a little while we have heard positive news which is very refreshing. Otherwise, we have been hearing bad news of disagreements and controversies in relation to the JCP," said a senior counsel on condition of anonymity. However, he feared that different bar councils and associations may oppose the move on the question of seniority principle since once again a junior judge is being elevated from the high court.

Referring to neighbouring India, the counsel recalled that Justice Fathima Bibi was the first woman judge to have been elevated to the Supreme Court of India. She retired on April 1992. Since then, eight female judges had been elevated to the top court of India of which Justice Indira Banerjee is still serving as a judge of the Supreme Court, he said.

Earlier, the JCP had elevated Balochistan High Court Chief Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel and Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar of the Sindh High Court as judges of the Supreme Court. The commission had offered SHC Chief Justice Ahmed Ali Shaikh to become an ad hoc judge of the apex court, but he declined.

Sindh High Court Bar Association president Salahuddin Ahmed, while commenting on the development, said Justice Ayesha Malik enjoyed fine reputation as a judge. Moreover, it would be wonderful to see more women in the upper echelons of the judiciary, he added.

“Had the seniority principle been followed, we would have had a woman chief justice of the LHC and a judge of the Supreme Court back in 2002-03 when Justice Fakhrunissa Khokar was wrongly and repeatedly bypassed,” he said, regretting that a number of senior judges had been overlooked not only from Punjab but also from other provinces.

“We are against the principle of pick and choose and thus we cannot support any out-of-turn appointment made to the apex court by the JCP unless it frames consistent objective criteria for making such choices,” Salahuddin Ahmed said.

Profile

Justice Ayesha Malik had been appearing as pro bono counsel for NGOs working in poverty alleviation, microfinance programmes and skills training programmes.

She is also author of a number of publications, including Why Trade in Financial Services: An assessment of the Agreement on Trade in Financial Services under the GATS, the Journal of World Investment, the 12th edition of the Global Report 2004 on the Independence of the Judiciary-Pakistan Chapter and Pakistan Secular Laws.

Justice Ayesha Malik also compiled the Supreme Court of Pakistan 1956-2006 Selected Cases published by the Pakistan College of Law on the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court. She also contributed to the Merger Control, Getting the Deal Through, being an International Journal of Competition policy and Regulation Global Competitive Review.

Justice Ayesha Malik had been a reporter for Pakistan for the Oxford Reports on the International Law in the Domestic Courts, a publication of the Oxford University Press.

She had taught banking law at the University of Punjab, Department of Masters of Business and Information Technology, and mercantile law at College of Accounting and Management Sciences, Karachi. She spent many years voluntarily teaching English language and development in communication skills at Herman Meiner School in Lahore.

From 2001 to the date of her elevation as a high court judge, Justice Ayesha Malik worked with Messer’s Rizvi, Isa, Afridi and Angell, known as RIAA, initially as a senior associate and then as

a partner. She was also in-charge of the firm's Lahore office. In this capacity, she spearheaded the Corporate and Litigation Department of the firm's Lahore office.

She also worked with Fakhruddin G. Ebrahim and Co, Karachi, from 1997 to 2001, where she assisted former chief election commissioner late Fakhruddin Ebrahim.

Justice Ayesha Malik completed her basic education from schools in Paris and New York and did her senior Cambridge from Karachi Grammar School. She did her A-Levels from Francis Holland School for Girls in London. She studied law at the Pakistan College of Law, Lahore. She went on to do her LLB from the Harvard Law School Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, where she was named a London H. Gammon Fellow 1998-1999 for the outstanding merit.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 13, 2021

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's Latest Merger Enables Renewed Attacks in Pakistan



THE Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), announced on August 7 that it had merged with a former al-Qaeda-affiliated, anti-state Pakistani jihadist group once led by Ustad Aslam (Umar Media, August 7). It becomes the ninth jihadist group to join the TTP since July 2020. Among the other groups are three TTP splinters, two al-Qaeda affiliates, a faction of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and two jihadist groups from South Waziristan (Terrorism Monitor, January 5). The al-Qaeda affiliates led by the late Amjad Farooqi and Ustad Ahmad Farooq both played significant roles for al-Qaeda in Pakistan after 9/11.

The Ustad Aslam group developed from the Amjad Farooqi-led group. Aslam was a close aide of Farooqi before Farooqi was killed in Pakistani security forces raid in September 2004 in the Nawab Shah district of Pakistan's Sindh province (Dawn, September 27, 2004). The Farooqi group was the first al-Qaeda Pakistani affiliate to play major roles in the al-Qaeda-led anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan. Farooqi, with Ustad Aslam and other accomplices, masterminded the abduction of the Wall Street Journal journalist and U.S. citizen Daniel Pearl in February 2002. They were responsible for multiple suicide attacks, including against the Pakistani Army Chief and President General Pervez Musharraf in December 2003. [1] The Farooqi group later became better

more known as the “Ustad Aslam group” in the Pakistani media and the jihadist community in Waziristan as Ustad Aslam was seen as superseding Farooqi.

This article provides insights into the Ustad Aslam group’s critical roles in the post-9/11 al-Qaeda anti-Pakistani state jihadist war to explain this merger’s significance for the TTP and its implications on the jihadist war against Pakistan in the near future.

From Lashkar-e-Jhangvi to al-Qaeda

Ustad Aslam, a.k.a. Qari Yasin, came from to the Lodhran district of Pakistan’s Punjab province. His militancy began when he joined the Sunni sectarian clandestine terrorist group LeJ in the late 1990s and became its most wanted member. He subsequently moved to Afghanistan and became an instructor there in LeJ training camps. In Afghanistan, Aslam participated in advanced urban warfare courses with al-Qaeda and other Arab jihadist experts. He became specialized in explosives, electronics, and bombmaking. With several other LeJ cadres, he received training from the al-Qaeda explosives expert, Midhat Mursi, a.k.a. Abu Khubab al-Misri. Amjad Farooqi was also in Afghanistan with Aslam and the LeJ members at this time. Aslam joined Farooqi’s group to establish the first al-Qaeda-linked anti-state jihadist group in Pakistan after 9/11 (Dawn, September 27, 2004). The group was consequently named after Amjad Farooqi.

The Pakistani state support for the United States in the global war on terror (GWOt) against the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and jihadist allies angered the previously state-loyal Pakistan jihadists who now turned against Islamabad. However, for LeJ, reasons for going to war against the Pakistani state had even deeper roots. Since the mid-1990s, LeJ was involved in brutal sectarian attacks in Pakistan’s urban centers, particularly in its largest Punjab province and the country’s largest city, Karachi. The group killed hundreds of people from Shia sects, including government officials, high-ranking security officers, and Iranian diplomats and cadets. They further planted bombs in an attempt to assassinate Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999 in Lahore, which he narrowly escaped. LeJ also killed U.S. citizens in Karachi in 1997 (DNI, September 2013). Thus, LeJ was the primary focus of the Pakistani counterterrorism operations in the country before 9/11, which resulted in the arrests and killings of its dozens of its members. The rest of the LeJ militants enjoyed shelter in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan with al-Qaeda and Kashmiri jihadist groups.

When the jihadists were fleeing from Afghanistan to Pakistan after the post-9/11 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, LeJ had no other option except to also relocate to Pakistan. This led to the killing of several cadres, including its founder and commander-in-chief, Riaz Basra (Dawn, May 15 2002). As a result, LeJ was destroyed, and its remaining members were left without leadership. To avenge its slain leader and other arrested or slain members as well as the Pakistani state’s role in the GWOt, Aslam and several other scattered LeJ cadres came under the command of Farooqi in close league with al-Qaeda to wage a ‘revenge war’ against the Pakistani state and its security agencies.

Training the First Generation of Anti-State Pakistani Jihadists in Waziristan

Aslam and his comrades moved to the South Waziristan district of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province – which was at the time one of the seven Pakistani tribal agencies part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) – in 2004. South Waziristan was emerging as the new safe haven for al-Qaeda and its local and foreign allies. Umar Faiz Aqdas, who was Aslam's LeJ comrade and a close friend from his same caste in another district in Punjab, also succeeded Farooqi, and Aslam became the late Ajmad Farooqi group's second-in-command. Abu Khubab al-Misri was also residing with them in the Mehsud area of South Waziristan, and they started training the new generation of anti-state Pakistanis for al-Qaeda, some of whom rose to senior leadership positions and became the founding figures of al-Qaeda's South Asian franchise, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Aslam enjoyed high respect in the jihadist community in South Waziristan, particularly by the Mehsud tribes, for his and his group's high-level of knowledge on modern terrorist tactics. Al-Qaeda and the TTP's Mehsud leadership, therefore, consulted Aslam and his organization in planning major attacks in Pakistan. Aslam became popular in the Ajmad Farooqi group in South Waziristan, which became evident by that group increasingly becoming known as the "Ustad Aslam group."

The Ustad Aslam group proceeded to strike major Pakistani cities, including the capital, Islamabad, with further high-profile attacks. Aslam planned the largest terrorist attacks in the history of Pakistan, which were the September 2008 Marriott Hotel bombing in Islamabad and the October 2009 attack in its twin city, Rawalpindi, on the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army (The Express Tribune, March 20, 2017). Although the former is known as Pakistan's 9/11, the latter was the worse attack in the history of the Pakistan Army. The group also claimed the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team and the bombing of the office of the Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in Lahore in 2009. Besides these attacks, Aslam and his group also helped TTP and al-Qaeda plan several other major attacks in the country. These attacks turned Pakistan into one of the world's most insecure countries due to the al-Qaeda-linked jihadist threat.

Ustad Aslam as Emir

After the Pakistan Army General Headquarters attack, Ustad Aslam and his group became a top priority of the Pakistani counterterrorism operations. As a result, Pakistani law enforcement agencies killed and arrested several of the group's members and damaged its urban network. In addition, U.S. drone strikes targeted the group's hideouts and training centers in South Waziristan. While Ustad Aslam survived multiple drone strikes, Umar Faiz Aqdas was killed in such an attack in the latter half of 2010.

Ustad Aslam succeeded Aqdas as leader of the group that had in any event been known as the "Ustad Aslam group," but some of his comrades were unhappy with this development. Aslam's harsh criticism of TTP Emir Hakeemullah Mehsud's policies resulted in tensions between the two groups. Aslam was close to the Mufti Wali ur-Rehman Mehsud group, which hosted the Amjad Farooqi group in the South Waziristan Mehsud areas. Both Mehsuds were lieutenants of TTP founding emir, Baitullah Mehsud. Differences between the Mehsuds began over the

successorship of Baitullah Mehsud after his death in a U.S. drone strike in August 2009. It was the beginning of intra-TTP conflicts, which later turned into brutal TTP infighting and led to its splintering in 2014.

Some members of Aslam's group suggested that he not involve the organization in the rivalry between the two Mehsuds, but when he ignored their advice some of the group members parted ways with him and joined the Ustad Ahmad Farooq group (not to be confused with the former "Ajmad Farooqi group"). By then, however, Ustad Aslam had become a prominent name in the anti-state Pakistani jihadist landscape. As a result, other al-Qaeda and TTP affiliates members rushed to join him. For example, most of the fighters who followed al-Qaeda senior Pakistani leader Ilyas Kashmiri joined the Ustad Aslam group after a U.S. drone strike killed Kashmiri in June 2011. Due to intense targeting by U.S. drones and Pakistani counterterrorism operations, the Ustad Aslam group has remained out of the media for much of the past decade and could not claim any major terrorist attacks. However, the group helped the TTP and al-Qaeda plan attacks and provided training to its members. This is how the Ustad Aslam group allied with TTP, but did not join TTP until Ustad Aslam himself was finally killed in a U.S. drone strike on March 17, 2017. Aslam was killed alongside a TTP commander in charge of its suicide battalion, who hosted Ustad Aslam in Bermal district of Afghanistan's Paktika province, which borders South Waziristan (The News, March 21, 2017). Paktika had become al-Qaeda's and TTP's home after a Pakistani military operation rooted them out of Waziristan in 2015.

Implications for Pakistan's Future

Although Ustad Aslam is highly respected and adored by the TTP, he had never merged his group into TTP. Thus, the current move of the Ustad Aslam group to join the TTP shows that the organization might have achieved a level of strength and trust that had not existed when it was at the peak of its operations, before it splintered in 2014. A senior Pakistani journalist and expert on the TTP, Ihsan Tipu Mehsud, argues that the Ustad Aslam group's merger with the TTP is at least symbolically significant, if not also operationally. These groups have suffered immensely in the wake of military operations across Pakistan and are scattered, isolated, and lack an operational command and control mechanism. They are in desperate need to find refuge with like-minded organizations. And in such a desperate time, the TTP once again came forward to embrace the Ustad Aslam group.

As a result, Ustad Aslam group's merger with the TTP brings the most skilled and experienced experts of urban terrorism under control of TTP leadership. The group has trainers who know sophisticated terrorist techniques and helped al-Qaeda deal its heaviest blows to the Pakistani state and its military. The intense Pakistani counterterrorism campaigns and the U.S. drone strikes have damaged its organizational cohesion and scattered its operational network inside Pakistan. However, the recently strengthened TTP now has the resources and urban network to strike Pakistan with deadly attacks like in the past.

SOURCE: JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION, AUGUST 13, 2021

The secret to a tranquil life

ALI HASSAN BANGWAR

SINCE the dawn of civilisation, humankind has tried utmost to live a life in a manner which is quite peaceful, serene and less bothersome. Over the journey of millenniums, humans have adopted and evolved various recipes to master the art of living. However, the life in contemporary times isn't an easy undertaking. It isn't a kid's stuff and plain sailing. For many, it's an epitome of untold stories, unfulfilled dreams, unattended calls and unsung adventures. It's an enigma, a maze one has to master by experiencing it or learning from other's life stories. Life is in fact an agonising reality one needs to acknowledge and accept. Salvation lies not in giving up to the life but in experiencing and braving its untoward realities. The following keys help maximise the allure, appeal and tranquillity of life.

The first and foremost, perhaps a time-tested way to a pacific life, is simplicity. It holds the key to the priceless treasure of repose and equanimity. Since a simple life is immune from the exorbitant needs, fancy desires and lavish display, one learns to become content with what one possesses. By living simply and humbly, one never indulges in the vicious cycle of ceaseless greed and gluttony and the subsequent anguish and depression.

Secondly, the lofty trait of forgiveness is yet another proven project of a worthy living. As a social animal, one interacts and comes in contact with various fellow beings each day as the needs are inextricably interlinked in a society. During the social interplay, doing wrongs or being wronged – inadvertently or otherwise – by fellows in one way or the other is but inevitable. Taking every wrong in mind and purposelessly thinking on these wrongdoings robs one of joy and allure of the moments that life offers. Henceforth, forgiving others for their wrongdoings and apologising for our wrongs to others would afford us the moments of calm besides knitting amicable terms with our fellow beings.

Thirdly, since we are bombarded from dawn to dusk with distractions and untoward happening around, we need not be receptive of all these stimuli. If one takes to heart and deeply reflects on every event and happenings around, s(he) would end up in being devoured by overthinking and depression. We should rather be selective in reacting to the events.

Fourthly, gratitude is another key to contentment and happiness. Rather than cursing and regretting for what we don't have, we need to remain grateful and make the most of what we have been bestowed with. Gratitude is the antidote to wishful desire, utopian castle building and the subsequent mental trauma they unleash.

Fifthly, doing away with the habit of expectations would bring peace in life. Since expectations lie at the roots of most of sorrows, we shouldn't put too much expectation both on people and our plans and efforts. We can control efforts, but not their outcomes. What we can do is to put sincere efforts sans overthinking on their results.

Sixthly, a life closer to nature helps unleash peace. A lifestyle laden with artificiality, fabrications and falsified lavish display is a fertile ground for pain, anguish and torment.

Seventhly, avoiding unnecessary and extreme emotional attachments to anyone can help escape the miseries of separation and subsequently ends in contentment.

Last but not the least, kindness and helpfulness is the time-tested recipe of satisfaction and happiness. The feeling one experiences after helping destitute and needy is paradisiacal. In reality, helping someone in need fills one's life with eternal joy and happiness.

Though mastering the exalted art of living isn't plain sailing, its outcomes are ebullient and overwhelming. By doing and undoing some of our thoughts, actions and habits, not only can we feel an eclectic happiness and contentment within us but also radiate joy to our fellow beings around.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 14, 2021.

One nation, one resolve

AS the nation celebrates its 74th Independence Day anniversary, it is time to laud the indispensable services of the founding fathers; and to reiterate the resolve to scale Pakistan to new heights of successes. Today is the day to pay our homage to the freedom fighters who sacrificed everything within their means so that the coming generations could live a life free from foreign tutelage. And, of course, a standing ovation and salute to Father of the Nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose vision foresaw the Hindutva's otherness a century ago, and carved out a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. Thus, the best way to cherish freedom is to work selflessly and rebuild Pakistan as a modern welfare state, a place free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Pakistan is blessed with enterprising people; it is rich in natural resources, impregnable in terms of defence, and socio-culturally harmonious. All it needs is to work on the vision of Mr Jinnah, wherein he dreamt of a society where caste, creed and religion do not matter. This is what Pakistan is in need of today – to erect a pluralist society. There isn't any external threat to the homeland, as the armed forces and the nation are united. This unity should be transformed into a renewed determination to beat parochial sentiments and further cohesion. It's time to realise the sense of freedom in all sincerity, and ensure that due constitutional, civil, economic and political rights are enjoyed across the board. This is how the nation can strengthen civil supremacy, boast sovereignty and bring people from all walks of life on one page: One Nation, One Resolve.

As a forward-looking elected government endeavours to accomplish the task of nation-building, today we all should unite for a cause: shun petty interests and uphold nationalism. Millions of Pakistanis still long for potable water and basic civic amenities of life, including medicare and education. This is where our focus should be. A nation of 220 million sitting on the crossroads of an irresistible geography has a glorious future. The new national narrative of self-reliance is the way to go. Rise to the occasion and rebuild Pakistan.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 14, 2021.

Seventy-four

FARRUKH KHAN PITAFI

HOW does one even begin to express one's love for a homeland that is everything? Alpha and omega. Home, journey and destination. A sandbox where you make all mistakes and, in a heartbeat, everything is forgiven and forgotten. Motherland and fatherland. And must one express this love? Or is it communicated and understood without saying anything like a son's is towards a parent. But then again this is the age of expression and children today remind you of their infinite love every five minutes. This is where the poverty of one's abilities holds one's tongue. I, for one, am no Tagore whose alchemy of words would create pure gold, or who had the company and help of titans like Yeats. I can only try to talk of the visceral nature of affection that powers my heart and preoccupies every waking hour of my modest existence.

Perhaps Tagore's these words would come close to what I want to say: "I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat. In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose. When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight, command me, my master, to stand before thee to sing. When in the morning air the golden harp is tuned, honour me, commanding my presence."

74 is an interesting number. Just one year shy of platinum jubilee. An age quite mature in human years but rather young in the comity of nations. One number further than 73, that Dr Sheldon Cooper of Big Bang Theory fame calls the best number. "Why? 73 is the 21st prime number. Its mirror, 37, is the 12th and its mirror, 21, is the product of multiplying 7 and 3.... In binary 73 is a palindrome, 1001001, which backwards is 1001001." But it is neither 73, not 75. Almost there but not quite. Stuck between being and becoming. But let us not forget that it is the mirror of 47, the year of the country's birth.

When you look at the nature of the 74 years of our collective cognitive experience, the first word that comes to mind is survivalism. Seriously. I have not seen another country that burns so much midnight oil mulling over existential threats, both real and imagined. This could be because of the spontaneous nature of Pakistan's birth, the trauma left behind by the violence that accompanied freedom, India's constant predictions about its failure, the fall of East Pakistan or a million more trials that it has gone through. While others sing of their country's greatness, we pray for its long life. Humility is good, and prayers useful. But when you have lived long enough you do not need to revisit and re-litigate the causal factors of your country's birth. It is there, we inherited it and it is the only place we have ever called home. Instead of justifying it every 10 minutes, we need to concern ourselves with the task of making it better. Dreams and visions matter here. Today's aspirations for tomorrow. And actions affirming those visions.

Reflecting on the Independence Day and journey so far proves to be a bittersweet experience for my generation. Sweet because it is the Independence Day. Bitter not because of the day or the country, but for who we (my generation) are. I call us the lost generation. Not the one that was led astray, but the kind that falls through the cracks when you are not looking. Heavy traffic on streets forces cars to switch to the slower lanes, where once boxed in, it may take hours to cover a journey of minutes. This is the story of my generation's life. As Faiz put it, 'Kahaan se aa'ii nigaar-e-sabaa, kidhar ko ga'ii, abhii charaagh-e-sar-e-rah ko kuchh khabar hii nahin', (Whence came that darling of a morning breeze, whither has it gone? The lamp beside the road has still come no lessening.)

For a lifetime how many crises have we seen? The worst earthquake of the country's history (2005), the worst floods (2010), the worst existential challenge since 1971 (the war on terror which left around eighty thousand dead including women and innocent children), perhaps the worst climate change challenge, economic hard times, belligerent neighbours and constant erosion of opportunities. The first Afghan war, refugee crisis, Afghan civil war, Taliban, the second Afghan war, now Taliban again. Modi, Doval and their defensive offence. Only God knows how many more upheavals we have to see before we meet our maker. And what leadership did we provide? All our national leaders are in their advanced sixties. My generation has never led the country. Perhaps the next generation will. We, my dear sirs, are truly a lost generation.

Then there is the matter of memory and introduction. The country's memory is not what it once was. In the American romantic comedy *50 first dates*, when Adam Sandler learns after falling for Drew Barrymore that she suffers from anterograde amnesia and he will have to re-introduce himself to her every single day, he does not baulk. But that's why stories are just stories. It is one tough job. And it must be a South Asian thing because recently an Indian poetess Rehana Sultana wrote: *Ma, ami tumar kachchey aamar porisoi diti diti biakul oya dzai* (Mother, I'm so tired, tired of introducing myself to you.) I know it was said in a different context. But it fits this context too. Like a glove. Doesn't it?

So, you get it. Bittersweet. But here is the thing. This country's most emancipating gift and one can die because of the intensity of love due to this, is that it is almost a blank slate. Too much can be written. And perhaps the best that has ever been written, anywhere. A paradise on earth, a city of love, a dreamer's best dream come true. We owe it to our next generation to leave a better Pakistan than the one we inherited. No political pipe dreams or delusions of grandeur. Just a beautiful, peaceful, pluralistic place one feels proud to call home. From our eastern neighbour, we are getting too much hate these days. We have seen enough hate to last a lifetime. We will only deal in love and humanity now. As the prime minister so aptly put it, we will be partners in peace, not in war.

Great nations are built on the backs of many generations that die unrecognised. It seems my country needs only one. Perhaps, that is the only way for my lost generation to be found.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 14, 2021.

Pakistan's FATF panel ranking gets better



THE Asia Pacific Group (APG) on Money Laundering has improved Pakistan's rating on four more of the 40 technical recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) against money laundering and terror financing (AML/CFT) but retained it on 'Enhanced Follow up' to meet the outstanding requirements.

"Pakistan has 35 recommendations rated compliant or largely compliant (C/LC). Pakistan will remain on enhanced follow-up, and will continue to report back to APG on progress to strengthen its implementation of AML/CFT measures," announced APG, a regional affiliate of the Paris-based FATF.

Overall, Pakistan is now fully 'compliant' with eight recommendations and 'largely compliant' with 27 others, according to third Follow-Up Report (FUR) on Mutual Evaluation of Pakistan released by APG. The re-rating to compliant status was one-notch up and three others on largely compliant status.

The country is 'partially compliant' with three recommendations compared to seven in June this year and 'non-compliant' with two (unchanged against June) out of total 40 recommendations. All in all, Pakistan is now compliant or largely compliant with 35 out of 40 recommendations of the FATF.

“Pakistan has made good progress in addressing the technical compliance deficiencies identified in its Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) and has been re-rated on R.10, R.18, R.26 and R.34,” the APG said.

As such, Pakistan showed satisfactory progress on one recommendation and upgraded to be compliant. This re-rating came about as Pakistan introduced comprehensive AML/CFT obligations for Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) and the entities that provide the financial activities previously provided by Pakistan Post are subject to the same AML/CFT obligations as other SBP and SECP regulated persons. Microfinance Banks (MFBs) and Exchange Companies (ECs) are also now subject to the same AML/CFT obligations as other SBP regulated persons.

Likewise, on three counts where Pakistan was re-rated to ‘largely compliant’ status from ‘partially compliant’ pertained to recommendations 18, 26 and 34. Recommendation 18 is about screening of staff and employees relating to financial institutions, CDNS, MFBs and ECs etc.

This meant Pakistan also addressed deficiencies with respect to the employee screening requirements for banks and DFIs with new nine provisions in SBP and SECP Regulations. Amendments have been passed in the CDNS and Pakistan Post Regulations to provide enforceable AML/CFT requirements. However, minor deficiencies remain with the SBP Regulation coverage of requirements for financial groups.

On Recommendation 26, the APG noted that deficiencies remained with respect to obligations for financial groups and a lack of explicit provisions for SBP to revise risk assessments of REs or financial groups in response to developments in their management and operations. Gaps will remain with Pakistan Post until the transfer of its business banking has concluded. However, it was re-rated to the category of largely compliant.

Similarly, on R-34, the APG said Pakistan issued a wide range of guidance and conducted feedback sharing sessions with REs to support implementation of their obligations, which largely aligns with ML/TF risk. Minor deficiencies remain with respect to the limited sector specific feedback and guidance issued to lawyers, and with the quality of the red flag indicators issued to REs but was re-rated to largely compliant.

The reporting date for this evaluation was February 1, 2021 which means that Islamabad may have made further progress since then that would be evaluated at a later stage. In February 2021, Pakistan submitted its third progress report, requesting re-ratings for R.10, 18, 26 and 34. The APG welcomed the steps Pakistan had taken to improve its technical compliance with all the four recommendations.

The Ministry of Finance and head of the task force on FATF Hammad Azhar separately welcomed the re-rating saying Pakistan was well placed in technical compliance in comparison to many other countries. For example, if Pakistan’s position is compared against G20 countries, then

Pakistan is on the fourth after Italy (38), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (38) and the United Kingdom (38).

“Pakistan is now in the top tier of countries that have achieved a rating of C/LC for over 35 of the 40 FATF Recommendations,” the finance ministry said, adding that the country also achieved the rating of largely compliant or compliant in all the six major recommendations of the FATF. The money laundering offence, terror financing offence, targeted financial sanctions related to terrorism and terrorist financing, customer due diligence, record keeping and reporting of suspicious transactions.

Pakistan would continue this momentum in addressing the remaining gaps identified in the MER-2019 and would seek upgrades in the remaining five recommendations, in the fourth follow-up report, the finance ministry added. Pakistan’s MER was adopted in August 2019 in which the country was rated compliant and largely compliant in 10 of the 40 FATF recommendations for technical compliance.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 14, 2021

Afghanistan's future

AS the Afghan Taliban continue their blitzkrieg across their country, with key cities falling like ninepins, it is a foregone conclusion that the capture of Kabul – and with it the control of Afghanistan – is only a matter of time.

US intelligence reports say that Kabul may fall within 90 days. But the truth is that with their capture of Pul-i-Alam that is some 70 km from the country's capital, the insurgents are closing in on the seat of power faster than was anticipated. Even cities ruled by the hard-line militia's staunch opponents, such as Mazar-i-Sharif, are finding it tough to resist the Taliban onslaught. Therefore, the international community, particularly Afghanistan's neighbours, should now be concerned about how to deal with a Taliban government in Kabul, however unpalatable it may be. And topping the global community's agenda should be questions about what the Taliban intend to do about their relations with transnational terrorist groups.

The US has taken a maximalist position in this regard, saying that if the Taliban take power by force, they shall be shunned by the global community. Yet the fact is that Kabul has always been taken by force; even after 9/11 the US installed the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan after defeating the Taliban militarily. The ideal situation would of course be what Pakistan and others are proposing: a peaceful settlement. But that does not seem likely. Although Afghan government negotiators in Doha have again extended the olive branch to the Taliban, it is unlikely the latter will entertain the matter as they have maximum advantage on the battlefield.

Indeed, much of the present chaos is the result of the abrupt American withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Kabul's inability to protect the country. The Americans – the former Trump administration and the current dispensation – have had enough of Afghanistan and, failing in their 'civilising mission', they want the 'boys' back home as quickly as possible. Pakistan has also failed to convince Kabul that it is a neutral actor, considering its past links with the Afghan Taliban. All these factors have aided the disorder that is currently unfolding in Afghanistan.

The international community must send a strong message to the Taliban: when they do take Kabul, if their country is used to host transnational terrorists, there will be consequences. After all, the Afghan Taliban have a working relationship with anti-Pakistan terrorists such as the banned TTP, and a major security nightmare may emerge if these malign actors are given an open field to operate. China has also communicated its concerns about Uighur militant groups such as the ETIM, while Al Qaeda and IS too have a large footprint in Afghanistan. Therefore, if the Taliban do not wish to see a repeat of the events of Sept 2001, they must pledge to not allow territory under their control to be used by terrorist groups against any other state in the vicinity or further off.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 15, 2021

Violence against women: a crime, societal failure or mental illness?

FIZA FARHAN

THE brutal murder of 27-year-old Noor Mukadam made international headlines and reignited conversations about rampant violence against women in Pakistan. Noor was tortured for hours and then beheaded in an affluent Islamabad neighbourhood on July 21. Prior to Noor's murder, on July 15, another woman Qurutulain Baloch was tortured to death by her husband in the presence of her children in Hyderabad. Local police refused to arrest the perpetrator, son of a former irrigation secretary in Sindh, due to his strong familial position. Before this, on July 3, Saima Ali was also reportedly murdered when her husband, a police constable, opened fire on her and their children. Cases of heinous targeted violence against women are making rounds all over Pakistani news and social media.

An incident that incited similar outrage was the sexual assault and murder of 6-year-old Zainab Ansari in 2018. The month of July alone has brought an episode of violence against women and girls across the country. Considering these circumstances, the early release of Shah Hussain who was convicted of stabbing Khadija Siddiqi 23 times in 2016 has further enraged the public.

Cases of violence and abuse against women and young girls have been on the rise in Pakistan. The Sustainable Social Development Organisation (SSDO) reported a significant rise in violence against women since the Covid-19 pandemic began. They cited 1,422 cases of domestic violence and 9,401 cases of gender-based violence during the last six months of 2020 alone. These numbers, however, do not present the full picture because many cases go unreported. It is not surprising to see the conversation on gender-based violence bring forward the notion of ongoing femicide in the country.

Recent cases of violence against women span across a range of age groups, social classes, and locations. The only commonality is that each of the assailants has either a proven history of violence or their degree of violence shows mental instability. From a history of drug abuse to anger management, perpetrators of violence often have similar mental health issues which aggravate their tendency to inflict violence on women. Societal tendencies to reason violence against women by victim-blaming signal mentally-ill individuals to become perpetrators of such crimes.

In Pakistan, mental health has long carried social stigmas – something which prevents potential perpetrators from seeking professional help at an early stage. The treatment of mental health is classified into psychiatric (medical), psychologist, psychotherapeutic, and counselling. Pakistan's

2001 Mental Health Ordinance makes no mention of treatments outside of psychiatry. Hospitals and medical clinics in Pakistan host many psychiatrists but this treatment is a medical service for diagnosable issues. Often potential perpetrators require consistent attention from psychotherapists or counsellors. In cases of violence towards others, they require 24/7 facilitation at rehabilitation centres. However, these services are scarce in the country. Those that do exist do not have a regulatory body overseeing that the institutions abide by international standards of ethics.

The lack of regulation became evident when it was discovered that Zahir Jaffer had a history of violence and mental instability himself. Yet he was a practising therapist at Therapy Works, one of Pakistan's largest mental health institutes and rehabilitation centres. In most cases, mental illnesses are rarely recognised for what they are and dismissed in favour of a 'boys will be boys' narrative. This blurs the line between illness-aggravated violence and normal behaviour. It widens the gateway for potential perpetrators to commit similar crimes. The case of Zahir Jaffer sheds light on the urgency with which mental health needs regulation and accessibility in the country.

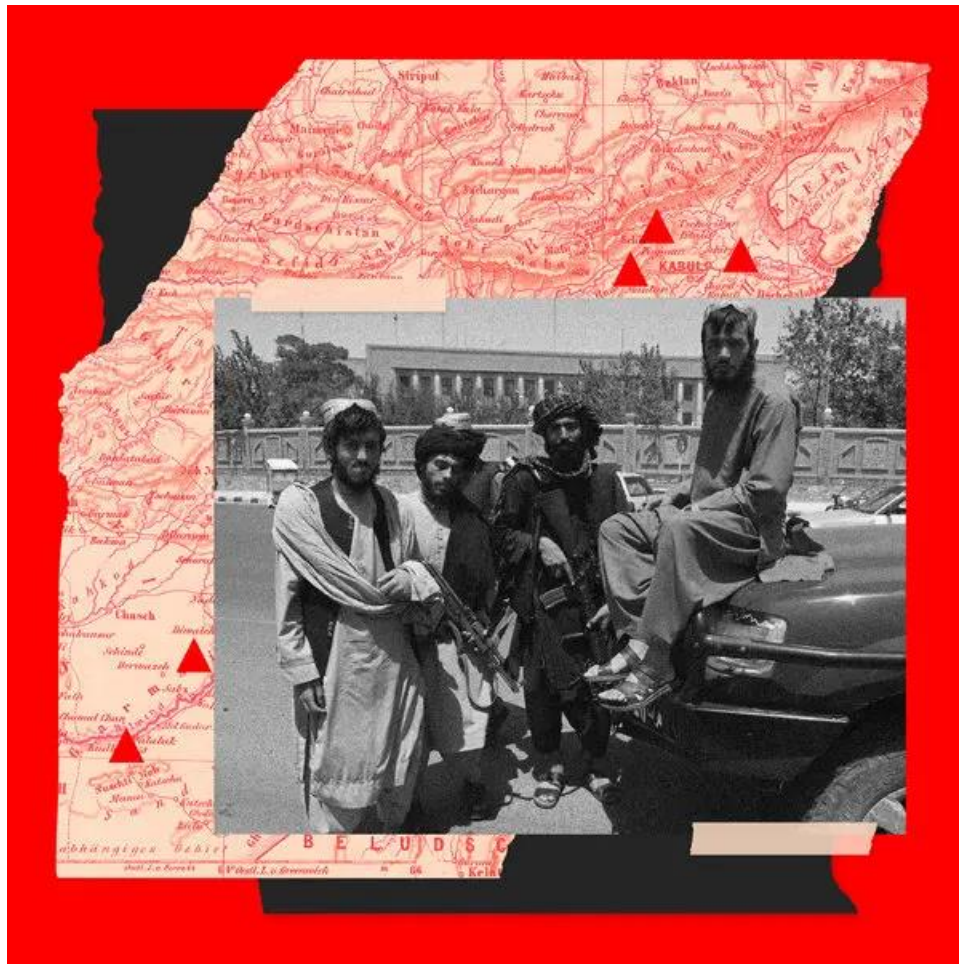
On July 26, a team of 11 prominent psychotherapists and counsellors in Pakistan held a conference to discuss the matter under the oversight of the Board of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BCP). They presented a collective manifesto to the State of Pakistan calling for approved academic training and supervision criteria, a licensing system, a governing body, and the creation of distinct categories for mental health practitioners.

However, it is important to bear in mind that mental illness is not a standalone factor in all cases. It is often combined with the social acceptance of men's violent behaviour which prevents them from seeking professional help and paves the way for cases like Noor Mukadam's. The question that arises is: what more can be done? The initiative taken by our therapists and counsellors is important to create security and accessibility around such services. However, the State of Pakistan also needs to pursue this earnestly by integrating it into the laws. Non-medical services need to be included in the mental health ordinance. In addition, effective implementation of safety laws for women like the 'Domestic Violence Bill' is imperative. The newly launched Women Safety app by the Punjab police is a vital step. It guarantees a team of officers to attend to women within seven minutes of pressing an emergency alert. One needs to sit back and reflect on the barbaric and appalling cases of violence against women and question where we are going wrong. Is the answer embedded in societal learnings? Is it the narrative of 'power' and 'control' by men over women that is depicted in the media? Is it a lack of entertainment activities and ensuing frustration in our youth that is driving a part of them to such a heinous point? Or the lack of implementation of laws and failure of the justice system is to blame? Or is it simply a question of the lack of awareness of mental health problems that remain undiagnosed and ignored until they unleash themselves in such heinous and unforgivable crimes?

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 17, 2021.

This Is What Taliban Control Looks Like in 2021

BY ASHLEY JACKSON



FOR all the recriminations and finger-pointing about how the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan so rapidly, there is a hard truth that needs to be reckoned with: The Taliban have spent years preparing for the eventual U.S. withdrawal. Despite numerous military surges, relentless airstrikes and thousands killed on all sides, no one was able to stop them. Year by year, Taliban soldiers methodically gained ground as they coerced and co-opted large swaths of the population now living under their rule and set up a shadow state. The Taliban exploited

anger at the abuses of foreign forces and Afghan government corruption to gain support in village after village.

The question now is what kind of government the Taliban will impose and what that will mean for Afghans.

To some extent, the world already knows how that will work, because the Taliban have been essentially controlling parts of Afghanistan for years. And yet it is far easier to capture territory as an insurgency than it is to govern it. This was one of the more painful lessons for the Taliban in the 1990s, when they swept to power but were a disaster when it came to governing. So, we don't yet know how the Taliban intend to govern the nation as a whole.

Already their administration is rudimentary and stretched thin, and there are stark differences between the deeply conservative areas that have long been under Taliban influence and the mainly urban and relatively more progressive areas they have recently gained control over. There is little indication that the Taliban are equipped to govern the cities – or the country as a whole – on their own. Afghanistan's social complexity is more nuanced than a simple urban-rural divide, but since 2001, city dwellers have generally benefited more from the security, aid and opportunities provided by the international intervention. Women have moved relatively freely, worked and attended school, and social norms writ large have sharply diverged from the Taliban's mentality.

In areas the Taliban have long controlled, courts enforce their version of Islamic law and settle disputes. The Taliban shadow state has appointed officials to monitor schools and regulate NGO-run clinics. But their administration is largely parasitic, seeking to take credit for what others provide. Public services are heavily dependent on aid programs and foreign assistance; grants account for some 80 percent of Afghanistan's public spending. Both are almost certain to rapidly decrease under any Taliban government.

I've spent much of my career in Afghanistan and during that time interviewed scores of Taliban and hundreds of Afghans living under their control. Among the hundreds of Afghans I've met in Taliban areas over the years, few favour the insurgency. Most people leverage their obedience to the Taliban to lessen their suffering. Some have even persuaded the insurgents to behave more like the responsible government they say they wish to be. Depending on how well the local populace has bargained and how much pressure they have mustered, the Taliban's policies – for example, on whether girls may attend primary school – have differed from place to place.

Some local Taliban have in recent months even sought to reassure the population and assume control of government institutions so that they kept running. In some cities, like Kunduz, reports have emerged of Taliban officials attempting to persuade civil servants to return to work. Elsewhere, as in parts of Ghazni Province, however, there are reports of Taliban retaliating against anyone associated with the government or security forces and destroying property.

The Taliban broadly face a choice: Lay siege, seek revenge and destroy the vestiges of the post-2001 intervention or absorb what they can and strike deals with those people and factions that can be persuaded to cooperate. It's not clear even the Taliban know what they want here. Aware that the world is watching, their political leadership is eager to counter negative press and avoid becoming a pariah state, as it was in the 1990s.

"We are the servants of the people and of this country," a Taliban spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, told the BBC on Sunday. "We assure the people in Afghanistan, particularly in the city of Kabul, that their properties, their lives are safe — there will be no revenge on anyone." After the fall of Kabul, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in a video message, urged Taliban fighters to show "humility."

But Taliban military leaders and fighters on the ground might not be on the same page. While the Taliban have now said they will not take revenge on those associated with the former government, reports of score settling, retaliatory attacks and potential war crimes have already mounted. Their forces are often young, politically undereducated and ill prepared for life after the war. "The Taliban here are mostly 18 or 20 years old," Zahir, a university student in Faryab, told me. "The only thing they know about government is how to kill the people that work for it."

Many Afghans I've spoken with in cities now fear the worst, recalling what life was like under Taliban rule before 2001. The urban areas arguably suffered worst, as they represented moral danger and corruption to the Taliban.

"As the Taliban seems to have been feeling triumphant, we're seeing practices on the ground that are often indistinguishable from the 1990s," said Heather Barr, who works in the women's rights division at Human Rights Watch. "There does not appear to be any Taliban 2.0."

One real test for the Taliban will be whether they can govern — and govern with — those who radically disagree with them. Recent history offers the lesson that exclusionary political settlements do not hold: Afghanistan is too large and diverse, and exclusionary politics has repeatedly sowed conflict. This was just as true in 2001, when the Taliban was excluded from the Bonn Agreement, which reconstituted the Afghan state after the U.S. invasion, as it was in the 1990s, when the Taliban refused to accommodate its adversaries.

The best that can be hoped for is that the new Taliban government will be more pragmatic than the last, recognizing that international aid and recognition are essential to their survival. But no matter how the Taliban decide to govern, Western countries will have to find a way to engage with them on counterterrorism, human rights and humanitarian issues. Cutting off the relationship now will negate any leverage the United States and other nations may have left and leave Afghans to the worst fate of all.

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES, AUGUST 17, 2021

Malala: I Survived the Taliban. I Fear for My Afghan Sisters.



IN the past two decades, millions of Afghan women and girls received an education. Now the future they were promised is dangerously close to slipping away. The Taliban — who until losing power 20 years ago barred nearly all girls and women from attending school and doled out harsh punishment to those who defied them — are back in control. Like many women, I fear for my Afghan sisters.

I cannot help but think of my own childhood. When the Taliban took over my hometown in Pakistan’s Swat Valley in 2007 and shortly thereafter barred girls from getting an education, I hid my books under my long, hefty shawl and walked to school in fear. Five years later, when I was 15, the Taliban tried to kill me for speaking out about my right to go to school.

I cannot help but be grateful for my life now. After graduating from college last year and starting to carve out my own career path, I cannot imagine losing it all — going back to a life defined for me by men with guns.

Afghan girls and young women are once again where I have been — in despair over the thought that they might never be allowed to see a classroom or hold a book again. Some members of the Taliban say they will not deny women and girls education or the right to work. But given the

Taliban's history of violently suppressing women's rights, Afghan women's fears are real. Already, we are hearing reports of female students being turned away from their universities, female workers from their offices.

None of this is new for the people of Afghanistan, who have been trapped for generations in proxy wars of global and regional powers. Children have been born into battle. Families have been living for years in refugee camps; thousands more have fled their homes in recent days.

The Kalashnikovs carried by the Taliban are a heavy burden on the shoulders of all Afghan people. The countries that have used Afghans as pawns in their wars of ideology and greed have left them to bear the weight on their own.

But it is not too late to help the Afghan people – particularly women and children.

Over the past two weeks, I spoke with several education advocates in Afghanistan about their current situation and what they hope will happen next. (I am not naming them here because of security concerns.) One woman who runs schools for rural children told me she has lost contact with her teachers and students.

“Normally we work on education, but right now we are focusing on tents,” she said. “People are fleeing by the thousands, and we need immediate humanitarian aid so that families are not dying from starvation or lack of clean water.” She echoed a plea I heard from others: Regional powers should be actively assisting in the protection of women and children. Neighbouring countries – China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan – must open their doors to fleeing civilians. That will save lives and help stabilize the region. They must also allow refugee children to enrol in local schools and humanitarian organizations to set up temporary learning centers in camps and settlements.

Looking to Afghanistan's future, another activist wants the Taliban to be specific about what they will allow: “It is not enough to vaguely say, ‘Girls can go to school.’ We need specific agreements that girls can complete their education, can study science and math, can go to university and be allowed to join the work force and do jobs they choose.” The activists I spoke with feared a return to religious-only education, which would leave children without the skills they need to achieve their dreams and their country without doctors, engineers and scientists in the future.

We will have time to debate what went wrong in the war in Afghanistan, but in this critical moment we must listen to the voices of Afghan women and girls. They are asking for protection, for education, for the freedom and the future they were promised. We cannot continue to fail them. We have no time to spare.

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES, AUGUST 17, 2021

Modern policing

MARIA TAIMUR

THe organisational culture of the police is shaped to a large extent by the criminal justice system that defines it. Policing that is saddled by the legacy of colonialism is not without its challenges. Colonial governments rested on two pillars to survive and perpetuate their rule: maintenance of law and order to uphold the government's authority, and the collection of revenue. Colonial policing was designed around these two principles and was never meant to deliver public service. In all endeavours to reform the police, one must not forget that for the new crop to take root, the soil has to be burnt to eliminate all traces of the diseased old roots.

Policing culture in our country remains colonial in character. Without a complete overhaul, isolated efforts to transform it into a service-delivery system will ultimately weaken it. In such cases most problems with policing systems are found at the level of police-community interaction. The front-line, or street-level, bureaucracy is the real face of the police in any country. Their behaviour reflects the organisational/hierarchical nature of the system. There is often a need for course correction at all levels.

Globally, advanced police cultures, both completely new ones and those that evolved through trial and error, put their systems under the microscope. They noted how their police culture was inherently different from the one in other countries; they also analysed the driving force behind their policing culture and the challenges therein.

Policing has gradually evolved from a function of social peacekeeping to a profession. Professions are defined by their capability to deliver public service, to have a shared code among those who practise it and to possess specialised knowledge. Since policing is a practical enterprise, as opposed to a deliberative enterprise like philosophy or theology, the foundation must rest upon public service delivery. It also transpires that the relationship between general ethical theory and practical decision-making in police work is very complex and not linear. It requires proper judgement rather than deductive inferences.

One area of concentration of democratic policing across the globe is organisational culture and ethics. Topics such as police authority, role morality, affirmative action, loyalty, privacy, coercion and deception, with all their complexities, have been debated and analysed both within and outside the force.

A major theme of the discussion on police ethics revolves around the way officers should conduct themselves. The pressures they face in the discharge of their duties must be frankly debated; they

are not mere observers but actors who make choices and affect outcomes. There should be an effort to cultivate a culture where police officers do not confuse the law with morality.

Law unlike morality deals with conduct and not with character and is jurisdictionally limited. Therefore, police ethics are of a distinctive type.

Police authority is an area which must grow out of political, legal and public debates. Since it is an extension of state authority, it must bear the onus when it comes to restricting the freedom of citizens. Ideally, this authority must flow out of a knowledge of the law, professional expertise and the law's application. As a representative of the state, the only legitimate user of coercive force is the police. Hence, in a democratic country, if the rules of business for restricting freedom are not laid down after a thorough debate, police conduct will always be brought into question.

Modern policing trends demand that compliance by the police with professional and personal ethics is essential for efficient public service.

The role of the police in the modern world is structured around obligations, responsibilities, rights and privileges. Their core functions are designed according to security management, crime fighting and social service activities. It is not about making the force responsible for everything under the sun.

Roles have been rationalised and moderated where there is a need for coercive intervention. Worldwide the concept of policing has undergone a transformation with the role of the police now being viewed in the context of a peaceful order.

There is a realisation that because the police have such close interaction with the community, the two cannot be at daggers drawn – the role of the police as peacekeeper and peace builder becomes even more crucial here. This makes sense when we consider that over half of actual police work involves mediation and ensuring peace in society.

It is high time to make a course correction in the policing culture in Pakistan, and to adapt to the new role.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 18, 2021

Rule of law or rule of men?

SYED AKHTAR ALI SHAH

THE rule of law forms the core of a civilised, democratic society. It is fundamental to political stability, social progress and economic development in a country. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the principle of ‘no-one is above the law’ is restricted to mere sloganeering – whether it is a democratic dispensation or a dictatorship. Pledges to ensure ‘supremacy of the law’ are ever high on the agendas and manifestoes of political parties, but have hardly been worked towards as a basic principle of governance in an egalitarian society.

Rule of law is an old concept – one that had agency even during the times of Aristotle. In his book, *Politics*, the great Greek philosopher poses the question: what is better, the rule of law or the rule of an individual? And he responds, saying, “to invest law then with authority is, it seems, to invest God and reason only; to invest a man is to introduce a beast, as desire is something bestial, and even the best of men in authority are liable to be corrupted by passion. We may conclude then that the law is reason without passion and is therefore preferable to any individual.” How prophetic he was!

These concepts provided in early history have been developed, evolved, and enriched. They are now a part of the constitutions of all civilised nations. Rule of law as a concept is at the centre of any judicial system, without which no society can think of justice today. In ordinary parlance, it means all citizens are equal before the law and under its protection; and that state functionaries and citizens must act in line with the law.

In recent history, AV Dicey, an exponent of the rule of law, maintained that “absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power and excludes the existence of arbitrariness, of prerogative or even wide discretionary authority on part of the government.”

US judges have interpreted and developed the concept in this context. Justice Scalia in *Morrison v Olson* (1988) mentioned that it appeared what is called rule of law in the UK is the “proud boast of our democracy that we have a government of laws and not of men”. This was also echoed in Continental Conference that “in America the law is king. For absolute government the king is law, so in free countries, the law ought to be the king; and there ought to be no other. But lest any ill use should afterward arise, let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished, scattered among the people whose right it is”.

In Pakistan, the ‘rule of law’ has recently been elucidated in a judgment in Constitution Petition No 39 of 2019, authored by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, a former chief justice of the Supreme Court.

To the fundamental question: “Is our government of laws or of men?”, the honourable judge remarks, “I understand that democratic maturity of our nation has reached a stage where this Court can proclaim that, as declared by Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke of England in the Commended case in the year 1616 regarding the powers of King James-I, howsoever high you may be; the law is above you.”

Prime Minister Imran Khan has time and again mentioned during his fiery speeches that the country is afflicted with the rule of the elite, like sugar barons; and “such mafias” have been trying to avoid accountability and resist the rule of law in the country. However, the PM does express his thundering commitment to maintain the rule of law and ensure accountability.

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan also underscores the notion of the rule of law. In other words, the rule of law is the bedrock of our constitution. The essence of the rule of law is embodied in Articles 4 and 5 of the Constitution, which emphasises the right of individuals to be treated in accordance with law and loyalty to the state, and obedience to the law and the Constitution.

Upon analysing the situation on the ground and in history, one can safely say that the reality does not match the rhetoric. The bitter truth is that we have scant respect for the Constitution and the rules of business framed thereunder, the supreme law of the land. The Constitution has been abrogated, suspended, and held in abeyance repeatedly. Judiciary, the guardian of the Constitution, has been manipulated to get desired results.

Elections have been engineered. Citizens are deprived of liberty without due process of law. Subsidies were given to sugar barons by the cabinet. Residential structures were constructed on water channels in the federal capital which resulted in urban flooding there during recent rains in sheer disregard to the master plan. Postings and appointments in violation of the Civil Servants Act and schedules attached thereto are orders of the day. The establishment of National Coordination Committee does not go in line with the NDMA Act.

Micromanagement of the administrative machinery down to the level of SHO and Patwari through the Prime Minister’s Portal is against the demarcation of the administrative authority of the federation and provinces. Change of the entire law regulating forest reserves and retreating from the stand taken by the Forest Department in the High Court in the Malam Jabba case reflect the rule of the elite. Moreover, the much-talked-about hybrid system, alien to the Constitution and other laws, illustrates negation of the rule of law and indicates the rule of men.

The rule of law as a cardinal principle of the Constitution is the main ingredient of the good governance. This cannot be ensured by mere lip service, but by practically working within the orbit of the Constitution with no extra-constitutional role to any functionary of the state.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 18, 2021.

Pakistan's CT challenge

FAISAL ALI RAJA

PAKISTAN'S counterterrorism (CT) challenge may not diminish completely once the Taliban establish their control in Afghanistan. Three possible scripts may unroll in the coming months. A single defence scenario may be a logical outcome involving all anti-Taliban forces, present within and outside the country, which may get united and form a single unified force against them. However, it remains to be seen how the unified force can find ground support to launch a counter offensive after the fall of Kabul. The Taliban discipline and attitude may define the nature and mode of any outside response. Already we are witnessing a media onslaught against the Taliban and their mode of security management to discredit them and prepare ground for an anti-Taliban public opinion. The current situation suggests that the anti-Taliban front may first discredit them, then urge the world community for action and finally come up with some sort of a hybrid counter action against them. The mode of such counter offensive cannot be predicted at this point in time. The Taliban need to establish an effective media representative to engage with foreign media proactively. They need to act swiftly and secure their borders as well.

There is a possible militant dispersion effect as Taliban start controlling one district after another. This may push these groups outside their jurisdictions and force them either to relocate or take refuge across the border. These groups can stage attacks against the LEAs of their new localisations. The Chinese authorities have already conveyed their concern to the Taliban about the possible scattering of East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). With more territorial victories, the groups which were loosely aligned with Taliban may offer their support within Afghanistan for security management. However, such groups have sufficient footprint in neighbouring countries and they can stage attacks against their original nemesis with renewed vigour and energy.

Recently, there has been a spate of attacks by TTP and Baloch sub-nationalists against police, army and foreigners in the country for varying strategic aims and objectives. The Taliban may not be in a position to hand over these TTP elements to Pakistan. A series of negotiations may be conducted with the Taliban to settle these issues. There might be a politico-tribal rapprochement between TTP and Pakistani authorities through Taliban mediation. Nonetheless, all elements within the TTP may not reconcile with the idea and look for alternative places of refuge inside or outside Afghanistan. If an all-inclusive government is formed, these elements may shift to the locations under governance of non-Taliban political forces. Foot soldiers of ETIM, IS and Baloch sub-nationalist parties may dilute and hide among population till they feel that the time is ripe for re-action.

Pakistan's CT challenge should focus on three areas – local operations, regional policy discourse, and international CT narrative. The groups, which may disperse as a result of Afghan conflict, should be identified along with their associates in the country. The sleeper cells of these groups pose a serious CT challenge for the country. At the local level, the provincial CTDs, police, and other paramilitary forces may be used for conducting IBOs against these elements across the country. These actions should have three important ingredients. First, these operations are the result of synergy of intelligence at regional, provincial and national levels. Second, an operational coordination among various CTDs or police forces or LEAs should translate into ground action in case such elements have trans-provincial presence. Third, the result of such operation be shared among all ground forces so as to further initiate pre-emptive operations in new districts or regions.

The regional CT policy should be evolved to counter regional militant outfits targeting the country. Here, clear, logical and concise terror links should be established during investigations in various cases to share them with regional countries and highlighted at different regional forums. Lastly, we need to strengthen our international CT narrative beyond terror-related fatalities, causalities and economic losses. It should now be built on improving social integration, enhancing national unity and expanding economic connectivity.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 18, 2021.

Threat from outlawed TTP seen growing



ISLAMIST groups around the world have hailed the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, sparking global alarm that the country could once again become a safe haven for jihadists inspired by its success.

The Taliban has said it will not allow Afghanistan to be used to launch attacks on other nations. But experts say that ties remain with al Qaeda, whose attacks against the United States prompted Washington to invade the country in 2001, as well as other militant groups including in neighbouring Pakistan.

The outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or the TTP, which is not part of the Afghan group, pledged allegiance, and said hundreds of its members were freed from prisons when the Afghan Taliban swept through the country in recent days.

The most concrete risk, some officials and analysts say, is to Afghanistan's neighbour Pakistan. "The first, easy test of their commitment (to their promises) is the TTP," said Asfandyar Mir, a South Asia security scholar affiliated with Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, referring to the Pakistan Taliban.

"Based out of eastern Afghanistan ... the TTP has stepped up violence against Pakistan and appears to be preparing for a major campaign."

The TTP said that 780 of their members, including former second-in-command Maulvi Faqir Muhammad, have been freed from prisons in Afghanistan, and had made their way to what the group called its strongholds in eastern Afghanistan.

An Afghan Taliban spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the prisoner release. At their peak, the TTP attacks killed hundreds of people, including one assault on a school in Peshawar in 2014 that killed more than 140 people, most of them children.

TTP operations were severely disrupted in subsequent years, but more recently has begun to regroup and launched attacks on security personnel in border areas.

Georg Riekeles, associate director of the European Policy Centre think-tank in Brussels, said the Afghan Taliban wanted international recognition and could try to live up to their promise to not allow Afghanistan to become a base for militancy.

But he said the Taliban's success had made them heroes to the Islamic radical underground. "You find all the ingredients of the myth that inspires and draws extremist groups and youth: radical religious ideology, heroic fighters in rugged mountains, military success and victory first against Soviet invasion, now against the US. "That's part of the lessons we must draw, and what we must prepare for."

One of the Taliban's top leaders is Sirajuddin Haqqani, the head of the militant Haqqani network. The United States has designated him a global terrorist and offered \$5 million for information leading to his arrest.

"Jihadists writ large are jubilant and electrified by the Taliban's return," said Mir at Stanford University.

"Major jihadist constituencies across South Asia, Middle East and Africa have taken note ... (and) al Qaeda's eco-system sees the Taliban's return as its own victory."

Besides groups affiliated to al Qaeda, congratulatory messages to the Taliban have come from Somalia's al-Shabaab and Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Yemen's Houthi group, which is opposed to the United States and other Western countries, said events in Afghanistan proved that foreign "occupation" was bound to fail.

World leaders have been sceptical of the Taliban's moderate public pronouncements since seizing power, although some diplomatic officials familiar with its negotiations say the group is seeking international recognition and possibly development assistance.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the group's spokesman, promised at a news conference in Kabul on Tuesday that Afghanistan would not be used to launch any attacks on foreign countries.

"I would like to assure the US and the international community that no one will be harmed ... we will not allow our territory to be used against anybody," he said. "We don't want any internal or external enemies."

Independent UN experts reported to the Security Council last month that al Qaeda was present in at least 15 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The experts also said Islamic State had expanded its presence to several provinces, including Kabul, and that fighters has formed sleeper cells.

Islamic State is opposed to the Taliban. But some analysts and officials cautioned that the ultra-radical group could take advantage of any chaos or encourage hard-line Taliban fighters to defect as the movement settles into governance.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appealed to the Security Council to "use all tools at its disposal to suppress the global terrorist threat in Afghanistan." The Security Council stressed the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan to ensure other countries were not threatened or attacked.

In a call with US President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson "stressed the importance of not losing the gains made in Afghanistan over the last 20 years, of protecting ourselves against any emerging threat from terrorism," a Downing Street spokesperson said.

Two sources familiar with the matter said China had raised concerns over the anti-China East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) group with the Taliban in recent meetings. "They have been taking up the issue of ETIM whenever they call on us," a Taliban source told Reuters, saying the group reassured China they would not allow attacks to take place.

The US government says ETIM no longer exists as a formal organisation and is instead a broad label China uses to oppress a variety of Muslim ethnic groups, including Uyghurs, in its Xinjiang region. China denies all accusations of abuse.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 19, 2021.

Cybersecurity policy

USAMA KHILJI

PAKISTAN'S National Cybersecurity Policy has been approved by the cabinet, and it is surprising that Pakistan did not have one up till now. The policy reads partly like an ambitious strategy paper, and at many points includes irrelevant factors. Still, it marks an important beginning considering the fast shift to digital in all spheres, including governance.

There are some important factors that are worth exploring apart from the salient features of this lengthy document, including the external factors that impact cybersecurity readiness, capacity and capability, the intersectionality of cybersecurity, and protection of rights while doing so.

The purpose of the policy is stated to be “Inter-departmental coordination and holistic approach to address cybersecurity challenges and their emerging trends on a national level”.

The focus rightly seems to be on synchronisation of a national cybersecurity effort, which is divided into national, sectoral and organisational levels. The focus of the policy is largely on government-related institutions, though it speaks of the need for cybersecurity best practices to be adopted in the private sector as well, including banking, the health sector, etc. It also mentions the need for public-private partnerships which are necessary for the policy to remain dynamic over time as it is also aimed to be. A critical factor in implementing such a policy will be getting the necessary buy-in from government institutions that must take cybersecurity seriously. This will require more work than just a policy, because it has to do with a particular mindset about technology, and seriousness regarding established security protocols – for example, knowledge about simple digital security steps such as screen locks on phones, not sharing passwords with others, etc.

Issues such as taking shortcuts, not updating anti-spyware and anti-viruses in computers and phones, and thinking of cybersecurity expenditure as unnecessary are some of the impediments that already exist and are likely to continue with a senior bureaucracy that is resistant to change.

Take, for example, the recent hacking of the Federal Board of Revenue records which took place despite repeated reminders in its third-party audit reports that asked the FBR to take cybersecurity protocols and compliance seriously, including when the current chairperson was a member IT, apart from warnings from others. The financial records of all Pakistani taxpayers were compromised due to resistance to logical advice in an audit. Nadra has been subjected to similar hacking despite being the repository of all Pakistani citizens' data. Are there any mechanisms for accountability in such cases? None.

The policy also addresses the capacity of government institutions to adopt such change over time, and gives a vague timeline. However, it must also focus on how behavioural change will be guided in government departments' resistance to dynamism. For instance, information officers are supposed to be present in all departments for right-to-information requests, but despite the presence of this law since 2002, most departments lack a dedicated information officer. How will the implementation of cybersecurity protocols and designation of associated personnel be different?

The policy also speaks of "weak enforcement of statutes" related to cybersecurity, which include the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act [Peca], 2016, and the dated Telegraph Act and Electronic Transactions Ordinance. What this policy fails to explore is that this is a general problem with the overall law enforcement and justice system in Pakistan. The Federal Investigation Agency faces major setbacks when it comes to the implementation of Peca 2016. For instance, its prosecutors do not show up in court, mysteriously lose evidence files, and have limited forensic investigation capacities.

This is where our law-enforcement agencies require help, which should be in the form of independent forensic laboratories that are free from influence, high in number, and efficient in delivering results while respecting the privacy of subjects of investigation that should be carried out only under a warrant from the court. There is no point bringing in new legislation if there is no capacity for its implementation. The policy also mentions the need to protect the online privacy of citizens, but after proposing a draft data protection and privacy bill last year, the government has made no progress on it despite inviting feedback from civil society which was duly provided in a detailed manner. When there is no data protection bill, how can foreign investors be confident of doing business here? What consequences exist for weak cybersecurity protocols that lead to data breaches, and what legal recourse to citizens is available in case of data breaches?

In another nod to the government's obsession with data localisation, the policy speaks of data beyond "legal jurisdiction", without realising the fundamental nature of the internet, or that countries cannot be expected to have physical access to all data related to its citizens. Apart from risking the right to privacy of citizens, such concerns also undermine already existent encryption protocols that ensure data protection no matter where it is stored. The mention of encryption is completely missing from this policy, and Pakistan should move towards ensuring the highest possible encryption protocols for data related to its citizens, as well as for critical national infrastructure that requires maximum security.

The policy also proposes a Cyber Governance Policy Committee, and this should include a diverse set of stakeholders so that maximum benefit can accrue from existing cross-sector relevant expertise. The plans for a framework for cybersecurity audit and compliance are important and must be implemented across the board. The national IT Research and Development Fund that has a large repository of funds from the telecom licensees should be utilised for cybersecurity research. Plans for special courts to adjudicate on cybersecurity matters sound ambitious where the *amicus curiae* can easily assist courts in such cases. The inclusion of cybercrime-related

curricula for computer science and law degrees; training of lawyers, prosecutors, judges; and teaching cybersecurity in middle and secondary schools are wonderful ideas that deserve further action. Such a policy cannot be successful without behavioural change, improvement in the overall legal system, inclusion of diverse voices, and cross-sector coordination and collaboration.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 21, 2021

Countering VAW

DR SYED KALEEM IMAM

AS a police chief, it was so painful to read the 'morning crime diary', summarizing how violent we have become. It is unfortunate that cases of violence against women (VAW) are rarely reported for fear of stigma. A sobbing father once asked me: "who will marry her, once she grows, knowing what had happened to her in the formative years?"

Statistics show that 66,000 women are killed violently every year and account for 17 percent of global homicides. And, while no country in the world is 100 percent safe for women, this does not absolve us from our obligation to eradicate VAW from our country and society. It is a fact that VAW is mainly due to attitude and rearing, patriarchs living with a perception of superiority, complexes, inhibitions, entitlements, misogyny, and misinterpreted ideologies. In our society, it is prevalent because of historically unfair power relations between men and women, which force the latter into a subordinate position.

The truth is that violence against women has been accepted and even condoned because many in our society reduce it to a 'domestic' or 'private' matter. We are a predominantly Muslim society and our religion emphasizes due respect to women, but sadly we are currently ranked 67 in the Safety and Crime Index list amid the Southern Asia Safety Index of surveyed 133 countries. And, as per the World Economic Forum's global gender index of 2020, we were ranked 153 out of the assessed 156 countries. Paradoxically, though the police are inefficient and corrupt, they are there to prevent and detect all crime, irrespective of the root causes. Nevertheless, blaming the victim, being fearful of acting against the powerful or of being held accountable, adds to victims' miseries and in turn emboldens criminals into repeating their crimes.

Police overreaction, especially in high-profile cases, may also wear down due process due to the pressure and the hype. Pushing the investigating officer to quickly finalize the investigations, holding press talks etc, instead of concentrating on the investigation stages is likely to end up in the police overlooking substantial incriminating evidence resulting in exoneration of the accused.

We have seen in cases of VAW, legal procedural delays on one pretext or another, and reducing even the bravest of victims into fear through nasty questions during investigation and court proceedings. There is no doubt that the criminal justice system's inadequacy does catalyse all such unfortunate incidents, particularly, when it doesn't swiftly dispose of cases. At the societal level, a culture of involving the entire clan of a perpetrator in the offence is unfair as is the alleged culprit and his coterie using all tactics to get the charges dropped.

The record reveals that in 2020, around 0.87 million criminal cases were registered all over

Pakistan, though the number could swell to two million if every crime were reported or recorded. Sadly 4888 cases (0.557 percent) were of VAW recounted during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These included murder, honour killings, rape, suicide, acid burning, kidnapping, domestic violence, forced marriage, etc. Analysis reveals that 57 percent of these offences occurred in Punjab, 27 percent in Sindh, 8 percent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 6 percent in Gilgit-Baltistan and 2 percent in Balochistan. The prevalent system, at times, can be quite merciless when it comes to justice. In the Mukhtar Mai rape case (2002) the accused was acquitted for "insufficient evidence". In Ghazala Javed, the playback singer murder (2012), the sentence was set aside based on compromise between the heirs of the victims. In the Qandeel Baloch murder (2016) her brother confessed to the murder saying she was "bringing disrepute" to the "family's honour" while in the Khadija Siddiqui stabbing case (2016) the accused after serving 3.5 years against his five years, was released on "technical remissions" (July 2021).

The constitution of Pakistan safeguards women's fundamental rights. However more recognition at the national level with consistent follow-up is required. It is time for proper classifications of women's basic rights like autonomy, representation, and freedom. Reforms are required in the police departments and judicial processes to remove hurdles in the way of women accessing justice. At the same time, we can create and discover counter-VAW programmes that have yielded tangible results. It's time to work out and overcome the root causes of VAW and develop a pragmatic response. The best way forward is to imitate effective models in vogue worldwide to contain its triggers. One such, 'The Social-Ecological Model,' a Framework for Prevention of VAW suggests analysing factors, shaping people's behaviour towards this violence to help establish programmes and prevention strategies. It uses a four-level social-ecological paradigm on the complex interplay and influencing factors between individuals, relationships, communities, and societal factors besides suggesting to act across multiple levels of the model at the same time to achieve population-level impact (Dahlberg LL, Krug EG, WHO).

But it is also time that we all see gender as a continuum instead of a two-stage set of hostile values. It is so strange that we love women as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers and yet are not ready for their social inclusion. Women will stop being suppressed only when we change society's chauvinistic mentality and insist on equal opportunity for all.

The perpetrators of shameful and horrific crimes, such as the one committed on the Lahore-Sialkot link road against a woman in front of her children, should be given swift and exemplary punishment so that no one can dare think of committing such a horrendous crime. Let's be clear that any violence perpetrated or condoned by the state or its officials or the community only ends up ensuring recurrence. Such crimes are not far away anymore; they are just around the corner. Are we doing anything to address the root causes, to overcome this pathological problem and improve our response mechanism? A collective response is the need of the hour - or maybe an implementable national action plan. Mere lip service hasn't and won't serve any purpose. Our's should not be a dark and gloomy 'wasteland'.

SOURCE: THE NEWS, AUGUST 22, 2021

Attack in Gwadar

IN yet another attack, Chinese nationals in Pakistan were targeted in what seems to be a bizarre attempt to derail the path of progress and stability. Friday's attack in Gwadar should be taken more seriously as it was reportedly carried out by a suicide bomber. A minor rammed into a vehicle carrying Chinese workers. This suicide activity points out at deep-rooted fissures. Nonetheless, in a heroic effort security personnel present on the spot did all in their capacity to limit damage, and thwarted a major tragedy. Two children died on the spot and three others, including a Chinese citizen, were injured.

This is the second such attack in almost a month apparently on Chinese nationals engaged in various CPEC projects countrywide. The previous one was on Dasu Hydropower Project in the remote Kohistan district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. What makes Friday's act dare-devil is that a security convoy of the Pakistan Army accompanying the Chinese was targeted. This hints at not only formal planning on the part of vested interests, but also a mindset prevalent to sabotage Pakistan-China cordiality and cooperation. But the credit goes to the visionary Chinese leadership who always looks at the bigger picture of regional development, and moves on with resilience. This is what makes this understanding an all-weather friendship.

While CPEC is nearing completion and there is a change of guard in Afghanistan, Pakistan will have to raise its vigil. There are non-state actors, as well as foreign-funded elements in political disguise, whose one-point agenda is to indulge in sabotage activities and unwind the gigantic development that Pakistan is witnessing under Chinese auspices. A glance at all such cowardly attacks carried out on Chinese assets were meant to stall the pace of development.

At the same, the security blanket seems to be unsatisfactory as there are certainly loopholes in it. This is why terror remnants are at their free will to choose their targets. The recent hurling of a grenade on a family truck, and gunmen who shot a Chinese engineer who had just arrived in Karachi; the motorcycle bomb blast in Quetta; and the audacity of anyone to lay siege to the federal capital hint at ensuing unrest. Take them out with smart intelligence gathering.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 22, 2021.

FATF: moving goalposts

Pakistan has been in the FATF dock for quite some time. The Paris-based regulator on financial transactions, anti-money laundering and terror financing believes that Pakistan has a lot to do in terms of reforming its monetary transactions and, especially, regulations at home against proscribed organisations. Thus, since June 2018, it has been placed in the grey list. The pressure is on to seek compliance on 27 points, initially spelt out by FATF. They primarily revolve around the guarantees that the state furnishes to the global consortium ensuring that all money flow is documented, and there isn't any pilferage in terms of illegal or suspicious transactions.

Pakistan obliged with FATF, irrespective of the fact that it is not a member of the club. Its endeavour was to improve and reinforce its CFT legal framework in good faith. Pakistan met 26 of the 27 conditions laid down by the FATF by legislating and introducing stringent financial regulations in its banking sector. Yet the consortium looked the other way and wanted more compliance as it listed out an eight-point action plan. This is like shifting the goal post, and is certainly devoid of merit.

The hunch is that Pakistan is being penalised owing its geopolitical invincibility, and cornered on a politicised agenda. This argument has meat because Sri Lanka and South Korea, to name a few, also fall in the same category, and their index ratio is also 22%, but they are off the hook and in white list. Pakistan being held in the grey list has much to do with how international lenders, as well as major powers, want it to fall in line for an agenda that is beyond the scope and limits of FATF.

Pakistan has no choice but to comply. This will help in making the world realise its seriousness in fighting terror financing, as well as obstructing money-laundering. The government advocates transparency in financial dealings, and wants to curb the flight of capital. FATF has just furthered that envelope. Islamabad should build a narrative and demand transparency in auditing by both developed and developing countries. This apartheid of singling out Pakistan is in bad taste.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 23, 2021.

Who to blame?

KISHWAR ENAM

WAKING up nearly every day to a new case of child abuse, violence and murder makes one wonder: who is to blame? Maybe it is my paediatric community that has been unable to guide parents, or maybe it is our society that frowns upon sex education and life skills as one way of bringing down the incidence of rape and murder. Or perhaps it is the parents who think their reputation in the family and community is far more important than the mental health of their child. Or perhaps it is our government for whom the enforcement of laws is never a priority.

Child abuse and domestic violence in Pakistan have plagued our society from the very beginning but such cases have largely been hidden from our eyes. We hear about them more now because of the continuous efforts of child rights activists in the country to raise awareness and the advent of social media. The increase in the number of cases of child abuse is also due to the absence of proper systems to handle these cases, poor law enforcement, court rulings that do not follow policy, no guaranteed punishments for rapists, poverty, unemployment, lack of population control efforts, uninhibited access to inappropriate material via social media, little attention to mental health, no lessons in the curriculum on how to keep physically safe, and finally their taboo nature in a conservative society.

We do not know when the government will realise it is an emergency. How many more Mahams, Noors, Farishtas and Zainabs will have to lose their lives before we develop a proper child protection system? We must register speedy FIRs and implement fair court judgements besides carrying out exemplary punishments and activating the Zainab Alert law. After the recent case in Karachi of the sexual abuse and murder of six-year-old Maham, police boasted how they had arrested the culprit within 72 hours. In fact, she could have been saved if the matter had been registered and a search team dispatched immediately after the father reported his daughter was missing. Those critical five to six hours when no one tried looking for her decided her fate. The only action taken by the police department was to fire the police officer who gave a tough time to the father. The police department should have passed an order that for future cases FIRs should be registered immediately and search parties sent out promptly by police stations.

Parents must be alert at all times. One cannot emphasise enough that the predator is always nearby and often someone very close to the child. In fact, 80 per cent of the time, the abuser is someone known to the child. Responsible behaviour is the need of the hour and children should not be allowed to leave the house alone under any circumstances. It is not worth the risk. Let's ask ourselves if we are honest about our role as parents. In a recent case of the sexual abuse of a

13-year-old, I asked the mother how and what her daughter knew about sex. With a casual smile, she replied, that children these days possess smartphones, and they watch (and understand) everything. It is easy to see how parents are ready to abdicate their roles of supervision and guidance and leave it to social media to 'educate' the child. At the other end, as a society, we still consider it immoral to talk to our children about this topic in all its aspects.

Parents and the government must also understand that we are in the midst of a mental health crisis. We need to be vigilant, proactive and supportive of our children. They are not only living in a time when the entire world is going through a crisis, we are also living in a country where child rights have no value. If we do not act now, we will not be able to survive the burden of mental health problems in the future.

Educational institutions should step forward to do their bit to safeguard their students. A significant chunk of a child's day is spent in school and a few impactful lessons can make a huge difference in his or her life. Add safeguarding and life skill lessons to the curriculum. Make child protection committees in schools and pledge to take the responsibility of keeping children safe in schools. Madressahs should also follow these rules. We can only curtail child abuse by taking positive steps, and not by pointing fingers.

Finally, our society needs to know that when we indulge in victim blaming, prevent schools from educating our children about these matters, and do not speak up when abuse is happening in front of our eyes, we are indirectly helping these predators.

Let's pledge to give our children a safe environment to grow instead of snatching away their precious childhoods in the name of superficial respect and honour.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 23, 2021

Afghanistan debacle marks demise of the 'American Century'

MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

AUGUST 15 will probably go down in history as the day that marked the formal end of the 'American Century' and the beginning of the 'Asian Century'. On that day, the US-propped Kabul regime collapsed, with its head fleeing with around \$169 million cash stashed in his luggage, and the ignominious, panicky exit of the American military coincided with the surprisingly swift but subdued return of the Afghan Taliban back to power after 20 years. Messy exits are now a hallmark of the US in the Third World countries it once dominated, but 'incompetence' was never an adjective that described the American way of doing things, until Kabul last week.

The dizzying speed of these developments reinforce what Lenin once said: "There are decades when nothing happens; and then there are weeks when decades happen!"

There is now a glimmer of hope that the 42-year-old Afghan conflict can perhaps come to an end after three Afghan Wars (1979-1989 'Afghan Jihad' funded by the US against the Soviet occupation), then the Afghan Civil War (1989-2001), and finally the 'War of Terror' undertaken by the US after 9/11.

President Carter's National Security Adviser Dr Zbigniew Brzezinski claimed in his memoir, *Power and Principle*, that Carter had signed a directive on July 3, 1979, to start funding the dissident Afghan Mujahideen with an initial funding of \$695,000 which would be distributed by the CIA via Pakistan. This was six months before the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Eventually, Afghanistan became the centre of CIA's biggest covert operation after WWII, codenamed Operation Cyclone. When the Geneva Accords were signed a decade later, providing the framework for the defeated Red Army's exit from Afghanistan, almost \$5 billion had been funnelled for this guerrilla war, with Saudi Arabia providing matching funds to the American money (\$2.1 billion each), plus another \$1 billion from other countries over a 10-year period. Over 100,000 Afghan Mujahideen had been trained and armed, besides about 10,000 Arab and other Muslim volunteers. The Afghan Taliban, who now are in power, are the ideological offspring of the Afghan Mujahideen, some actually having fought in the war against the Red Army.

During an interview with French newspaper *Le Nouvelle Observateur* published in its issue of January 15-21, 1998, Dr Brzezinski was asked whether he had regrets in funding a struggle that

spawned religious extremism, destabilising parts of both the Muslim and Western worlds, he answered without batting an eyelid: “What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and end of the Cold War?”

It was largely an American-created genie that the US tried, albeit abortively, to put back into the bottle when Washington, under President George W Bush, launched the ‘War on Terror’ after 9/11. Pakistan was coerced into joining the war, although India was the first in the region to offer unstinted cooperation to the American war effort. And Saudi Arabia too was cajoled into the post 9/11 war effort because it feared American reprisals as 15 of the 19 hijackers that attacked the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were from Saudi Arabia (of the remaining four, two were from Egypt and one each from Lebanon and the UAE).

America’s Afghanistan Project came unstuck for three reasons starting in 2003.

First, that year, an over-confident US went to war with Iraq, instead of stabilising and strengthening Afghanistan. The US shifted attention to Iraq, fighting a war of choice because of Bush’s ideological foreign policy fixation, when he labelled Iraq, Iran and North Korea as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’, although none of these countries had anything to do with 9/11; and, in fact, Iran had actively cooperated with the US in the removal of the Taliban regime.

The second reason was an inability to learn lessons from history due to imperial hubris and US duplicity with allies like Pakistan. Just before the Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, a top-secret British delegation was in Moscow seeking ‘expert advice’ from the Russian experience in Afghanistan. Their advice was instructive, but never followed: “You will make the same bad choice we did, you will go in, you will lose, many of you will die and then you’ll be forced to retreat, which will be good for us”.

Regarding duplicity with allies, for example, in his book, *Lawless World*, Philippe Sands reveals the contents of a telephone conversation between President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair on January 30, 2003, just a few weeks before the launch of the war on Iraq on March 20. In that conversation, Bush tells Blair that he “wanted to go beyond Iraq in dealing with WMD proliferation, mentioning in particular Saudi Arabia, Iran, North Korea and Pakistan”, at a time when Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were supposedly US allies. And by 2005, the US, in another example of double-dealing with Pakistan, violating its own laws as well as IAEA rules, went ahead to sign a major civil nuclear deal with India, with a view to roping in India against China, backed later by massive armaments and sophisticated technology to India, to the detriment of Pakistan.

The third reason for failure – apart from the confusion why the US was in Afghanistan – was the US perpetuating its military presence by propping up a small self-serving corrupt Kabul elite dependent on dole outs from Washington. To expect any self-respecting Afghan soldier to lay down his life for such a corrupt clique was delusional, to say the least. The Washington Post did an excellent expose of the deception and lies that lay at the heart of America’s ill-fated

Afghanistan Project, by publishing the Afghanistan Papers in November 2019, as there was a yawning chasm between what was publicly stated and what was privately believed.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the Afghanistan debacle has evoked memories of Cambodia and Vietnam 1975 or Iran 1979, where the departing American ambassador announced somewhat bitterly: "Till yesterday, we were ruling this country!"

Afghanistan is much more than an intelligence failure or an error of policy judgment. It has turned out as the nemesis of the US policy of 'regime change' in the Third World, which the US attempted 72 times during the Cold War, 1945-1989.

Over 75 years ago, when the US emerged as the victor of WWII, it was heralded as the harbinger of the 'American Century'. This view was reinforced when the Afghan War against the Soviet Union sparked the collapse of the USSR and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, symbolised by the demolition of the Berlin Wall. The sole superpower's President, George HW Bush, triumphantly proclaimed in 1991: "What we say goes!"

That was 30 years ago. Today, the image, clout and confidence of the sole superpower lies buried in the debris of the destruction of the war in Afghanistan, which has lived up to its reputation as 'the graveyard of empires', devouring the American superpower, as it did earlier with Britain and Soviet Union – the superpowers of the 19th and 20th centuries.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 24, 2021

Access to justice against gender-based violence

DURDANA NAJAM

OF late, many violent cases against women have been reported, filmed, and broadcast on social media. We have been hearing about rape victims as young as two years' old, women beaten to death by their husbands, girls killed by their boyfriends, acid thrown on women by an estranged friend and women stripped naked in public as punishment. In addition, it is common to find the corpse of women on the heap of garbage, unrecognisable in most cases either because of third-degree burn or brutal murder.

Most of the culprits go unapprehend, while those caught have the chance to slip out of the loopholes our legal system provides to the crooks, well connected and influential. Still worse, lack of evidence, concocted witnesses, unscrupulous judges, and the ever-slow grinding wheel of Pakistan's justice system enable the accused to either get out of the court settlement or receive punishment barely matching the offense.

Recently three incidents in a row have exposed the fault line on which women are standing in Pakistan:

Usman Mirza in Islamabad stripped naked a girl for hours in an apartment with his other male friends.

Zahir Jaffar beheaded his friend Noor Makadam in a gruesome murder at his home in the posh locality of Islamabad.

Four hundred boys in Lahore harassed a girl in a park for hours without any intervention from the law enforcers.

In between, multiple stories of harassment of girls at the hands of clerics in madrassas were making round.

Two groups have come forward in criticism of these incidents. One group is critical of a woman's open demeanour and supported the culture of veiling. They believe that an unveiled and unrestrained woman invites trouble by giving wrong signals to a man. Another group believes that a woman should have the freedom to wear whatever she likes and that the demand for restrained behaviour should be for both men and women.

Pakistan is not the only country where violence against women has been perpetuated despite stringent laws to protect them. Africa is ripe with gender-based violence. Advanced countries in

Europe are still struggling to close the gender gap. Even in the US, women have to work twice hard to build their stature equal to men.

Women everywhere are walking on a tightrope. Most of us are beholden to an illusion that women who step out of their homes get the worse out of men. In reality, it is the other way round. Women at home have been exposed to more harassment. Financial dependence on male family members exacerbates a woman's vulnerability in the household.

Our problem does not lie in how women dress or in the unrestrained behaviour of men. Instead, we are caught in the web of two issues. One relates to religion, and the other concerns the legal system of the country.

We have been unable to identify standard operation procedures to practise Islam in Pakistan. We had travelled through time when headscarves and long gowns were promoted at the government level. We have been at the milestones where women were given free will to choose their attire. During the Musharraf period, Islam and modernity were allowed to run parallel to one another. People celebrated Valentine's Day and Basant nights in a party style, while Jamaatud Dawa, Alhuda, Jammat-e-Islami, and Tablighi Jamaat were given a free hand to open new outlets, preach and sermonise issues according to their interpretation of Islam. This cocktail of modernity and Islamisation without legal oversight allowed the introduction of religious literature, which was at times hateful, fear-inducing, hyperbolic, violent, and divisible. The mess that Musharraf left turned this country into a fireball.

From bomb blasts to killing innocent children at the Army Public School, it was hell broke loose. We are out of that mess though; we are far from defining the contour of religious norms at the policy level. Had we implemented the National Action Plan in totality, much of this trouble would have been solved.

Maulana Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, the prime minister's Special Representative on Religious Harmony, has appealed to the cleric community to use their pulpit to discuss the respect women deserve from society. He is also of the view that both men and women are expected to be chaste in Islam. "It claps both ways. Unless men lower their gaze and behave kindly, women will remain insecure and vulnerable even in thousand veils," said Ashrafi.

Notwithstanding all these efforts, no amount of public or government measure to eliminate violence against women will be fruitful unless women are able to access justice against gender-based violence. The law of the land is in dire need of overhauling. Once the wheel of justice begins its journey in the right direction, we will finally see a new Pakistan emerge, but not before that.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 26, 2021.

Defeat the ideology

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

THE onslaught of militancy did not provide time and space to the state to focus on countering violent extremism (CVE); consequently, countering terrorism (CT) remained the top priority. Sole reliance on kinetic options resulted in the killings of militants, but the ideology remained intact. Without defeating ideology, sustainable peace cannot be guaranteed.

Violent extremism (VE) is a multifaceted phenomenon that undermines peace, security, human rights, and sustainable development. Misinterpretation of religion, weak rule of law, ungoverned or poorly governed areas, poverty, unemployment and unfair resource distribution, social marginalisation and political disengagement are push factors; the promise of empowerment and revolutionary change, implementation of Shariah, Islamic political system and jihad are pull factors.

Owing to statistical quantification, CT gets instant attention of the ruling elite, bureaucracy, media, and public. It is easy to quantify the number of operations, arrests, killings, recovery of ammunition, weapons, and explosives. However, CVE is a long-term, non-coercive and difficult to quantify endeavour to reduce space for violent extremists and make it difficult for them to attract volunteers. A proportion of existing funds dedicated for CT needs to be allocated for CVE while departments like education, health and social welfare should be provided funds for CVE.

A CVE policy needs to be based on a diagnostic approach: it needs to uncover why extremists see joining such a bandwagon as an aspirational social act and why, despite low educational credentials, the majority of them desire to reshape the world.

Traditionally, extremist organisations preferred to reach out to the youth but now women are also their priority. Women are disproportionately affected by conflicts. Their extreme social exclusion and victimisation in patriarchal societies create incentives for some women to seek power and mobility by aligning with extremist organisations. The role of women as social influencers and agents of change in stabilising communities and preventing extremism needs rethinking.

Encrypted communication facilitates extremists to strengthen networking, seek finances and build capacity. Administrative reforms and policing cyberspace should therefore be accorded top priority.

Section 47 of The KP Police Act 2017 invested Public Liaison Councils (PLCs) with enormous powers to check the misuse of loudspeakers, monitor and verify the credentials of tenants and

monitor the activities of released convicts but selection criteria of PLC members, their capacity, monitoring and evaluation needs a review.

Violent extremists effectively utilised ideology and technology to their advantage. However, countries are yet to use technology to the optimum level in countering VE. Through technology, public awareness can be created about the techniques of extremists regarding recruitment, funding, propaganda and facilitation. The recent establishment of an outreach branch by the National Counter Terrorism Authority (Nacta) will strengthen CVE efforts with the help of the community.

Mental health and social wellbeing are also low priority areas. Though depression is a major driver in VE, it is usually ignored as a driver of behavioural change because mental health is considered a personal issue. The role of psychologists and psychiatrists is yet to be linked with the efforts of CVE.

A fair understanding of CVE dynamics requires credible research. That is not possible without collaboration between LEAs, including CTDs, and universities. The Higher Education Commission needs to encourage CVE research. Section 4 of the Nacta Act mandated Nacta to collaborate research in the fields of CVE and CT. The signing of a letter of intent between Nacta and HEC and an MOU between Nacta and the Higher Education Regulatory Authority KP are practical manifestations of the Nacta law.

In January 2021, the Indonesian president signed an exclusive National Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism (NAPCVE) that leads to terrorism. NAPCVE is based on the 'whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach'. Pakistan's implementation of NAP is a combination of CT, CVE and institutional reforms. For a more effective response, Pakistan also needs an exclusive CVE NAP.

The National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG) drafted by Nacta, is in the CVE domain. An outcome of 24 rounds of discussions with 305 stakeholders, the NCEPG cover 50 points primarily focusing on six areas including rule of law and service delivery, citizen engagement, media engagement, integrated education reforms, reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration, renunciation and promotion of culture. It is imperative upon all stakeholders including civil society, federal and provincial governments to convert these guidelines into reality.

Peaceful survival warrants winning the battle of ideas. Let's plan, invest, and give it a try.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 26, 2021

12 US troops, 60 Afghans die in blasts at Kabul airport



TWO suicide bombers and gunmen attacked crowds of Afghans flocking to Kabul's airport on Thursday, transforming a scene of desperation into one of horror in the waning days of an airlift for those fleeing the Taliban takeover.

The attacks killed at least 60 Afghans and 12 US troops, Afghan and US officials said.

The US general overseeing the evacuation vowed the United States would go after the perpetrators of the bombings, and warned that more such attacks are expected.

"We are working very hard right now to determine attribution, to determine who is associated with this cowardly attack. And we're prepared to take action against them," Gen Frank McKenzie, head of US Central Command, told Pentagon reporters in a briefing. "Twenty-four-seven. We are looking for them."

Shortly after McKenzie spoke, the militant Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the killings on its Amaq news channel.



McKenzie said the attacks would not stop the United States from evacuating Americans and others, and flights out were continuing. He said there was a large amount of security at the airport, and alternate routes were being used to get evacuees in.

US officials said 11 Marines and one Navy medic were among the dead.

McKenzie said another 15 service members were wounded. Officials warned the toll could grow. More than 140 Afghans were wounded, an Afghan official said.

One of the bombers struck people standing knee-deep in a wastewater canal under the sweltering sun, throwing bodies into the fetid water. Those who moments earlier had hoped to get on flights out could be seen carrying the wounded to ambulances in a daze, their own clothes darkened with blood.



The IS affiliate in Afghanistan is far more radical than the Taliban, who recently took control of the country in a lightning blitz and condemned the attack.

Western officials had warned of a major attack, urging people to leave the airport, but that advice went largely unheeded by Afghans desperate to escape the country in the last few days of an American-led evacuation before the US officially ends its 20-year presence on Aug 31.



Emergency, an Italian charity that operates hospitals in Afghanistan, said it had received at least 60 patients wounded in the airport attack, in addition to 10 who were dead when they arrived.

Surgeons will be working into the night, said Marco Puntin, the charity's manager in Afghanistan. The wounded overflowed the triage zone into the physiotherapy area and more beds were being added, he said.

The Afghan official who confirmed the overall Afghan toll spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief media.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said one explosion was near an airport entrance and another was a short distance away by a hotel.

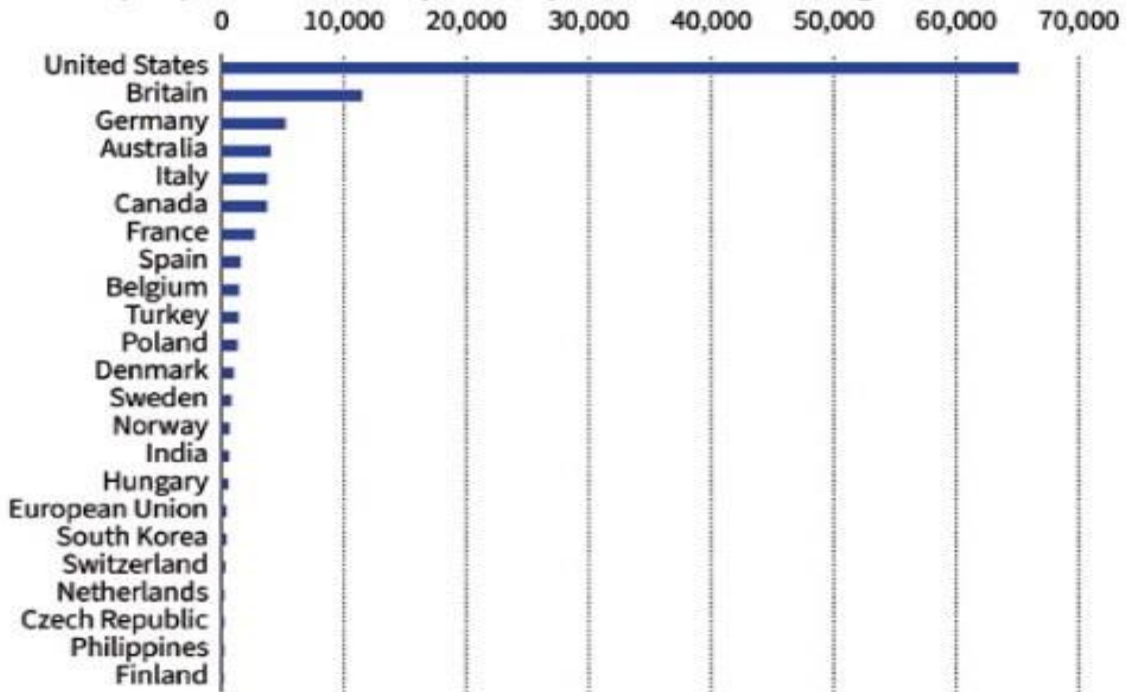
McKenzie said clearly some failure at the airport allowed a suicide bomber to get so close to the gate.

He said the Taliban had been screening people outside the gates, though there was no indication that the Taliban deliberately allowed Thursday's attacks to happen. He said the US had asked the Taliban commanders to tighten security around the airport's perimeter.

Adam Khan was waiting nearby when he saw the first explosion outside what's known as the Abbey gate. He said several people appeared to have been killed or wounded, including some who were maimed.

Evacuations from Kabul

Number of people evacuated by country* or the EU as of Aug 26, 1330 GMT



Some countries such as the UAE (20,500) and Qatar (7,000) are not included in this list as their figures do not distinguish between evacuations by their military and by other countries in transit through their territory

Source: Authorities of different countries *Countries that evacuated more than 100 people **AFP**

The second blast was at or near Baron Hotel, where many people, including Afghans, Britons and Americans, were told to gather in recent days before heading to the airport for evacuation.

Additional explosions could be heard later, but Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said some blasts were carried out by the US forces to destroy their equipment.

A former Royal Marine who runs an animal shelter in Afghanistan said he and his staff were caught up in the aftermath of the blast near the airport.

“All of a sudden we heard gunshots and our vehicle was targeted; had our driver not turned around he would have been shot in the head by a man with an AK-47,” Paul Pen Farthing told Britain’s Press Association news agency.

Farthing is trying to get staff of his Nowzad charity out of Afghanistan, along with the group’s rescued animals. He is among thousands trying to flee.

In Washington, US President Joe Biden spent much of the morning in the secure White House Situation Room where he was briefed on the explosions and conferred with his national security team and commanders on the ground in Kabul.

Overnight, warnings emerged from Western capitals about a threat from IS, which has seen its ranks boosted by the Taliban's freeing of prisoners during its advance through Afghanistan.

Shortly before the attack, the acting US ambassador to Kabul, Ross Wilson, said the security threat at the Kabul airport overnight was clearly regarded as credible, as imminent, as compelling. But in an interview with ABC News, he would not give details.

Late on Wednesday, the US Embassy warned citizens at three airport gates to leave immediately due to an unspecified security threat. Australia, Britain and New Zealand also advised their citizens on Thursday not to go to the airport.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied that any attack was imminent at the airport, where the group's fighters have deployed and occasionally used heavy-handed tactics to control the crowds. After the attack, he appeared to shirk blame, noting the airport is controlled by US troops.

Before the blast, the Taliban sprayed a water cannon at those gathered at one airport gate to try to drive the crowd away, as someone launched tear gas canisters elsewhere.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 27, 2021

Unbecoming of man

THERE has lately been an upsurge in online harassment of women in addition to the abnormal rise in physical violence against them in the country. This shows men with criminal tendencies have got it as their birth right to torment women, and they seem to be exercising this 'right' unfettered. Brutal killings, rape and savage harassment of women are taking place with sickening regularity and simultaneously the number of cases of online harassment has increased exponentially.

The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that in less than eight months the Cybercrime Wing of the FIA in Lahore has received 6,168 complaints pertaining to sexual harassment out of a total of 14, 108 applications submitted requesting investigation into cybercrimes. The figures for cases of sexual harassment are very high indicating the level of fear and helplessness prevailing among women. The FIA says complaints of sexual harassment are increasing at an abnormally fast rate. University and college students have lodged most of the complaints of sexual harassment largely relating to blackmailing by peers through the use of doctored video clips and photographs from calls or chats on WhatsApp and Facebook. Videos and pictures recorded during interaction in classrooms, recess and recreation are being used for extracting sexual favour from women, for monetary gain and other nasty purposes. A large number of cases also pertained to matrimonial disputes and estrangement after the break-up of relationships. Working women too have lodged complaints of harassment.

The FIA attributes online crimes to the ignorance of the relevant technology on the part of the users. Users commit a mistake when they sell mobile phones and computers to others without deleting pictures and videos. Individual buyers and shopkeepers use such videos and images for immoral purposes. People must make sure they delete pictures and videos before selling their devices. The rot can be stopped both by coercive measures and by convincing men that it is unbecoming of man born of woman to misbehave with women.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 27, 2021.

Kabul airport blasts

AT least 13 US servicemen are among the 100 people reported dead in the terrorist bombings outside Kabul's airport and near a hotel where foreigners awaiting evacuation were staying. Daesh has claimed responsibility, and the US and the Taliban are also pinning the blame on the terrorist group. Initial reports suggest that some kind of intelligence failure took place, since American intelligence had warned of a "specific" type of attack on people attempting to flee Afghanistan. There is also a haze over the number of explosions. At least two have been confirmed, but some sources report several more.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, in a statement, claimed that the sounds of explosions later in the day were actually US forces 'safely' destroying their own weapons and equipment at the airport ahead of the withdrawal. The Americans did not confirm this, but given that the Taliban did not accuse the Americans of wrongdoing or causing any harm to life with their explosions, it is not really a point of contention. The US has already gotten bad press over the amount of modern American weapons that the Taliban have acquired from abandoned stocks of the Ghani government's security forces. It makes sense that they would not want even more equipment falling into the Taliban's hands. Despite the bloodshed, there may be some positives in Biden's address after the attack. He said the US would come after the attackers. "We will not forgive; we will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay." Biden also went as far as stating, "There is no evidence thus far from our commanders in the field that there has been collusion between Taliban and ISIS." The Biden administration has also reiterated that evacuations will continue, and that the Taliban have been assisting them where possible without creating any hurdles.

Meanwhile, in the US, a few opposition figures, including Senator Josh Hawley – a Trump ally who has been accused of supporting January's terrorist attack by Trump supporters on the US Capitol – started calling for Biden to quit. It was an odd sight, considering that Biden's hands were tied by the terrible negotiations Trump and his administration had done with the Taliban.

Indeed, the chaos in Kabul is something that several world leaders and military figures, including some from Pakistan, had feared was coming because of the Trump administration's failure to get the Taliban to agree to a unity government and for the hard deadline agreed for the withdrawal of American troops. The partisanship in Washington threatens to derail any chance that the US has of working with the Taliban to combat their common enemy – Daesh. For all of their failings, the Taliban are universally accepted as a better alternative to Daesh, and for several years have been the main force keeping the group's Afghan affiliate at bay. This is also a key reason why neighbouring countries want stability in Afghanistan. Unlike the previous Afghan government, the Taliban have shown the resolve to fight the multinational terrorist group.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 28, 2021.

Kabul massacre

WHILE Kabul may have fallen to the Afghan Taliban with little violence, Thursday's devastating suicide blast outside the Afghan capital's airport serves as a harbinger of what lies ahead should the local chapter of the self-styled Islamic State group have the freedom to operate in a security vacuum.

The IS's Khorasan affiliate has claimed credit for the atrocity, which targeted families waiting outside the airport to be processed in order to leave Afghanistan. At the time of writing the death toll was at least 100, including over a dozen American troops, Taliban fighters and non-combatants. There had been intelligence reports of an impending attack, while the mass exodus to flee Taliban-ruled Afghanistan amidst the hasty Western withdrawal meant that a disaster was only a matter of time. IS was waiting to exploit the situation, and it has done so in a most brutal way.

However, gruesome as the airport bombing was, it offers an opportunity for all Afghan forces to disregard their differences and join forces – aided by the international community – against the IS threat. The world has seen in Iraq and Syria the brutal violence the self-styled caliphate is capable of. The threat of IS in Afghanistan has also been highlighted in these columns previously. Therefore, ignoring the threat will help create a regional security nightmare.

While the Taliban control most of Afghanistan, those opposed to their rule, primarily in the Panjshir area, have vowed to stick to their guns. In the interest of security, the Taliban and Panjshiri forces must work together to eliminate the IS threat from Afghan soil.

In reaction to the bombing, US President Biden has said he will strike back at IS. But instead of indulging in any gung-ho operations, there should be a unified anti-IS effort in Afghanistan led by the Taliban and other Afghan groups, and aided by foreign forces including Nato as well as Russia and China. Afghans know their country best and it should be left to them to purge it of IS.

However, such an operation does come with risks. After all, the more hard-line members of the Taliban may break ranks with the group's leadership and join forces with IS, as was the case during the Taliban-US negotiations. Be that as it may, leaving IS to its devices in Afghanistan will help create a new monster. Not only will a rejuvenated IS rampage across Afghanistan, it will pose a grave threat to all major regional states, including Pakistan. Again, mention must be made of Syria and Iraq, where foreign interference and collapse of governance gave the soldiers of the 'caliphate' an open playing field. The effects of this folly were felt in the West also, as acts of terrorism increased globally. Therefore, mistakes of the past must not be repeated in Afghanistan, and Afghan forces must lead an internationally supported effort to disable IS in the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 28, 2021

Action against drug mafia

THE menace of narcotics has long been persisting in Pakistan, including Sindh province. Taking notice of the recent rise in the activities of the drug smugglers, traffickers and peddlers in Sindh, the chief minister has ordered a crackdown on the drug mafia in the province, telling officials to deal with these criminal elements ruthlessly and eliminate the nuisance once and for all.

No time limit has been set for the drive, thus keeping it open-ended. In the near-past, more than 250 cases have been registered against the drug mafia in the province, with Karachi topping the list, followed by Sukkur, Larkana, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, and Shaheed Benazirabad. During the drive, drug smugglers, major dealers, traffickers and peddlers would be targeted with no mercy shown to them considering the fact that they are posing grave health risks to young and old alike. They are destroying particularly the young generation.

Drug traders monetise their dirty merchandise into wealth, for which smart economists have coined the terminology 'monetising assets'. They say selling assets and goods is looked down upon, so the act of selling things, whether they are state assets, family silver or drugs, should be known as an act of monetising, as it makes the activity sound highly respectable. The government in a neighbouring country has planned large-scale monetisation of state assets. The decision is, however, encountering stiff resistance from the opposition and the common people. Enough of digression.

The Sindh government, meanwhile, has taken serious notice of the fast-spreading drug addiction in several places in the province. This has naturally resulted because drug traders have widened the net of their nefarious activities. The government has also decided to set up a 200-bed rehabilitation centre, to be built by the government and run by private experts, in Qambar-Shahdadkot. We hope the anti-drug campaign will give the desired results. What is surprising is that the drug trade has continued to flourish despite many crackdowns in the past.

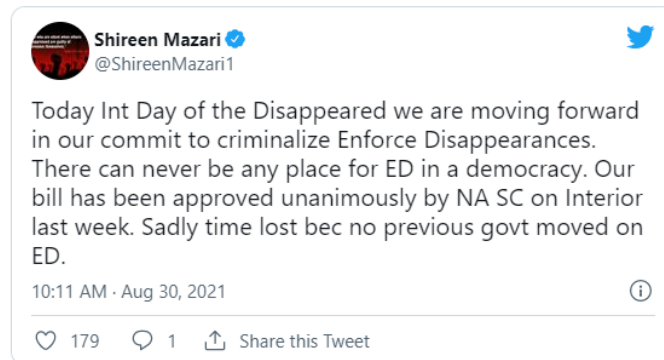
SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, AUGUST 29, 2021.

Pakistan moving forward in criminalising enforced disappearances



MINISTER for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari on Monday said that Pakistan was "moving forward" in its commitment to criminalise enforced disappearances and emphasised that such acts were "unacceptable in a democracy".

On the International Day of the Disappeared, which is being celebrated across the world today, Mazari said the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Interior approved a bill on enforced disappearances last week.

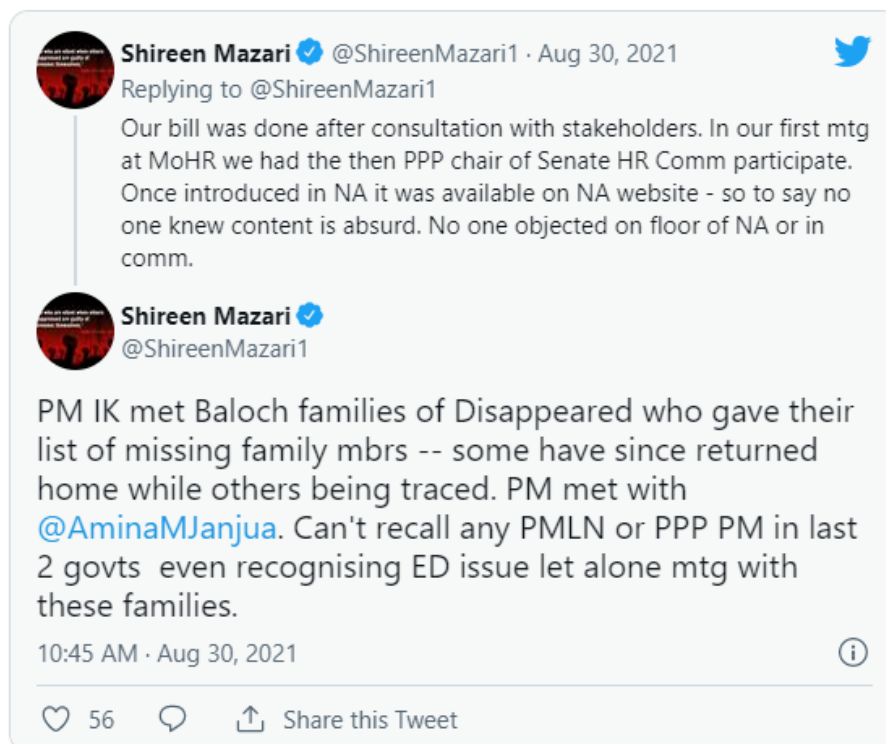


"Sadly, time [was] lost because no previous government moved on enforced disappearances," she regretted. The minister said the bill sailed through the NA body after consultations with all stakeholders.

"In our first meeting at the Ministry of Human Rights, we had the then PPP chair of the Senate human rights committee participate. Once introduced in NA it was available on NA website so to say no one knew the content is absurd. No one objected on the floor of the NA or in the committee," she said.

She also said that Prime Minister Imran Khan had met Baloch families of "disappeared" persons who provided details about their missing family members. "Some have returned home while others are being traced," the minister said.

Mazari said the premier also met the chairperson of the Defence of Human Rights in Pakistan, Amina Janjua, to discuss the matter.



The minister also hit out at former governments for their lack of response on the issue. "[I] can't recall any PML-N or PPP prime minister in the last two governments even recognising enforced disappearances, let alone meeting with these families."

In June, the PPP said the bill introduced by the government in the National Assembly to curb the practice of enforced disappearances would not end the menace as it required further deliberation and amendment.

PPP's Farhatullah Babar was of the view that enforced disappearances must be treated as a separate autonomous crime and that a separate legal mechanism was needed for taking up complaints, holding perpetrators accountable and for providing compensation to the aggrieved families.

"The amendment bill does not meet these requirements," he had said.

The PPP secretary general had also cautioned against rushing through the bill and called for inviting all stakeholders to the relevant standing committee of the National Assembly or holding of public hearings.

On January 19, the Islamabad High Court observed that the prime minister and his cabinet were responsible for 'enforced disappearances' in the federal capital, and sought a list of prime ministers who held the office since 2015.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 30, 2021

The butcher's bill

ZARRAR KHUHRO

BORN in blood, fuelled by revenge and sustained by hubris, the 'War on Terror' left nothing but shattered nations and lost lives in its wake. The occupation that began with the whine of B-52 bombers and the rout of the Taliban ends with the death of dozens at the Kabul airport, the names of whom will be added to the butcher's bill of this 20-year conflict along with all the victims, mostly faceless, mostly uncounted, that are the legacy of what was called the 'Forever War'.

The fact that it was the Afghanistan branch of Daesh, known as the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) that carried out the attack is another proof, if any further was needed, that the 'War on Terror' has produced nothing but more terror. Daesh, which didn't exist before the US invaded Iraq, is a true child of American foreign policy. It was in the US-controlled detention camp Bucca that this nihilistic death cult was born, and it was in the chaos caused by the US invasion that this cancer bred and multiplied, finally metastasizing across the region and the world.

Daesh entered Afghanistan in 2015, with former TTP fighters flocking to their banners along with disaffected members of the Afghan Taliban and a smattering of fighters from the alphabet soup of militant groups that operate in Afghanistan. Setting up their base in the eastern province of Nangarhar, the IS-K, while distinct from its parent group in Syria, also operated along the same lines of almost exclusively attacking civilian targets with the aim of causing high casualties and just this year they claimed responsibility for bombing a girl's school in Kabul, an atrocity that claimed the lives of 90 people, mostly children.

War, like politics, makes for strange bedfellows and so we are now treated to the unusual spectacle of seeing a degree of cooperation between the US and the Taliban against the IS-K. But this too is not without precedent: in 2019, the Taliban and IS-K were involved in a bitter battle for control of the lucrative timber business in the Korengal valley of the Kunar province, all under the watchful eyes in the sky of the US army. Seeing the conflict play out on their screens, the US forces made a decision to intervene on the side of the Taliban, using airstrikes and drones to pin down the IS-K forces and allow the Taliban freedom of movement. For their efforts, the team involved in this operation was jokingly dubbed the 'Taliban air force'.

It gets better: in 2018 when Taliban fighters had routed Daesh in Jowzjan it was the Afghan army that send in helicopters to rescue IS-K fighters, in what the Afghan National Army termed a surrender, but what many others see as proof that the Afghan government was in fact supporting this group in its fight against the Taliban.

For the Taliban, the IS-K presence is intolerable as it poses not just a physical but also an ideological threat and so over the past several years, we have seen many instances of the Taliban taking on the IS-K. Furthermore, the Taliban are close to Al Qaeda which in turn is a bitter rival of Daesh. For the US, the Taliban in this particular case is the lesser of two evils as unlike Daesh, they do not have an expansionist, internationalist agenda. That calculation is likely to colour further interactions on this common threat in the future as well.

But knowing all this doesn't make it any less surreal, and now we are forced to ask a question none may have ever imagined asking: what will the Taliban's counterterror strategy be?

While IS-K does not possess the wherewithal to pose an existential threat to the Taliban and has in fact seen its capabilities greatly degraded over the past few years, it certainly possesses the ability to stage deadly attacks across Afghanistan, especially at a time when the Taliban are stretched thin trying to consolidate their hold. Ideologically, it is now presenting itself as the 'true' resistance to the West and accusing the Taliban of allowing 'spies' and 'crusaders' to leave Afghanistan under a deal.

Whether this tack will succeed in increasing recruitment is an open question, and will largely depend on what attitude smaller militant groups adopt towards it. Thus far, it seems that those groups have no immediate intention of leaving the Taliban umbrella, with prominent jihadist ideologue Mufti Abu Zar criticising IS-K's actions and praising the Taliban victory. Similarly, ETIM, the terrorist group that is on top of China's hit list has also resisted IS-K's overtures. However, as pressure increases on the Taliban to act against such groups, as Pakistan is demanding with the TTP, there remains a possibility that just as the Taliban may consider these groups for leverage/ barga-in-ing in the region, these groups may themselves use a possible alliance with IS-K as a lever against the Taliban.

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 30, 2021

Denmark to help Pakistan check human trafficking

THE Danish government on Monday signed a \$1.6 million partnership agreement with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a UN migration agency in Pakistan, which would assist Pakistan in building capacity to check human trafficking.

Under the agreement, Denmark will provide funds to implement a comprehensive and coordinated response to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in Pakistan.

The partnership agreement was signed by Danish ambassador Lis Rosenholm and IOM Chief of Mission in Pakistan Mio Sato, at the Danish Embassy in Islamabad.

IOM, in close partnership with the Federal Investigation Agency, will implement a range of activities to prevent human smuggling in Pakistan as well as ensuring protection of victims of these organised crimes.

IOM Pakistan has closely aligned all project activities with the priorities of the FIA as outlined in their National Action Plan (2021-2025) to combat the trafficking.

Over a period of three years, IOM would strengthen technical capacities of relevant stakeholders' immigration and border management officials to prevent irregular migration. IOM would work closely with vulnerable populations to encourage regular migration as opposed to irregular migration and provide direct assistance to victims of TIP and SOM, enabling them to sustainably reintegrate into the society.

The Ambassador of Denmark, Lis Rosenholm, expressed her appreciation for the close cooperation with the FIA and IOM, and added, "Denmark's support is in natural extension of the Danish government's wish to work with international partners to find ways to improve the international response to challenges with irregular migration, including human trafficking and smuggling. We are even more pleased to do it now when Pakistan is facing a humanitarian and migration crisis."

Speaking on the occasion, IOM Chief of Mission in Pakistan Mio Sato thanked the government of Denmark for their generous support towards this much-needed initiative.

Mio Sato said: "IOM looks forward to furthering cooperation with the Danish government through this project that would significantly strengthen capacities of the FIA to curb irregular migration from Pakistan in a holistic manner. We really want to address the challenges of the victims and assistance to them."

SOURCE: DAWN, AUGUST 31, 2021

Govt takes major step to meet FATF conditions



THE federal government has taken a major step towards fulfilling one of the remaining conditions of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Action Plan to get the country's name struck from the global financial watchdog's grey list.

Under the new measures, property dealers and realtors will cross check the name of sellers and purchasers of properties in the country with the United Nations list of people involved in money laundering and terrorism financing.

If a name appears in UN's list, it would be forwarded to the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) director general for the Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs) through a web-based app introduced by the FBR.

In this regard, an agreement has been reached between the FBR and the Association of Real Estate Consultants. Under the agreement, the property dealers will be registered with the Director General of the DNFBP and they will be required to maintain a record of four types of information.

In the future payment for the purchase of the property can only be made through the buyer's own bank account. The dealers will keep a copy of the sale agreement and copies of the computerised national identity cards of the buyer and seller of the property.

Muhammad Ahsan Malik, the Vice President of the Federation of Realtors Pakistan Punjab and General Secretary of the Association Real Estate Consultants Association (RICA) said that the FBR officials and the Real Estate Consultants Association held talks on August 17.

Top officials of the National Coordination Committee were also present in the talks at the FBR headquarters. It was agreed that the property of the people included in the UN list will not be bought or sold. "A realtor or real estate agent could be prosecuted if he deliberately assisted such a person."

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