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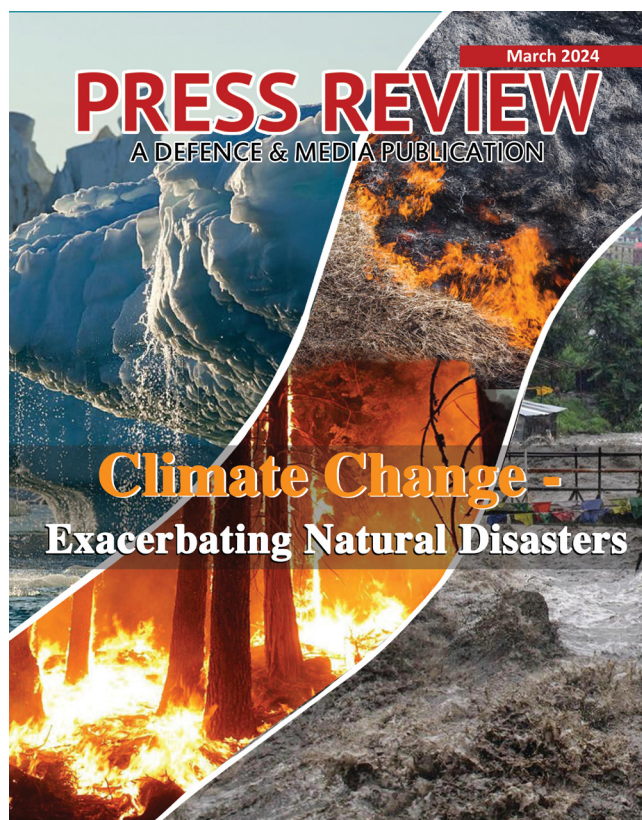
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Hoarding is prohibited in Islam

People are observing some behaviour and panic in the market due to inflation. So, just like everyone is talking about washing hands and so on, we need to remember other Islamic principles when it comes to things like hoarding, fixing prices, and deceiving others in the market. These negative practices can lead to major problems in the economy as many people live day by day and have little or no savings. So artificial and deceptive practices in the economy can have a major impact on the well-being of society. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: “The honest and trustworthy merchant will be with the prophets, the truthful and the martyrs.”

As we are all interdependent, Islam has put rules that one should not harm society with actions. Therefore, scholars have ruled that hoarding items that are needed in society (beyond one’s own needs) come under prohibited or *haram* activities. This is especially true when the intention is to resell later and profit from creating an artificial shortage and panic buying in the market. While stocking up some food, medication, and the like for one’s own need during emergency time is fine, going beyond the reasonable limit is not permissible. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: “No one hoards but a sinner. Do not hoard; otherwise, Allah will withhold from you.”

Once prices, due to supply and demand increase, it is not permissible to interfere with genuine market dynamics. A man came and said to the holy Prophet (PBUH), “Fix prices.” He said: “(No), but I shall pray.” Again the man came and said to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), “fix prices.” He said: “It is but Allah Who makes the prices low and high. I hope that when I meet Allah, none of you has any claim on me for doing wrong regarding blood or property.”

In reality increasing in prices for to profit incentive encourages people to take higher risk and bring needed goods into the market, until the prices stabilize on their own. Muslims should not present a false picture/description of the items they are selling. Deception is not permissible, especially during these uncertain times when people are desperate and fearful. The Prophet (PBUH) passed a man who was

selling grain. So he put his hand into it and felt that it was damp. The Messenger of Allah then said: “He who deceives has nothing to do with us.”

There is no problem in taking legitimate measures for business development, but Islam prohibits it in ways that create social distortions, stop the wheel of economic development, promote greed and increase people’s difficulties, but it is bad. This method is hoarding, which is forbidden and a grave sin. The situation is that someone buys grain during the time of inflation and does not sell it, but stops it because when people are worried, he will sell it at a high price. After days, when it becomes expensive, he sells it. This is neither monopoly nor prohibition.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: Allah punishes those who hoard food; hoarding is haram. No one hoards but one who is in error. Whoever hoards food away from the Muslims, Allah will afflict him with leprosy and poverty. He condemned this kind of hoarding and said: Whoever withholds grain for 40 days with the intention of increasing inflation, he has distanced himself from Allah and Allah is disgusted with him. The mention of 40 days is not for limitation, so that less than that is permissible, but the purpose is that it is a punishment for those who become addicted to it.

Some traders take advantage of the opportunity to hide grain from the market and store it in their warehouses and after some time (when the grain becomes expensive and people are worried) bring it to the market and charge the asking price for it. The rich buyers buy at expensive prices but the poor are tempted. Hoarding is a cause of displeasure to Allah and His Prophet (PBUH). This way, blessings arise from the wealth earned. According to the *Hadith*, the one who hoards to harm the Muslims becomes a victim of leprosy and bankruptcy.

In the matter of avoiding hoarding and benevolence of Muslims, the thinking of the elders of the religion used to be very good. Coincidentally, the price was low, so the traders advised the lawyer to delay till Friday to earn double the profit. He did so and reaped manifold profits. Upon knowing, this elder wrote a letter to the lawyer saying, “Oh so-and-

so!” With the security of our religion, we are satisfied with a little profit, but you have done against it, so when this letter reaches you, give all the wealth to the poor of Basra. So create a mind of goodwill towards the Muslims; have complete trust in Allah; be content with what you get because sustenance is only what is written in the destiny; you also adopt the style of trade of the elders of the religion, with the mercy of Allah your business will flourish.

(Ghulam Yaseen Nizami —
Pakistan Observer, March 01, 2024)

The ‘Night of Forgiveness’

Shab-e-Bara’at occurs on the night between the 14th and 15th of the month of Sha’ban. It is an occasion which is observed through worship and prayers. It holds importance for Muslims, as it is believed that on this night, Allah Almighty decides regarding individuals’ fate, livelihood, life, and death. To seek Allah Almighty’s blessing, people worship and pray throughout the night. The importance of this night is underscored by the Holy Prophet (PBUH), who stated that on this auspicious night, Allah sends special favours to the world and announces the forgiveness of numerous sins committed by his followers. In another *Hadith*, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) mentioned that Allah forgives all His servants, except unbelievers and the spiteful, on this night.

Hazrat Ali (RA) narrated: “During the 15th night of Sha’ban, a Muslim should stand at the (particular) night with the day fast. It is due to Allah Almighty, Who comes in this night on the opening heaven and announces, who wants to be forgiven by me mainly who did sins without any break. Is there anyone who finds sustenance, so that I sustain, and those who are in affliction, so that I manifest? This continuation runs till the morning prayer.

Allah desires to forgive us, as emphasized by the Prophet (PBUH). On the 15th night of Sha’ban, Muslims are forgiven, except the unbelievers and the spiteful. We’re human and err, but Allah’s forgiveness is abundant. This night is a divine opportunity for redemption. Moreover, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) not only emphasized to worship and pray for himself but also he went to the graveyard and pray for the buried people there. By taking such a move, he told us to include those persons who were with you some time ago but not now.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) recalled a deeply moving incident involving the Prophet (PBUH) during his night prayers. She described how his prostration lasted so long that she feared he had departed from this world. Anxious, she gently moved his thumb to reassure herself of his continued presence. The Prophet (PBUH), upon noticing her concern, tenderly reassured her, reaffirming his commitment to seeking Allah’s pleasure above all else. Reflecting on the significance of the night, he disclosed its identity as mid-Sha’ban, a period when Allah showers His mercy upon His servants, granting forgiveness to many and bestowing grace upon those who earnestly seek it.

As Muslims, we should pay attention to our deeds and action. And if these actions are not according to Islam, we should pay attention to it because at the end of life; we would be met by the day of judgment where no recommendation, capital, and our elders would save us from the Fire of Hell. Everyone would get their share according to their deeds.

This night has confirmed the opportunity to get our sins forgiven by Allah Almighty and the opportunity to get our direction right if the previous one is wrong. But, these prayers are not obligatory. It is up to the person either he or she chooses to offer prayer and spend this night in sleeping. But, who can prevent himself or herself from getting the reward? It is also not necessary to spend the whole night in prayers and, recitation. We can select a timetable before the night comes and can easily do whatever we want. It is also not necessary to spend the whole night in worship.

Prayer and recitation have also been confirmed by the life of our holy Prophet (PBUH). These are essential ways to get the will of Allah. If fact, we should do it regularly no matter if we do it in little quantity. These are the few crucial ways from which we can save ourselves from the Hell fire. This night is an opportunity to get the assurance of Allah regarding our betterment.

(Pakistan Observer, February 23, 2024)



Kashmir Solidarity Day-2024

DR. MUHAMMAD KHAN

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 05, 2024

Each year, government and people of Pakistan observe 5th February as a Solidarity Day with the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The primary focus of this solidarity is the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), who have suffered massive human rights violations at the hands of Indian security forces since 1990. Kashmir Solidarity Day-2024 is being celebrated in an environment, when Pakistan is heading for general elections and political stability in the country. This year Kashmir Solidarity Day aims at attaining six objectives: a) Restoration of pre August 5, 1947 special status of IIOJK, which India revoked through Jammu and Kashmir Re-organization Act-1954 in complete violation of UNCIP Resolutions and in violation of IIOJK Constitution, b) Emphasizing India to stop human rights violations and genocide of Kashmiris in IIOJK, c) Stressing India to stop making demographic changes in IIOJK, d) Creating an awareness among international community about unresolved nature of Kashmir dispute, e) Reminding United Nations that this international body is still lacking in implementation of its resolutions on Kashmir, and f) Re-assuring the people of Jammu and Kashmir that Pakistani State and its people stand with the Kashmiris in their struggle for right of self-determination.

Apart from massive human right violations by Indian security forces, the occupied State is in a state of constant siege and surveillance while Indian forces and RSS militants are free to kill, torture and arrest any innocent Kashmiri. Whereas the Kashmiri leadership of IIOJK is already in jails, the people are facing a situation of an open prison in extreme cold winter where there is freezing temperature in the valley. Thousands of Kashmiris have been killed and injured since August 5, 1947. Besides, thousands of the youth have been taken to torture centres and prisons outside the state boundaries in various parts of India. Indeed, the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A were meant to rehabilitate the Non-Kashmiri Hindus in IIOJK. Non Kashmiri Hindus from all parts of India are being allotted the land in IIOJK for making demographic changes. All the demographic changes are aimed to convert the Muslim majority into

minority.

Reportedly, Hindu nationalist paramilitary volunteer of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the youth wing of Bajrang Dal (BD), the religious Hindu militant organisation of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, have been moved into the Valley to terrorize the Muslim Kashmiri masses. For the past four years, these Indian state sponsored militants have killed hundreds of Kashmiri youth, torched and detonated houses and raped Kashmiri Muslim women folk in Jammu and Valley areas. These terrorist groups have been given total impunity and freedom by the BJP government under Modi. Unfortunately, there is no response from the international community over this illegal Indian act, and India is taking advantage of this international silence and insensitive Muslim world. Rather the Muslim states of Middle East are supporting India through enhanced collaboration with New Delhi.

The State of Jammu & Kashmir and Pakistan have historical relationship, which dates back to centuries. This relationship rooted in the joint history of these two areas over the years and later turned into a relationship of interdependency. Religious harmony, common culture, joint races on both sides, migrations and inter-marriages further strengthened this bond between the people of two sides. Besides, these linkages, geography of the Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan are another compelling factor, which essentially unite these areas. All natural routes to various parts of Jammu and Kashmir are from Pakistan. The only link, India exploited in 1947, through Gurdaspur (Pathan Kot) was an unnatural link, which India manipulated through Radcliff Award, through an unfounded division of Punjab.

Over the last 76 years, the Kashmiris did not reconcile with the Indian rule over their state and revolted many a time against forceful Indian occupation. In the last struggle, started in 1990, over 100,000 Kashmiri people lost their lives at the hands of brutal Indian security forces. Indian Army and paramilitary forces are still continuing with their brutalities in IIOJK, taking cover of discriminatory and inhuman laws, India specially imposed ever since 1990s. Despite heavy Indian military

deployment (900,000 Indian troops) in IIOJK, it could not defeat the will of Kashmiris for attainment of their right of self-determination, thus forcefully and illegally changing the status of IIOJK.

Over the years, the Kashmir dispute has become a humanitarian issue under the massive human rights violations in IIOJK at the hands of Indian security forces. In fact, there is a state-sponsored terrorism and organized campaign of genocide going on in IIOJK. This is indeed the darkest aspect of India, which the international community, major powers and UN are constantly ignoring. Although, the United Nations, Amnesty International and many other human rights organizations have been raising their concern over Indian human rights violations yet there has been no action against India on those accounts.

Rather, the major powers are enhancing their political and economic linkages with India. Nevertheless, through Kashmir Solidarity Day-2024, the State and the people of Pakistan are once again emphasizing to the United Nations, major powers and civilized international community to give Kashmiris their UN-mandated right to self-determination. All roads to peace in South Asia pass through Kashmir; peace in Kashmir will ensure peace in entire region. The state and the people of Pakistan stand with their Kashmiri brothers and sisters.

Humanitarian dimension of Jammu and Kashmir dispute

The Jammu and Kashmir dispute is primarily a political issue, thus requiring a political solution based on the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Two UNCIP resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949 clearly laid down the criteria for the conduct of plebiscite in the State for ultimate grant of right of self-determination to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The right to self-determination has the key position in the UN Charter as a basis for every human being. The essence of the right to self-determination is that: every nation and a community has the right to freely decide its future as per the wishes of its masses without any discrimination, restriction and bondage. If this right is applicable to the entire international community, Kashmiris cannot and should not be made an exception and subjugated through foreign occupation indefinitely. India recognized and accepted the right of self-determination to Kashmiris as per above-mentioned UNCIP resolutions yet denied its implementation for the last 76 years.

The persistent Indian denial of a political solution to the Kashmir dispute created frustration and unrest among the people of IIOJK. The frustration of Kashmiris was the result of years of Indian occupation, discrimination of Kashmiris in their own state, maltreatment of Kashmiris and denial of internal autonomy to State, agreed under Article 370 and 35A of Indian Constitution. Resultantly the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) revolted against the unlawful Indian rule and its unremitting exploitative policies in 1990. The popular slogan of 'Azadi', right of self-determination, was the only demand of Kashmiri masses of IIOJK right from the beginning of this indigenous Kashmiri movement.

Through a brutal response to this UN-mandated legal demand of Kashmiris of IIOJK, India made massive deployment of Army and paramilitary forces in entire IIOJK and started persecution of Kashmiris through various inhuman strategies. Mass arrests, torture in detention centres, custodial killings and indiscriminate firings over the peaceful Kashmiri demonstrations became the order of the day in IIOJK right from the start of 1990. As per estimates collected through various neutral sources, Indian brutal security forces have killed over 100,000 Kashmiris in the IIOJK since 1990. Kashmiri leadership in IIOJK has frequently been targeted and killed either through direct attack or else while being in custody and house arrests. The founding father of Kashmiris resistance movement, Syed Ali Shah Geelani died in September 2021 while being under house arrest for over five years.

As per records maintained by names, dates and places of occurrences, over 12,000 Kashmiri women have been subjected to rape and molestation which also include gang-rapes and killings of women after rapes. The Indian State provided a blanket coverage to all these inhuman Indian acts through various callous laws like; Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), Public Safety Act (PSA), Geospatial Information Regulation Act (GIRA) and National Investigation Agency (NIA). These discriminatory laws provided Indian Army and its paramilitary special provisions for arrest, illegal detention, torture and killings of Kashmiris with impunity. Such laws and maltreatment of Kashmiris through use of brutal force are against the international law, humanitarian declarations, UN Charter and international pacts.

(Dr. M Khan — Pakistan Observer, February 02, 2024)



What Kashmir Solidarity Day reminds

SAJJAD SHAUKAT

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 05, 2024

Every year, Kashmir Solidarity Day is observed on February 5 by the people throughout Pakistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK). It is an internationally recognized day observed by people, predominantly Kashmiris, worldwide. Pakistan observes this very day to express the country's unwavering political, moral and diplomatic support to the just struggle of Kashmiri brethren, as enshrined in the UN Charter and relevant UN resolutions. The day is marked by public processions, seminars, protests and special prayers in mosques by people across Pakistan and (AJK) to condemn Indian military oppressions which are being carried out in the disputed territory of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and to show solidarity with the Kashmiri freedom fighters who continue their war of liberation of the IIOJK. 5th February symbolizes Pakistan's deep-rooted relationship with Kashmir.

Every year, this day revives the cultural, religious and the geographical proximity the valley enjoys with Pakistan. It is mentionable that in order to maintain its illegal control, India has continued its repressive regime in the IIOJK through various machinations. While, Indian Constitution was torn into pieces on August 5, 2019, Indian Parliament revoked Articles 35A and 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gave a special status to the disputed territory of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The act split the IIOJK into two territories to be ruled directly from the centre. Thus, Indian fanatic Prime Minister Modi's government, led by extremist party BJP, unilaterally annexed the IIOJK to turn Muslim majority into minority. On the same day, strict military lockdown was imposed in the IIOJK which continues unabated. The deployment of more than 900,000 military troops in the IIOJK, who have martyred tens of thousands of Kashmiris, including women and children through brutal tactics and fake encounters, while closure of mosques, shortage of foods, medicines for the patients have further increased the plight of the Kashmiris.

While, under a well-planned hidden agenda, the Modi-led regime has intensified, bringing ethno-demographic

changes in IIOJK. In this context, Indian's various moves such as introduction of new laws, amendment of the laws to facilitate non-Kashmiris and outsiders in order to usurp the rights of the Muslim Kashmiris – issuance of domicile certificates to more than 800,000 non-Kashmiris, registration of almost 2.5 million new non-local voters in the IIOJK – failure of fake drama to host G-20 Summit on May 22-24, 2023 in the IIOJK, from time to time, violations of the Line of Control (LoC) by shelling inside Pakistanis, side of Kashmir – in violation of the ceasefire agreement of 2003 might be cited as instance. In order to conceal India's state terrorism, IIOJK has been cut off from rest of the world. Notably, during the partition of the subcontinent, the people of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) which comprised Muslim majority decided to join Pakistan. But, Dogra Raja, Sir Hari Singh, a Hindu who was ruling over the J&K in collusion with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Governor General Lord Mountbatten joined India. The Radcliffe Boundary Award gave the Gurdaspur District – a majority Muslim area to India to provide a land route to the Indian armed forces to move into the J&K. Indian forces invaded Srinagar on October 27, 1947 and forcibly occupied the J&K in utter violation of the partition plan. When Pakistan responded militarily, on December 31, 1947, India made an appeal to the UN Security Council to intervene and a ceasefire ultimately came into effect on January 01, 1949, following UN resolutions calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir. The Security Council adopted resolution of April 21, 1948, which promised a plebiscite under UN auspices to enable the people to determine whether they wish to join Pakistan or India. On February 5, 1964, India backed out of its commitment of holding plebiscite. Instead, Indian Parliament declared Kashmir an integral part of the Indian union. Since 1989, Kashmiris have already been enduring various forms of state terrorism; no Indian soldier has ever been taken to task. Hence, since the military clampdown started, Indian forces have intensified the employment of cruel tactics. Almost, 100,000 Kashmiris have died in the past

33 years. In this regard, UN human rights experts on August 4, 2020 called on India and the international community to take urgent action to address the “alarming” human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir — “to investigate all cases of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and arbitrary detentions.” And the Amnesty International said on September 29, 2020 that it is “stopping its work in India because the government has frozen its bank accounts on September 10 [2020] for highlighting rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir... the government had sought to punish it for that”. In the recent past, the UNSC in its meetings has thrice reiterated that the Kashmir issue requires to be settled in accordance with the principles of UN Charter and the related Security Council resolutions. Moreover, Indian extremist rulers are escalating tensions with Pakistan to divert attention from the drastic situation of the IIOJK and Indian internal issues. For the purpose, Indian forces also accelerate shelling inside Pakistani side of Kashmir by violating the ceasefire agreement in relation to the LoC. Nonetheless, the 5th of February is being observed as the Kashmir Solidarity Day to pay homage to Kashmiri martyrs and to show solidarity with the freedom fighters who continue to fight for liberation, demanding their legitimate right to self-determination, as recognized by the UN resolutions.

International solidarity and Kashmir

The preservation of stability and the assertion of dominance by superpowers are inextricably linked to their ability to exert control over critical geostrategic regions and maritime routes in the contemporary world. The acquisition of such control enables these states to secure their political and economic interests, while simultaneously guaranteeing their strategic advantage in the global arena. The current geopolitical landscape reveals the proxy conflicts initiated by these dominant states in many regions of the world. The United States exercises control over strategically important bottlenecks in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, while Russia continues to uphold its long-established sphere of influence in Eurasia Central Asia and Africa. China is getting its hold tighter on the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

They are in significant competition for geopolitical and geostrategic dominance in the Middle East, Indo-Pacific, and Africa and are engaged in proxy wars against one another in these regions. An illustrative instance is Syria, where the United States and its allies are engaged in combat against the Assad Regime and its principal backers. The strategic importance of South Asia has rendered it a crucial region for

the competition between them. In the past, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, which was a strategically important country in the rivalry between big powers, to acquire control of the hot waters in the Indian Ocean. In response to the events of 9/11, the United States launched a military operation in Afghanistan to protect its strategic interests in Central, South, and Southeast Asia. However, in this broader geopolitical contradiction Russia, China, and major European governments mostly disregarded the issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

The challenging terrain and severe climate, combined with the lack of direct access to the sea, necessitate a substantial investment of financial resources to create the necessary physical infrastructure. Consequently, this discourages superpowers from becoming involved in the dispute. Russia has consistently sought to exert influence over the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan, while China has constructed the Karakorum Highway and is currently extending it into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a means to gain access to the Indian Ocean via Azad Kashmir. Conversely, the United States implemented the Indo-Pacific strategy as a means to curb the growing Chinese influence and extended an invitation to India to assume regional security responsibilities.

The United States has established new policy directions to redefine its fundamental aims and long-term goals through an enhanced political, economic, military, and strategic alliance with India. The defence cooperation between India and the United States has emerged as the central and most important aspect of a new strategic partnership. The crucial component of the newly formed strategic alliance is the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal which was ratified in 2005. The main objective of the contract is to deliver nuclear fuel, components, and technology to India and the pact has the potential to initiate a new phase of the arms race in South Asia. Both the US and India have engaged in a series of defence policy discussions to expand their defence connections and have successfully secured billions of dollars in defence trade deals. It encompasses a range of sophisticated equipment, including the P-8 maritime surveillance and anti-submarine warfare aircrafts, Apache attack helicopters, CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters, C-17 and C-130 transport aeroplanes, and various other systems.

(Gul i Ayesha Bhatti — Pakistan Observer, February 05, 2024)



Kashmir Solidarity Day and situation in IIOJK

MUHAMMAD HANIF

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 05, 2024

The people of Pakistan and Kashmiris around the world observe February 5 as Kashmir Solidarity Day. They reiterate their persistent support and send a loud and clear message to the world that Kashmiris are not alone in their struggle against the Indian occupying forces. This day is observed all over Pakistan, involving the orchestration of conferences, seminars and rallies at the political level in parts of the country to highlight the Kashmiris' freedom struggle in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and human rights (HR) violations as well as atrocities being committed on Kashmiris by Indian security forces to crush their freedom struggle.

This year also, this day has been observed with zeal to show Pakistani people's solidarity with Kashmiri

brethren in their struggle to get their right to self-determination. On this day, the Pakistani people highlighted and condemned the illegal actions of India. IIOJK has been under the brutal occupation of India for 76 years since partition. Despite the United Nations resolutions calling for the determination of the will of the people of the IIOJK state through plebiscite, whether to accede the state to Pakistan or India, India has failed all UNSC efforts to hold the plebiscite on flimsy grounds.

India has used above 900,000 troops to crush the Kashmiris' freedom struggle, which they started in 1989. In the process, Indian security forces have committed endless killings, rapes, abductions, cold-blooded murders, and human rights (HR) violations. And, Pakistan and India have already fought two wars over

A call for justice

SYEDA TAHREEM BUKHARI

February 5 is observed as Kashmir Solidarity Day (KSD) since 1991 to express the support and solidarity with Kashmiris subjected to Indian Illegal occupation. This day stands, as a stark reminder that people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir deserve to live in peace and dignity. It signifies Pakistan's unwavering support to defend Kashmiris, fighting for their right to self-determination. The issue of Kashmir brought to the attention of the UN by India, thus recognizing Kashmir as an international dispute whose resolution depended on the will of its people through UN-sanctioned plebiscite, as outlined in the UN Security Council Resolution 47 of 1948. In its 1954 Constitution, India recognized the unique status of the Kashmiri population and granted special semi-autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir, the sole Muslim-majority state in the country.

By revoking Article 370, Kashmiris stripped off their rights under Modi regime. India escalated its

military presence in Kashmir, deploying and mobilizing a staggering 900,000 forces. Furthermore, India has enlisted over 130,000 police personnel in anti-resistance operations and established additional counterinsurgent agencies. The demographic shift in IIOJK by India is akin to Israel occupation tactics. In January 2022, vast tracts of land in the Gulmarg and Sonamarg regions of IIOJK were designated as 'strategic areas' and allocated to the Indian military. This action represents a flagrant breach of International Law concerning the disputed status of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The escalation of force and the impunity granted to Indian forces in IIOJK have significantly intensified "Atrocity Crimes." There have been numerous instances of extrajudicial and custodial killings, as well as the denial of burial rights to the families of civilians and insurgents alike.

Humanitarian crisis in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir has become a new normal in India. The ongoing desperate humanitarian crisis in Palestine,

the J&K state in 1965 and 1999 (in addition to the 1947/48 war). In utter violation of the UNSC Resolutions, on August 5, 2019, the Modi-led BJP government in India illegally amended the Indian Constitution, abrogated its Articles 35-A and 370, took away the State's autonomy and divided it into two union territories under federal control.

To suppress the Kashmiris' reaction to its August 5, 2019 illegal actions and crush their freedom struggle, the BJP has imposed Governor Rule in IIOJK, has deployed above 900,000 security forces personnel and carried out a major crackdown in the State. The crackdown has continued for the last four years. While all the Kashmiri leaders and people have rejected the Indian government's August 5, 2019 illegal action of taking away the State's autonomy and dividing it into two union territories, to this day they are also protesting and asking India to reverse its illegal actions of August 5.

Pakistan also protested the August 5, 2019 actions and broke diplomatic and trade relations with India till it restored the pre-August 5 position of IIOJK. The world media and many world leaders also condemned the Indian illegal action. According to *BBC News* dated 6 August 2019, Articles 35-A and 370 of the Indian Constitution allowed IIOJK a certain amount of autonomy, its constitution, a separate flag and freedom to make laws. Article-370 also barred the Indians from outside the State from settling permanently or buying property in IIOJK.

Since August 5, 2019, the BJP government has been taking punitive measures to tighten New Delhi's

grip over IIOJK. The domicile law introduced in 2020 permits anyone who has lived in the region for 15 years or studied there for seven years to apply for a domicile certificate, will ultimately result in the state becoming another Palestine," Badar-ul-Islam Sheikh, a 29-year-old resident of the main city of Srinagar, told *Al Jazeera*.

The BJP government's clampdown on Kashmiris that started weeks before August 5, 2019 continues to this day in many ways in order to break the will of the people so that they may not continue freedom struggle. As stated by Mehbooba Mufti, former chief minister of the State, the last four years were "full of surveillance and raids by investigative agencies and enforcing laws leading to a change in the demographic makeup".

Press freedom in IIOJK has witnessed an unprecedented crackdown since 2019. Any journalist who exposed HR violations by the Indian forces is branded as pursuing an anti-national agenda. "We have seen reporters facing summons, raids, detentions, no-fly-lists, and now passport seizures, a journalist said.

At least 50 government employees in IIOJK have been terminated from their services since 2019 on vague charges of being a "threat" to security. "And, if anyone protests over unemployment, it is considered anti-national, and punished to break the Kashmiris' will to resist".

Now the BJP government is trying to hold the intended state assembly elections in the so-called J&K Union Territory. But the APHC has vowed to reject the farce elections and continue with its peaceful freedom struggle.

coupled with the unperturbed silence maintained by the international community, has led people to lose faith in the credibility of these institutions. These protracted conflicts if left unresolved could erupt into an intifada at any stage. Learning from the Israel-Palestine war, where India is employing Israeli oppression tactics to silence Kashmiris via bulldozing their property, using GPS trackers against them for surveillance. The UN experts raised concern against the genocide in Gaza calling the international community to intervene. While, another genocide of Muslims expected in India where Genocide Watch has even warned against it. Furthermore, when the mastermind of Gujarat Genocide, the Prime Minister of India is actively engaged in turning India into a theological state. To avert another genocide of

Muslims, the international community has to intervene to resolve this protracted conflict that has potential to inflict unprecedented harm.

The recent consecration ceremony of Ayodhya Ram Temple amid an upsurge in discrimination against religious minorities raised concerns regarding deteriorating condition of minorities' rights in India where Hindus have claim on worship places of Muslims in Varanasi and Mathura. India was using bulldozer justice to silence the sane voices before and now they are bulldozing the holy places of Muslims. Recently, a 700-year-old Mosque was bulldozed in Delhi. It could ignite another Hindu-Muslims riot.

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Concept of self-determination and the issue of Kashmir

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The principle of self-determination in modern times can be defined as the right of peoples to determine their own political status and pursue their own economic, social and cultural policies. Self-determination in its literal meaning or at a terminological level implies the right [of a people] to express itself to organize in whatever way it wants. Dr. Karen Parker defined the concept from a legal point of view, "The right to self-determination is indisputably a norm of *jus cogens*. *Jus cogens* norms are the highest rules of international law and must be strictly obeyed at all times.

Both the International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States have ruled on cases in a way that supports the view that the principle of self-determination also has the legal status of *erga omnes*. The term "*erga omnes*" means "flowing to all." Accordingly, *erga omnes* obligations of a State are owed to the international community as a whole: when a principle achieves the status of *erga omnes*, the rest of the international community is under a mandatory duty to respect it in all circumstances in their relations with each other.

It is interesting to note here that many people believe and wrongly so that the people who demand the right of self-determination belong to a particular ethnic group or come from a particular religious background. The fact is that the issue of self-determination knows no boundaries; it crosses all religious and ethnic lines. Actually, when people are victimized, they do rebel. When they are subjugated, they demand freedom, when they are occupied, they cry for democracy, and when they are persecuted, they seek self-determination. And they do so irrespective of religious background, cultural affiliation and linguistic limitations.

The East Timorese were Christians who demanded an end to the domination of Indonesia's Muslim majority. Both Namibia and South Africa are Christian states, but Namibia gained self-determination by defeating South Africa's apartheid. So, people belonging to different religions, races, and cultures have sought self-determination, freedom and

democracy. This is nothing unique to a particular ethnicity or a religion.

In any event, the UN recognized three types of situations in which the right to self-determination is applicable. The first is of course that of colonial peoples to self-determination. Next is when a State falls under the foreign domination. This is seen as a violation of the right to self-determination. The third situation covers racist domination and has only been applied in South Africa. The applicability of the principle of self-determination to the specific case of Jammu and Kashmir has been recognized by the United Nations. It was upheld equally by India and Pakistan when the Kashmir dispute was brought before the Security Council by the Government of India on January 1, 1948.

Since, on the establishment of India and Pakistan as sovereign states, Jammu and Kashmir was not part of the territory of either, the two countries entered into an agreement to allow its people to exercise their right of self-determination under impartial auspices and in conditions free from coercion from either side. The agreement is embodied in the two resolutions of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) explicitly accepted by both governments. It is binding on both governments and no allegation of non-performance of any of its provisions by either side can render it inoperative.

These are not resolutions in the routine sense of the term. Their provisions were negotiated in detail by the UNCIP, and it was only after the consent of both governments was explicitly obtained that they were endorsed by the Security Council. They thus constitute a binding and solemn international agreement about the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. It is worth mentioning here that when India first brought the issue to the United Nations, its Ambassador to the UN, Sir Gopalaswamy Ayyangar set out three options for Jammu and Kashmir: (a) accession to India, (b) accession to Pakistan and (c) independence. When presenting his government's case to the Council on January 15, 1948, he stated: "The question

... whether she [Kashmir] should withdraw from her accession to India, and either accede to Pakistan or remain independent with a right to claim admission as a member of the United Nations – all this we have recognized to be decided by the people of Kashmir.”

Pandit Nehru, then the prime minister of India said, “We have declared that the fate of Kashmir is ultimately to be decided by the people. That pledge we have given, and the Maharaja has supported it, not only to the people of Kashmir but to the world. We will not and cannot back out of it.”

It is a historical fact that when the Kashmir dispute erupted in 1947-1948, the United States, Great Britain and France, championed the stand that the future status of Kashmir must be ascertained in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the people of the territory.

The US was a principal sponsor of the Resolution #47 which was adopted by the Security Council on April 21, 1948, and which was based on that unchallenged principle. The basic formula for settlement was incorporated in the resolutions of the UNCIP adopted on August 13, 1948 and January 5, 1949.

The idea that the dispute over the status of Jammu and Kashmir can be settled only in accordance with the will of the people, which can be ascertained through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite, was the common ground taken by both Pakistan, and India. It was supported without any dissent by the United Nations Security Council and prominently championed by the United States, Britain and other democratic states.

There was much in these submissions that was controversial between India and Pakistan, but the proposal of a plebiscite was not. This is clear from the statement made on January 28, 1948 by Ambassador Fernand van Langenhove of Belgium as the President of the Security Council. He said: “... the documents at our disposal show agreement between the parties on the three following points: (1) The question as to whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir will accede to India or to Pakistan shall be decided by plebiscite. (2) This plebiscite must be conducted under conditions which will ensure complete impartiality. (3) The plebiscite will therefore be held under the auspices of the United Nations.”

What prevented the plebiscite's holding was India's refusal to accept any proposals that called for her to withdraw the bulk of her forces from Kashmir and thus conclude a truce leading to the induction of a Plebiscite Administrator. When the Commission reported this to the

Security Council, Sir Owen Dixon, an eminent jurist from Australia, was appointed as United Nations Representative to negotiate the synchronized withdrawal of all Indian and Pakistani forces in order to prepare the stage for an impartial plebiscite under the United Nations supervision. After an intense effort, he reported to the Security Council on September 15, 1950 that: “In the end I became convinced that India's agreement would never be obtained to demilitarization in any form or to the provisions governing the period of plebiscite of any such character, as would in my opinion, permit the plebiscite being conducted in conditions sufficiently guarding against intimidation and other forms of influence and abuse by which the freedom and fairness of the plebiscite might be imperiled.”

The same was the substance of the reports of Senator Frank Graham (United States) and Gunnar Jarring (Sweden) who succeeded Sir Owen Dixon as United Nations Representatives. Since the plebiscite could not be impartial unless both India and Pakistan withdrew their forces from Kashmir, a stalemate ensured. This stalemate has now lasted for more than 77 years.

Professor Khurshid Ahmad, Chairman Islamic Foundation UK and an intellectual and scholar of international repute wrote in April 2001 that “The Kashmir problem is not a land dispute. Nor is it a product of a conflict over land grabbing between the two countries i.e., India and Pakistan. It is about freedom and right of self-determination of some 12 million people whose state has been annexed by a colonial country through brute force. That country is still occupying the state through its brutal use of force. This oppressive power is adamant on establishing the fascist and colonial rule of ‘might is right’ in total negation of its own pledges, the UN resolutions, and the unprecedented movement and sacrifices of the people of Kashmir for freedom. The United Nations and its Secretary General are stuck to a cowardly and criminal policy of turning blind eye and deaf ear to what is happening.”

Professor Khurshid added that “Nobody has the right to play with fate of more than 12 million people of Jammu & Kashmir. The governments of Pakistan and India, too, cannot, by themselves or under external pressure, decide on their future. Their duty and that of the world body is only that they provide for the exercise of the right to self-determination through a bipartisan plebiscite under international auspices. It is this right the Kashmiri people are fighting for. No leadership in Pakistan and no international leader has the right to adopt a line other than these historical facts and the stand based on truth

and justice. Whoever opted for a course other than this had to, and will have to, face disgrace and retreat; and will distort the issue even further rather than bring about any improvement in the situation. This is an irrefutable principle of history that cannot be wished away by way of desire or conspiracy. Dr. Syed Nazir Gilani, President, Jammu Kashmir Councilor Human Rights (JKCHR) and internationally known expert on the subject wrote to the UN Secretary General that “Article 1 (2) of UN Charter, Article 1 (1) of ICPR and Article 1 (1) of ICES uphold the “equality and right of self-determination” of all people. One such people who have been recognised by the United Nations for their “rights and dignity” and “security and self-determination” are the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. United Nations has defined these people as “People of legend, song and story, associated with snow-capped mountains, beautiful valleys and life-giving waters”. Today we associate them with living in a highly militarised zone and locked down inside their homes.”

It seems that the words of Professor Khurshid Ahmed and Dr. Syed Nazir Gilani echoed in the minds of many discerning observers in the Indian public square who believe that the persistence of the Kashmir problem weakens India by diminishing its stature among the great powers. Here are the illustrations:

Columnist Swaminathan Aiyar wrote in 2008 in *The Times of India* “We promised Kashmiris a plebiscite six decades ago. Let us hold one now, and give them three choices: independence, union with Pakistan, and union with India. Let Kashmiris decide the outcome, not the politicians and armies of India and Pakistan.” Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi said during a conference in Washington, DC in 2005, “Let us remember here that the future of Jammu and Kashmir is not something that the governments of India and Pakistan can decide without involving the Kashmiri people.”

Justice V. M. Tarkunde, former Judge of Bombay High Court who is known as, ‘Father of Civil Liberties Movement in India’ wrote in *Radical Humanist, New Delhi*, “While it is not easy to find a solution of the Kashmir issue, it is clear that any attempt to solve it must be guided by the basic consideration that a people who have a distinct language, culture and religion and who constitute an overwhelming majority in the Kashmir Valley cannot be retained in India by force and against their will for an indefinite period.”

Ved Bhasin, former Editor-in-Chief, *Kashmir Times* said that “I feel the Jammu and Kashmir problem has to be solved by peaceful methods. We have to find a just and peaceful

solution that satisfies the political aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.” George Fernandes, Federal Minister of Kashmir Affairs, Government of India said at the Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University on October 12, 1990, that “I do not believe that any foreign hand engineered the Kashmir problem. The problem was created by us, and if others decided to take advantage of it, I do not believe that one should make that an issue. Given the nature of the politics of our subcontinent, such a development was inevitable.”

Much is being made of the fact that seven decades have passed since the principled solution on Kashmir was formulated by the United Nations with almost universal support. These resolutions are obsolete and out of date, so says the Government of India. The passage of time cannot invalidate an enduring and irreplaceable principle – the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir. If passage of time were allowed to extinguish solemn international agreements, then the United Nations Charter should suffer the same fate as the resolutions on Kashmir. If non-implementation were to render an agreement defunct, then the Geneva Convention in the 21st Century in many countries is in no better state than these resolutions.

Professor Khurshid Ahmed, Chairman, Institute of Policy Studies, articulately defended the international legitimacy of the UN Security Council resolutions in these words “The foremost question is that if the international law, Geneva Convention, covenants among nations, international assurances and pledges are subject to time limitation: To our knowledge, there is no such international law, principle or tradition. Nor is it possible. Is it not a fact that the Portuguese had occupied Macao in 1557 that continued for four and a half centuries, but China at last regained it in 1999 as prolonged occupation could not be a justification for distorting the facts. Has the Resolution 242 that was passed after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 been outdated merely because of lapse of time?

The Utrecht Treaty was signed in 1713 that transferred sovereignty over Gibraltar from Spain to Britain. The treaty did not become defunct because of lapse of time and in spite of Spain’s claims. Britain gained control of Hong Kong in 1898 from China but had to return it after 99 years in line with its accord with China. The agreement of Taiwan is likewise a live issue despite the lapse of time. Another case is of East Timor, the one Kofi Annan referred to. The UN Resolution is of 1975 and got implemented only in 2000, after 25 years. If 25 years’ lapse could not render ineffective the Resolution of 1975, how can the Resolutions

on Kashmir be ineffective?” It is worth noting that when the people of Kashmir demand the right of self-determination, they do not demand it only under the UN Charter or under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or under Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which they can do lawfully but they do demand this right under the 16 substantive resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. Secondly, the International Court of Justice set out four factors of a people to seek the right to self-determination: 1) A definable territory; 2) A history of independence or self-rule; 3) A distinct culture; 4) A will and capacity to regain self-governance. Kashmir meets all the required standards.

First factor: A definable territory: The territory of Kashmir comprises about 86,000 square miles. It is more than three times the size of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg combined. It is also somewhat larger even than the United Kingdom. It is in fact larger than 103 sovereign countries. Its current population 23.5 million makes Kashmir bigger than 129 independent nations.

Second factor: A history of independence or self-rule: Kashmir had a long history of self-governance pre-dating the colonial period. In this regard, it is revealing that under British colonial rule, Kashmir was granted internal autonomy. The territory of Kashmir has been clearly defined for centuries. Kashmir successfully regained independence when overrun by Alexander's Empire in the 3rd century BC and the Mughal Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Third factor: Regarding cultural uniqueness: The Kashmiri culture is distinct from other cultures. Kashmiri culture is known as Kashmiriyat. Its culture has unique folklore, dress, traditions and cuisine. Everyday artefacts such as cooking pots, jewellery have a unique Kashmiri style. Even fabric, embroidery, carpets and shawls have uniquely Kashmiri designs. The Kashmiri people speak a totally different language – Kashmiri – which is distinct from Urdu, Hindi and Persian. One prime and interesting example is tea. In the whole of India and Pakistan, people take tea with sugar while as in Kashmir they take tea with salt.

Fourth factor: Will and capacity to regain self-determination: Never really since 1947 have the people of Kashmir given up the wish of self-determination. They resisted the British and maintained autonomy throughout British rule. In 1931 the Kashmiri people and their leadership formed the “Quit Kashmir” Movement against the British and the British-supported Maharajah. And the

“Quit Kashmir” campaign against the Maharajah continued into 1946, when it reconstituted itself into the Azad (Free) Kashmir Movement. Resistance to Indian occupation has continued unabated throughout Indian occupation until today. At present, the people of Kashmir have been facing a brutal occupation. The presence of 900,000 Indian military and paramilitary forces has made Kashmir the largest army concentration anywhere in the world. The Indian army has killed more than 100,000 innocent Kashmiris. Yet, the people of Kashmir have never lost hope in their objective, which is the right of self-determination.

Now what needs to be done? First, the question arises: what should be the point of departure for determining a just and lasting basis? The answer obviously is (a) the Charter of the United Nations which, in its very first article, speaks of “respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples” and (b) the international agreements between the parties to the dispute. Second, the Kashmir dispute must not be resolved militarily. It is a political issue and needs to be resolved through political means only. Third, there cannot be and should not be any conditions from any party, other than commitment to negotiations. Fourth, there can be no progress in talks if they are not accompanied by practical measures to restore an environment on non-violence in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

Following steps can pave the way for creating that environment: (i) There must be an immediate and complete cessation of military and paramilitary action by Indian forces against the people of Jammu & Kashmir. (ii) All bunkers, watch towers and barricades set up by the Indian military and paramilitary forces in towns and villages must be immediately dismantled. (iii) All those imprisoned in connection with resistance to the Indian occupation must be unconditionally released, including Mohammad Yasin Malik, Shabir Ahmed Shah, Masarat Aalam Bhat, Aasia Andrabi, Khurram Parvez and others. (iv) The draconian laws, including Domicile Law which is designed to change the demography of Kashmir must be repealed immediately. (v) The right of peaceful association, assembly and demonstration must be restored to the people. (vi) International and impartial NGOs like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc., must be permitted to visit Kashmir. (vii) The United Nations Special Thematic Rapporteurs must have access to assess the situation in Kashmir and report back to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.



Horror & terror, bigotry & barbarism: Endless sufferings Palestinizing of Kashmir

The entire Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir is under perpetual siege, since 1947 when the Indian army and Dogra army together with ultra-Hindu zealots let loose reign of terror and tyranny on unarmed and innocent people of Jammu & Kashmir, and started the worst genocide of post-WW II history. This massacred continued from 27 October to 30 November 1947, and Indian-Dogra Army-RSS put to death over 273,000 Muslims only in two months. This massacre of innocent and unarmed Kashmiri people hasn't stopped; with the presence of over 900,000 Army, India hasn't stopped availing any opportunity for adding salt to the wounds of Kashmiri people, increasing their death toll, and multiplying the scare and dread, horror and human sufferings, unabated.

Narendra Modi's Hindu Rashtra is following the footsteps of Netanyahu's Zionist Israel; he is exactly Palestinizing the occupied valley of Kashmir. Moreover, Modi is the replica of Adolf Hitler; his is the reincarnation of Nazi Germany. Saffron India is actually similar to Nazi Germany. And the worst part is, the world community is turning a blind eye to the unending rule of tyranny and terror, bigotry and barbarity by successive Indian regimes, especially Hindutva-led incumbent BJP, which indeed is tantamount to biggest war crimes, mock of the UN Security Council's various resolutions, violation of the UN Charter, and humanity itself.

The invasion of Jammu and Kashmir by Indian army on October 27, 1947 had been in total disregard to the subcontinent's Partition Plan, against the aspirations of Kashmiri people, and also all principles of international law. The freedom struggle started since is the vivid reflection of their will to live under no tyrannical rule extended by India but instead decide their fate by themselves alone. This right to self-determination is given to them by various UN Security Council resolutions – UNSCR 38, 47, 51, 91, and 122 to be exact.

The freedom struggle against the illegal Indian occupation of Kashmir since October 27, 1947 has led to the endurance of the worst kind of Indian repression and state terrorism by the people of Jammu & Kashmir who protest every day, offer sacrifices every now and then,

and call the international community to come to their rescue and help them get rid of the repressive Indian yoke as their birth right permissible under the UN body.

The November-December 1947 massacre alone reduced the Muslim population in Jammu from 61% to 33%. The same spree of murderous campaigns against Muslims by Hindu extremists continues till this day. In the past 76 years, millions of Kashmiri people, boys and girls, men and women, and the elderly have lost lives to Indian tyranny and terrorism. As of August 5, 2019, India has added salt to their wounds, undemocratically and illegally abrogated Articles 370 & 35A of its Constitution – obviously in clear violation of UNSC Resolutions, and taken away the autonomous status of the state of Jammu & Kashmir which though had given them limited freedom of using separate flag as well as identity, but under the Indian subjugation.

According to the Partition Plan, the entire Jammu & Kashmir was supposed to acceding to Pakistan because of the principle of predominant Muslim population. But its last ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, who had already been facing agitation from inside as well as from "Quit Kashmir Movement" against his autocratic rule and wanted to perpetuate his rule which was only possible if he submitted to the Hindu leadership and got guarantees from the British. So, on October 27, 1947, he in collaboration with both Hindus and British, cunningly announced Kashmir's accession to India and signed the same day an improper and illegal Instrument of Accession. This was followed by the invasion of Indian security forces into Srinagar and other parts of J&K, which led to the worst post-WW II massacre.

India today is unwearyingly changing the cognition of Kashmiri youth and the people by a well-orchestrated disinformation campaign on the lines of Israel's anti-Palestine agenda and tactics. The making of movies like "Kashmir Files" and spreading propaganda that Pakistan occupied Azad Kashmir through tribal fighters, etc. is aimed at misleading the youth so that the Kashmiri people do not protest over unilaterally altering the already disputed status of the state by abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, and changing the demographic

structure and identity of the state – through New Delhi's August 5 action.

After August 5, 2019, the Indian government has unleashed constitutional terrorism in the occupied valley. They have introduced a number of new laws and amendments to existing laws to change the demographic structure of the disputed region and in order to further suppress and exploit the inhabitants of the besieged valley. They have shredded more international laws in IIOJK than imagined: the UNSC Resolution 1948 that mandates a plebiscite, and Geneva Conventions that prohibit an occupation force from transferring its own civilian population into held territory – were all violated and are being violated by India under Modi regime. Thus, the move to abrogate Article 370 is a clear violation of UNSC resolutions 38, 47, 51, 91 and 122. Moreover, the unilateral action to change the status quo in IIOJK violates the 1972-Simla Agreement between Pakistan and India.

Article 3 of Geneva Convention makes it illegal for member states to use torture on prisoners of war in non-international armed conflicts. The Article states that “violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture” are prohibited from being used against prisoners of war and persons who did not take part in the conflict. India is a party to Geneva Conventions, hence protecting people against torture remains an obligation for Indian state under instruments of international law. Meanwhile, ICC needs to step in as it did in confronting situations like in Yugoslavia or Rwanda where national judicial structures had broken down. Years after establishment of ICC, India has deliberately stayed out from becoming a party to Rome Statute – which governs ICC's jurisdiction.

India's brazen and systematic crimes against humanity infringe Article 12 of the human rights treaty of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – already ratified by India. Furthermore, the so-called Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Order 2020 is another illegal step by India to settle non-Kashmiris in IIOJK by changing the domicile laws. This is a clear violation of international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention. Ironically, India – a gross violator of international law – is eying a permanent seat in UN Security Council, a body that is meant to ensure compliance to international law by member states.

Article 370 allowed IIOJK to retain its autonomic status in all matters, except defense, currency and foreign affairs. It had established a separate constitution and a separate

flag as well. As a result of this Article, all the provisions of Indian Constitution weren't applicable in IIOJK and needed concurrence of local government in place. Now the abrogation of Article 370 is a blatant negation and unjust replacement for UN-administered plebiscite and a cunning move by India to betray Kashmiris and usurp the strategically important Himalayan territory.

In 1954, a Presidential Order granted Kashmiri legislature right to define “permanent residents” and safeguard their privileges through Article 35A. For most Kashmiris, who abhorred increasing Indian hegemony, the law meant at least their rights and resources would be relatively protected. In 2015, High Court in IIOJK passed a historic judgment stating that Article 370 was “permanent” and Indian Supreme Court declared that only parliament could remove the Article. Moreover, Article 370(3) of Indian Constitution permits revocation of law by presidential order. However, such an order must be introduced before the State's Constituent Assembly. Since that body was dissolved in 1957, the August 5, 2019 abrogation of Article 370 stands null and void.

India has also upended its own Constitution: the presidential order revoking Article 370 stresses taking consent of IIOJK. But that consent has been taken from Governor, a representative of the Centre, without the elected legislature which is entirely unlawful. Therefore, the abrogation has exposed Kashmir 'accession' as a sham. It establishes India as an occupation force and brings into question the democratic norms India boasts of. The abrogation also means ripping up the oldest card New Delhi has been playing since 1972 to block the third-party mediation, and the Simla Agreement that states “Neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation.” That clause is now in tatters, endorsing solution of Kashmir dispute not rooted in Simla Agreement, but in hard UNSCRs.

The Azad Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly has strongly rejected the abrogation of Article 370 by the Indian government and termed it “a dirty conspiracy against the state subjects and their democratic rights.” While presenting the resolution in the assembly, the AJK PM said that August 5 was another darkest day in the history of Kashmir. The removal of 35A is aimed at affecting a demographic change, which BJP considers prescriptive for controlling the territory. Kashmiris fear what they call BJP's “Israel model” to establish settler colonies that will favour Indian rule in the disputed region.

Since 1991, Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has become pivotal in controlling the region with 900,000 Indian troops. Today, the soldier-civilian ratio – of 1:8 – makes IIOJK one of the most militarized regions in the world. After Article 35A, things are getting even worse for Kashmiris. The fear of an Indian settler influx, that would alter demography of the region in India's favor, is real for Kashmiris. In election manifesto for Kashmir's state assembly, BJP has promised to provide land at cheap rates for establishment of colonies for retired soldiers. Besides, New Delhi has been involved in issuance of fake domiciles to change the demographic nature of IIOJK. Credible reports have emerged in influential international publications that India has issued more than 4.2 million illegal domicile certificates to non-Kashmiri settlers to obliterate the Kashmiri identity. India's atrocities and mainland India reflect systematic cleansing of Muslims to achieve RSS' long cherished objective to establish a 'Brahminical State' purported by Sadhvi Saraswati that India would be a 'Hindu Rashtra' by 2023.

The renewed Kashmiri intifada in 2008 was triggered by fear of "land grab" and demographic terrorism." That year, IIOJK government agreed to transfer 40 hectares of forest land to Amarnath shrine – a Hindu pilgrimage site in the Himalayas. The proposal included setting up new housing facilities for pilgrims. Kashmiris took to streets fearing establishment of separate Hindu settlements. The resistance leaders called the move "establishing a state within a state." Parallels were drawn with Israel Land Authority's new constructions in Har Horna, East Jerusalem in 2005. The same is being done today through the issuance of new domicile law by India.

Abrogation of Article 370 and 35A opens floodgates to Indian settlers. In this context, RSS-BJP duo is also planning to undertake a massive delimitation exercise on the basis of geography rather than population, that will allocate more seats to Hindu areas of Jammu in order to politically disempower the already oppressed Muslim majority population. Amid the political crackdown, India formed a new pro-government party called Apni Party using breakaway factions of National Conference and People's Democratic Party. This party publicly supported Indian government's August 5 action to abrogate Article 370. However, despite all the shenanigans, the aforementioned party failed to get much traction in the region's political arena. The obtaining environment has pushed all political parties to take a hardline stance vis-à-vis Indian action in IIOJK.

India is closely following Israeli playbook in implementing its devilish designs. The recent political engagements are aimed at enticing IIOJK leadership to support the delimitation process as a prequel to restoration of statehood. The abolishment of Articles 370 and 35A had been the dream project of right-wing Hindu supremacists, which was finally executed and implemented by Modi, the RSS leader. Establishment of separate housing colonies of Pundits and Sanik was part of BJP's policy of settler colonialism. These policies not only go against international law and other human rights treaties, but these actions violate UN Security Council resolutions that emphatically prohibit an occupying state from making any unilateral decision that could undermine the status of a disputed territory. More than 500 prominent political leaders and workers were detained after India announced to repeal Article 370 of its Constitution. Almost all Hurriyat leaders were put under house arrest or in jails. By detaining these pro-liberation leaders, India is trying to silence dissent. Reportedly, those political leaders, who have been released, have signed bonds stopping them from speaking against abrogation of Article 370 – this is evident from the silence of Abdullah family.

Meanwhile, amid repeated curfews, an eerie silence with concertina wire barricades laid on deserted streets and heavy deployment of Indian police and armed forces' personnel. People remain confined mostly indoors due to stringent restrictions, as communication links have been snapped by the authorities to prevent anti-India demonstrations. Moreover, the exercise is also aimed at hindering formation of a joint front against BJP government – by creating ideological fissures/ cracks in Kashmiri political leadership. The concerted campaign to undermine or incapacitate APHC is evident from detention of Ashraf Sehrai after Syed Ali Geelani.

In March 2020, India enforced 37 new laws that were previously not applicable to the occupied territory. Moreover, the Indian government enacted 26 land-related regulations in October 2020 which marginalized locals and aimed to deprive them of their ancestral land. Out of 334 state laws, 164 laws were repealed and 167 laws were adapted. The introduction of the laws bears similarities to the Israeli strategy of establishing illegal settlements to manipulate the region's demographic makeup. These laws facilitate the acquisition of domicile status for a significant number of non-residents, which has raised concerns among native Kashmiris about the

potential influx of Hindu extremists and the resulting anxiety regarding their own existence. Consequently, these discriminatory laws have initiated a process of demographic segregation. For instance, in April 2020, India implemented a domicile law, allowing Indian citizens who have resided in the region for 15 years or studied there for 7 years to obtain a domicile certificate for residency benefits.

Implementation of discriminatory laws, coupled with ongoing contentious delimitation exercise of political constituencies is causing legitimate concerns amongst Kashmiris regarding their potential minority status. The developments raise questions about India's compliance with international laws and the UNSC Resolutions, as introduction of such laws appears to disregard legal frameworks undermining the rights and aspirations of Kashmiri people.

Meanwhile, "normalcy" in IIOJK will be 'peace of the graveyard.' Despite repeated foiled choreographed attempts by BJP government to project so-called normalcy in the Valley post-August 5, the international community has expressed serious concerns over the brewing humanitarian crisis there. According to KMS report on September 30, 2022, "Indian troops in their continued acts of state terror martyred 17 Kashmiris during the month of September alone. "From January 1989 till September 2022, Indian forces killed 95,148 civilians in fake encounters, and 165,400 were arrested during this time period in IIOJK." Amnesty International in its report published on June 10, 2022 "Increase in unlawful killings in J&K" reported that "for decades, people of J&K suffered from gross human rights violations and abuses committed by both state and non-state actors. 87 civilians were killed by armed groups during August 2019 to November 2021. Since 2019, Indian authorities imposed collective punishment measures against Kashmiri population under the garb of 'counterterrorism' measures. But the recent spate in targeting of civilians raises further questions on government actions which include a heavy-handed crackdown on peaceful protesters including those recently held by Kashmiri pundits who were subjected to baton charge and teargas shelling. The relentless crackdown on politicians, journalists, human rights activists and even the closure of state's HR commission has further stifled independent voices leaving the people without a remedy."

According to AI report "*Summary of Human Rights Concern in India*" published in 2022, "Torture by the

security forces is a daily routine and so brutal that hundreds have died in custody as a result. Scores of women claim that they have been raped. Efforts by relatives to use legal avenues to obtain redress have been persistently frustrated: court orders to protect detainees are routinely flouted and the legal machinery in the state has broken down... Indian government has not yet undertaken a review of the special laws in force, provisions of which clearly contravene international human rights standards in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." On the other hand, Indian forces have stepped up extrajudicial killings, particularly targeting Kashmiri youth, and following *mala fide* conviction and sentencing of Hurriyet leader Yasin Malik in a suspicious and contrived case. Indian forces continue to operate with complete impunity under draconian laws such as Public Safety Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

US Human Rights Watch in its latest report published in 2022 exposed India's real face to the world by highlighting Indian authority's repressive laws. The report expressed concern over excessive use of force and torture during cordon and search operations, resulting in civilian deaths. On July 24, 2022, Indian defence minister attempted to distort the well-established historical facts about J&K dispute, leveled baseless allegations and hurled threats against Pakistan. This is not the first time that a senior Indian politician has tried to cast aspersions on the legitimate, indigenous and just freedom struggle of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. Such provocative statements cannot alter the reality.

Stoke White Investigations (SWI) said in a report: "There were 450 incidents of violence in 2020-21, exposing Indian brutalities and war crimes against Kashmiri people. The report "*India silencing journalism and HRs in Kashmir*" said: "there were 100 of enforced disappearances, besides 30 cases of sexual violence and 1,500 cases of pellet guns."

Indian PM Modi, at a rally in Gujarat on October 10, 2022, claimed that he had somehow resolved the Kashmir issue as "I am following the footsteps of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (former Indian Congress leader). I have values of the land of Sardar and that was the reason I resolved the problem of Kashmir and paid true tributes to Sardar Patel." Reacting to his remarks, Pakistan Foreign Office called out Modi for not making such delusional statements about having resolved the dispute unilaterally, Indian leadership must deliver on

their commitments to the Kashmiris.”

Yasin Malik after torture for so long was sentenced to life imprisonment on May 25, 2022 following his conviction by a special court on fake terrorism charges. Amina Malik, sister of JKLF chairman Yasin Malik, addressing a press conference on August 5, 2019 said, “Yasin Malik was illegally detained on February 22, 2019 and put on slow death trail by Indian government for being a political adversary, having a different political belief and ideology.” According to bi-annual HR review report by Legal Forum for Kashmir covering the period from January 2023 to June 2023, 113 military operations were carried out during which Indian forces martyred 126 Kashmiris, bombed 116 houses, conducted 18 encounters, destructed 91 civilian properties and internet was shutdown 109 times. Recently, two developments took place involving US and Germany that pushed Pakistan’s efforts to highlight Kashmir at par with India preventing third-party intervention. US Ambassador Donald Blome and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock separately made statements endorsing Pakistan’s position on Kashmir.

Since August 5, 2019, Indian occupation forces have killed 639 innocent Kashmiris in extrajudicial murders. Numerous reports of the UN, including the two commissioned by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2018 and 2019 have reconfirmed ongoing Indian atrocities against the Kashmiri people.” According to MOFA report, on June 12, 2022: “More than 621 Kashmiris have been martyred by Indian occupation forces since India’s illegal and unilateral actions of August 5, 2019. During 2022 alone, 98 extrajudicial killings of Kashmiris have been recorded.” In May 2022, Indian troops martyred 32 Kashmiris. According to KMS, at least 26 people were injured due to teargas shelling, in May 2022.” the Russell Tribunal on Kashmir in December 2021 deplored that the Israeli model of settler colonialism in being repeated. It was also the ground situation which is a serious matter of concern for the whole of humanity. India remunerates a military, political, economic, social, cultural, and moral war against Kashmiris and uses black laws as weapon of war. Omer Ilhan, who belongs to President Joe Biden’s Democratic Party, on her visit to AJK said: “The US Foreign Affairs Committee has previously held hearings to investigate the reports of human rights violations and discussed Modi administration’s anti-Muslim rhetoric and its effects. The condemnations and concerns of those

who fight for human rights and the question of Kashmir will be including in future hearings in the USA.”

Police, security forces and intelligence agencies use torture in the form of assault, physical abuse, custodial deaths, rape, threats, psychological humiliation and deprivation of food, water, sleep and medical attentions. For the first 10 months, until October 2021, the National HR Commission reported 77 deaths in police custody, 1,338 deaths in judicial custody, and 62 extrajudicial killings.

Four Special Rapporteurs of the UN released a letter written in May 2020 on “*Torture in J&K before and after August 5, 2019*” in which it was written that they had confirmed information “concerning the continued deterioration of HR conditions in particular citing arbitrary detentions, violations to the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment and rights of persons belonging to minorities.” According to Special Rapporteurs, India had violated seven sections of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which India ratified on April 10, 1979, and two sections of the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In the third Joint Letter by UN experts on May 4, 2020, they relayed their deep concern over the continued deterioration of HR conditions since August 5, 2019, in particular citing specific cases of continued arbitrary detentions, excessive use of force, torture, custodial torture and ill-treatment, and death in custody, especially targeting Kashmiri Muslims. In the eleventh Joint Letter dated 1 October 2021, three UN Special Procedure Mandate-holders expressed ‘deep concerns regarding the apparent unnecessary and excessive use of force and torture against Kashmiri journalists and HR defenders by Indian security forces.’ For years, international human rights organizations have stated that Indian troops intimidated and control the population with torture, physical and sexual abuse and unjustified arrests. Abuses documented since 1989, include torture, hostage-taking, rape, waterboarding, shocks, burns, and sleep deprivations.

In light of a series of decisions banning headscarf in educational institutes in Indian states and demolishing Muslim property as well as an increase in Islamophobia and violence, the OIC countries strongly condemned Islamophobia and India’s rising hatred against Muslims, saying that they come “in the context of India’s escalation of hatred and abuse of Islam.” Independent Permanent

HR Commission, one of the principal organs of the 57-member OIC, tweeted that it “condemns these brazen acts of discrimination, flouting all pluralistic ideals with impunity. It calls upon the world and UN Special Procedures to urge upon Indian government to protect human rights of its Muslim minority and immediately put an end to hostilities against them. Moreover, the systematic state-sponsored discrimination against Kashmiri Muslims bears all the hallmarks of a genocide, according to the founder president of Genocide Watch – a global organization that flags the intentional destruction of ethnic, racial and religious groups. “We believe that Indian government’s actions have been an extreme case of persecution and could very well lead to genocide,” said Dr Gregory H. Stanton, Founding President Genocide Watch. The Watch described the situation in IIOJK as appalling. “Kashmir is under military rule and it is a very clear pre-genocidal situation.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released a 43-page report on July 8, 2019, in which serious concerns were raised about abuses by state security forces in IIOJK. The UN experts voiced serious concerns over the sudden and unexplained closure of J&K State HR Commission as a deeply negative development, leaving Kashmiri people with limited legal recourse to seek justice for HR violations at the hands of Indian forces.

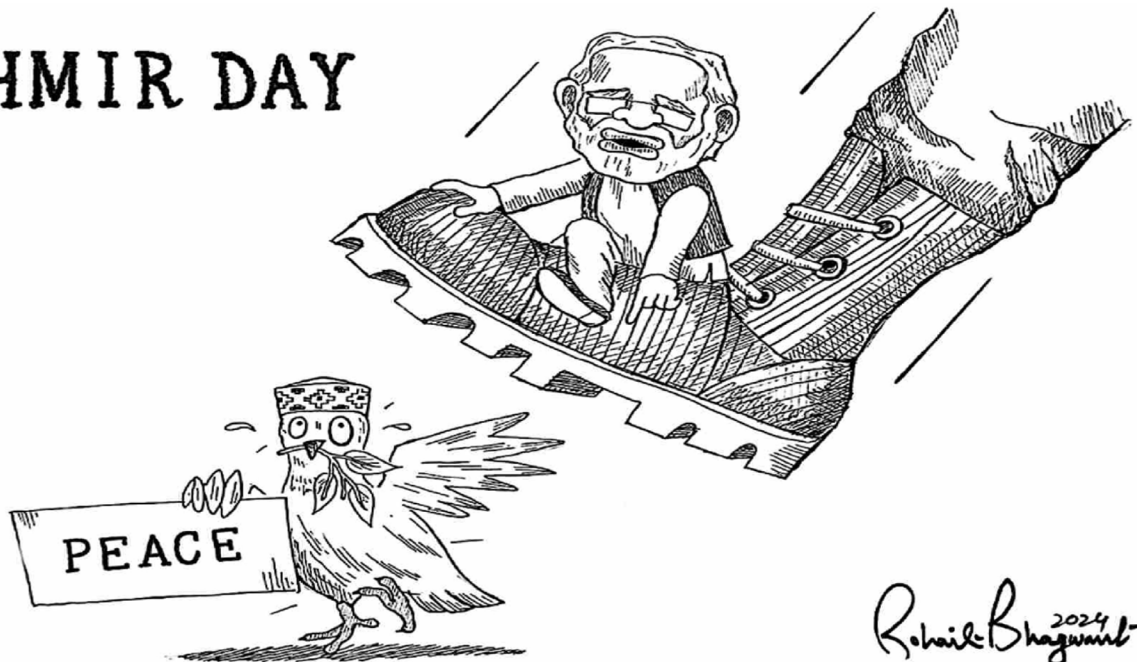
India hosted G-20 Tourism Working Group meet

in Srinagar on May-22-24, 2023 in clear violation of international law. J&K is internationally recognized disputed territory. The dispute is on UNSC agenda for over seven decades. So, hosting such meet is in complete disregard of relevant UN SC Resolutions, principles of UN Charter and international law. By holding G-20 meeting in Srinagar, India could not hide the reality of illegal occupation. The decision of countries including Pakistan, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Oman and Egypt to boycott the Srinagar G-20 meet was seen as a bold and brave step in support of the oppressed people. It was a clear message to India that international community did not recognize or endorse its claim over the region. The boycott signified growing concerns about the plight of Kashmiri people and emphasized the need for a just and peaceful resolution to the Kashmir dispute. By refusing to attend G20 meet, they showed their commitment to upholding international norms and principles.

Pakistan has time and again appealed to strengthen UN Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan giving it powers to investigate and report the situation on ground. No action has been taken yet. Clearly, Indian armed forces are in synchronization with their saffron patrons who have politicized the state institutions for fulfillment of Hindutva ideals.

(Zee Khan, Data Files)

KASHMIR DAY



Indian false flag 'operations'!

From the very beginning of the 21st century, India has planned dozens of false flag operations to achieve three main objectives: (a) to defame Pakistan on account of terrorism, while Pakistan unequivocally fought a war against terrorism, (b) to divert the attention of Indian masses from many domestic issues which, otherwise, needed immediate attention and (c) to strengthen the Hindutva ideology for isolating the minorities, especially the Muslims. Some major false flag operations include the Indian Parliament attack in 2001, the Mumbai attack in 2008, the Pathankot attack in 2016, the Uri attack in 2016 and the Pulwama attack in 2019. In the aftermath of these events, many Indian officials revealed the Indian aims and objectives behind these false flag operations.

In 2023, the former Governor of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), Satya Pal Malik, exposed Indian secrets behind the Pulwama attack of February 14, 2019. As a result of this attack on an Indian military convoy in Pulwama area of IIOJK, 44 Indian soldiers were killed while dozens were injured. Immediately after the attack, Satya Pal contacted Indian Prime Minister Modi who couldn't satisfy his queries. Indeed, there was Governor Rule in IIOJK at the time of attack and Indian Army was controlling the entire State and its Administration.

The summary of Mr Pal's finding is that, Indian Government under Modi had planned this false flag operation utilizing Indian spying network RAW to achieve four main objectives; (i) to win the Indian public support for Modi and BJP for elections 2019, which was successfully achieved, (ii) to defame Pakistan in the eyes of international community as a sponsoring terrorism, (iii), to delay the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS) to Pakistan, planned for 15th February 2019 and (iv) to create grounds for attacking Pakistan or at least paving way for the conduct of surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC). Pakistan, however, very swiftly responded to the Indian so-called surgical strike on February 27, 2019.

Mr Pal believes that Modi and Ajit Doval had same view about the Pulwama attack, since both told him to stay quiet for attaining abovementioned objectives. In fact, disclosures of former Governor show that "how the Indian leadership has habitually used the bogey of terrorism from Pakistan to advance its sham victimhood narrative and the Hindutva agenda, clearly for domestic political gains." Indeed, the immediate fallout of the Pulwama attack was quite upsetting

for Pakistan in connection with the high profile visit of MBS. Pakistan even offered its cooperation in the investigation process. On its part, India launched a massive media campaign to implicate Pakistan and Pakistan-based organizations in the Pulwama attack and created war hysteria among the Indian masses.

This all ended at the Indian Air Force physical incursion into the Pakistani aerial space up to Balakot which was responded by Pakistan by shooting down two Indian aircraft in Nowshera sector of IIOJK. One Indian aircraft fell in Azad Jammu and Kashmir whose pilot was also arrested. From the planning to its conduct phase, India wanted to achieve a political and strategic mileage from the Pulwama attack. Politically, India wanted to tell the world that, whatever is happening in IIOJK is sponsored by Pakistan. Through this strategy, India wanted to obscure its own massive human rights violations in the IIOJK where India has deployed 900,000 troops for the genocide of Kashmiris and rape the women folk of IIOJK.

Strategically, India wanted to prove its military ascendancy over Pakistan and in the broader region of South Asia which Pakistan countered befittingly. The Pakistan retaliation and shooting of Indian aircraft have put India into a humiliating position, with a strategic disadvantage. In order to cover its humiliation, the Indian Prime Minister asked for better equipment and new aircraft like the Rafale, which India later procured from France in 2021. Since then, squadrons of Indian Rafales could not do anything against Pakistan.

Indeed, the Pulwama attack put the Indian military into a strategic disadvantage. It exposed Indian strategy and unfounded accusations, it has been labelling Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan today stands at a higher pedestal with a strategically dominating position in and around South Asia. From 2000 to 2019, over a dozen false flag operations were conducted by India and blamed Pakistan and Pakistan-based organizations for all of these. In 2000, India stage-managed a drama of killing 36 Sikhs in IIOJK on the eve of the visit of former US President Bill Clinton. Later investigations proved that RAW was behind the killing of these Sikhs to defame Pakistan. The international community rejected the Indian accusations against Pakistan and the false flag operations; it carried out since the beginning of 21st century.

While analysing the history of India's false flag operations, one gets the impression that India considers Pakistan as the

last hurdle in achieving the status of a regional hegemon in South Asia. Pakistan demands India to answer the questions raised by former Governor Satya Pal Malik. "It is time India should be held accountable for the actions that imperilled regional peace in the aftermath of Pulwama attack." Pakistan also expects that the international community should act neutrally and question India for these false flag operations. India must give Kashmiris their right to self-determination and stop persecution of minorities in its own country. Indeed, Modi and the broader Hindutva agenda of India is very dangerous for South Asia in particular and the world in general.

(Dr Muhammad Khan —
Pakistan Observer, March 01, 2024)

Myth of False Flag Operations

At every critical juncture inside India, our eastern neighbor resorts to carrying out a false flag operation to deviate attention of its domestic and international audience from the happenings inside the country. Most of the time it is Pakistan that becomes victim of India's bellicosity. This trend has been more obvious during the BJP's regime especially under PM Modi. Now that elections in India are just around the corner, fear looms large that Indian leadership might opt for such imprudent undertakings.

India has a history of orchestrating false flag operations against Pakistan through disinformation campaigns via media. So far, India has used false flag operations on different occasions which triggered the situation leading to far-reaching consequences between both countries. Tracing back the recent history, the Ganga hijacking in 1971, the Indian parliament attack in 2001 leading to Twin Peak Crisis, Godhra train burning in 2002, Samjhauta Express bombings in 2007, Mumbai attack in 2008, Pathankot airbase attack in 2016, Uri attack in 2016 and Pulwama suicide attack in 2019, all led to serious consequences between the two nuclear powers.

Interestingly, in year 2023, Pakistan frequently prompted the world of intended false flag operations against it by India. In January 2023, just days before Indian Republic Day, Pakistan unearthed an operation was being planned by the Indian Army and the police in the Poonch sector of IIOJ&K. The Pakistani intelligence agencies even identified the protagonists namely Bashir and two of his associates, Aalam and Aslam. A false flag operation was also tried in April 2023, days ahead of the G20 summit. It was again on 21st of May 2023, that the Modi regime conducted false flag operation in Poonch district, on 14th of September 2023 in Islamabad district and on 28th of October 2023 in Neelam. They blamed Pakistan for

these incidents. On 5th of October 2023, Indian media accused Pakistan of supporting attack in Rajouri. In fact, an Indian Major himself had killed 5 Indian soldiers by firing. In the same vein, in December 2023, when the Indian troops came under attack at Sarankote in Poonch district, the Modi regime immediately blamed Pakistan, although the area was 15 to 20 kms away from the Line of Control (LoC). Post incident, RAW's fake "X" accounts and biased media started accusing Pakistan without evidence.

The incumbent BJP led government has a tendency of carrying out human rights violations against the Kashmiris in particular and other minorities in general across the country. They have serious allegations now also about the overseas killing plots revealed by Canada and the US besides Pakistan. In order to divert world's attention from their atrocities and wrong doings, the BJP led government takes shelter of false flag operations and concocted media hype which stir up anti-Pakistan sentiments. The attention of targeted audience is thus deviated from the actual transgressions of the government.

But this has become a norm and even voices from inside India are being raised against the government on this particular issue. For instance, Satya Pal Malik, former Governor of occupied Kashmir, and Ravish Kumar a journalist, revealed that the Pulwama attack was a false flag operation and therefore criticized the Modi government for it. The current fears seem genuine because the upcoming elections; a significant event in the history of the country wherein BJP retains to hold power for another term, might invite temptation for yet another false flag. It is especially important when the Indian government is being internationally criticized for its overseas killing plots. But the type of false flag that India has been carrying out is too obvious now. It is therefore expected that Indian government might try something new this time to achieve its political objectives.

Indian government, like any other, makes full use of media power to propagate its self-generated narrative. The uniqueness with Indian government and the media is that they do it without facts and investigation. They just spread the news and analysis on it short of any factual position. That sometimes even deprives them of logic but the propagation is too extensive that it is registered with the audience. Also, the government blocks channels and outlets which could bring other side of the story to the public. The public opinion is swayed against the facts and logics by involving famous personalities so as to bring credibility to the news. But all this sounds quite below civility.

(Reema Shaukat —
The Nation, February 27, 2024)

27 Feb 2019 skirmish, five years later

SULTAN M HALI

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 27, 2024

February 27, 2019 will be remembered by India, Pakistan and Indian Air Force (IAF) pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman for decades. Five years down the line, it is imperative to scrutinize critically, who gained what from this brief skirmish. Readers may recall that on February 14, 2019, India launched a false flag operation in the Pulwama district of Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir (IIOK), resulting in the death of 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel. Blaming Pakistan for the attack, IAF conducted a surgical strike on Balakot, well within Pakistan's sovereign territory in the wee hours of February 26. Indian media quoted official sources that 12 IAF Mirage 2000 fighter aircraft equipped with SPICE 2000 & Popeye precision-guided munitions, supported by four Sukhoi Su-30MKI, Netra and Phalcon airborne early warning and control aircraft, an IAI Heron UAV and two Ilyushin Il-78 aerial refuelling aircraft were involved in the operation.

Following the incursion, ISPR released news of the failed strike first. Indian media went berserk to the extent that Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj claimed that IAF targeted and destroyed an alleged terrorist training camp in Pakistan, killing "350 militants." Pakistan not only denied the existence of any training centre in the area but also exposed the IAF surgical strike's failure since the bombs only managed to create a few craters and destroy some pine trees. The same was confirmed by the foreign and local media teams who were provided access to the strike site. Analysis of open-source satellite imagery by the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Laboratory, San Francisco-based Planet Labs, European Space Imaging and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute concluded that India did not hit any targets of significance on the Jaba hilltop site in the vicinity of Balakot — thus revealing the Indian false claims. The next morning, after assessing that IAF was unsuccessful in causing any damage, PAF launched "Operation Swift Retort" to send a clear message to India, targeting multiple locations in IIOK but deliberately dropped their payload off the target sites to avoid any human casualty or collateral damage. When IAF interceptors tried to retaliate, they were trapped and in the melee, two were shot down by PAF: a

MiG-21 and a SU-30. The debris of the SU-30 fell in IIOK and its pilot was killed but the kill was recorded on PAF aerial reconnaissance platforms, yet no formal claim was made or awarded. The MiG-21 pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who ejected safely, landed in Azad Kashmir and was captured alive.

On the same day, IAF mistakenly shot down its own Mi-17 helicopter with SPYDER air defence system (ironically also of Israeli origin), killing six Air Force personnel and 1 civilian in a frenzy of confusion. Later, two Indian officers were court martialed for their *faux-pas*. To hide its humiliation, India claimed that Wing Commander Abhinandan shot down a Pakistani F-16 Fighting Falcon before he was downed and awarded him a gallantry award Vir Chakra for his imaginary kill. Despite insistence, India failed to provide any proof of shooting down an F-16 but US specialists carried out an inventory check, finding all PAF F-16s intact while the media was shown the missile pods of Abhinandan's MiG-21 from which not a single missile had been fired.

Public disclosures by PAF personnel, in a special TV show aired on the occasion of Defence of Pakistan Day, depicted that PAF pilots were in a position to shoot down at least half a dozen Indian fighter aircraft but were ordered to keep the kills minimum lest the limited conflict escalates out of proportions and leads to total war. It was also revealed that in the retaliatory air attack by PAF, a military installation in IIOK was targeted by PAF fighter aircraft where the top brass of India Army was holding an operational briefing. Targeting them would have blown the Indian commanders to smithereens but the valiant PAF fighter pilots were ordered to deliberately drop their munitions on a playground adjacent to the military installation. This was depicted through real time imagery on the TV screens and clearly proved the supremacy but restraint of PAF.

The edge that PAF has enjoyed over its arch rival is better training, higher morale and level of motivation coupled with superior maintenance systems and close coordination of assets. It would have been expected that India would have learnt its lesson and if Wing Commander Abhinandan, now a Group Captain, would have been a fighter pilot worth his salt,

he would have divulged the truth about the false claim of shooting down an F-16 and returned the gallantry award conferred upon him on a fake premise. Unfortunately, he continues to relish the “fantastic” but very expensive cup of tea provided by his Pakistani captors, since he paid for it with an IAF MiG-21 and his own integrity. There is, however, a method in the madness because Narendra Modi fully exploited the February 26-27 events, boasting that Pakistan had been taught a lesson for the alleged Pulwama “terror attack”, 350 Jihadists had been eliminated in Balakot and a state-of-the-art Pakistani F-16 was shot down by IAF. Building on his plethora of lies, Modi duped his gullible but chauvinistic nation and scored a decisive victory in the May 2019 polls.

Taking advantage of the support of his extremist vote bank, on August 5, 2019 Modi abrogated Articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian Constitution and illegally annexed the disputed territories of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh into the Indian Union and kept the hapless Kashmiris in a state of lockdown for over three years. In December 2019, a further emboldened Modi promulgated the draconian legislations: National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to target Muslims in India and unleash extreme barbarity to subjugate them, turning them into second class citizens, stripped of their privileges, rights and even dignity. In 2024, five years after the Pakistan-India skirmish, India is going to polls again and belligerent Modi is likely to achieve a sweeping victory.

Right-wing India

The evidence of the oppressive and intolerant nature of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP’s rule in India, particularly as it concerns the Muslim minority, just keeps growing. According to a first-of-its-kind report by India Hate Lab (IHL), a Washington DC-based research group that aims to document, study and analyze hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy theories that target religious minorities in India, found that India averaged around two anti-Muslim hate speech events per day in 2023. Around 75 per cent of these hate speech events, including over 77 per cent of speeches that included a direct call to violence against Muslims, took place in states and territories ruled by the BJP such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra and peaked around August and November, when elections were taking place in four major states including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Unsurprisingly, a third of all the recorded hate speech events were organized by two far-right organizations affiliated with the RSS, placing them firmly within the same ideological umbrella as the BJP.

The corollary to this hateful speech has been anti-Muslim violence and the destruction of their property and places of worship under highly dubious pretenses. For example, in Uttarakhand, which accounted for an estimated six per cent of the hate speech incidents, five Muslims were killed while reportedly protesting against the demolition of a mosque and religious school in the town of Haldwani. While much of the BJP’s oppressive rule has targeted Muslims, they are not the only religious minority that feels increasingly unwelcome in PM Modi’s India. Reports from December 2021 highlighted anti-Christian violence, chanting and vandalism in Haryana during Christmas celebrations. Sadly, the increasing persecution of religious minorities has done little, if anything, to slow India’s global ascent, which has reached new heights under the BJP administration. Last year saw New Delhi hosting the G20 summit, while PM Modi, a man credibly accused of enabling or failing to prevent an anti-Muslim pogrom that led to the deaths of at least hundreds of Muslims when he was chief minister of Gujarat, was invited to address the US congress and lead International Yoga Day celebrations at the UN headquarters in New York. The persecution and oppression of Muslims does not seem to weigh too heavily on the minds of those in charge of the global order and Muslim lives do not seem to count for much.

The alarming nature of India’s right-wing turn is only heightened by the fact that it was once the poster-child for many of South Asia’s liberals as an imperfect but relatively advanced, compared to the rest of the region, model for secularism, pluralism and democracy in India. That it has now become arguably the region’s most intolerant state serves as a painful reminder of how easily democracy can descend into majoritarianism unless the proper buffers are in place. This includes a powerful civil society and a judiciary and media that cannot be cowed by the political powers-that-be. Building such robust mechanisms is just as important to democratic vitality as holding elections.

(Editorial — The News, March 03, 2024)

Hindutva's fascism under Modi

For the last four years, India's farming community remains under great turmoil because of Indian premier Narendra Modi's obscure, fascist, fundamentalist and an apartheid green lawfare. Needless to say, intermittently since September 2020, the Indian government has been witnessing a continuous wave of populist movements against the policies – callously and ruthlessly brought forward by the ruling right-wing central government (BJP) – indoctrinated by the Hindutva ideologues in New Delhi. This farmers' movement against the Modi government is deeply rooted in the recently passed farm laws, namely the 'Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020; and Essential Commodities Amendment Act 2020.

Tens of thousands of farmers began a protest march

towards New Delhi earlier this week to demand guaranteed prices for their produce, but were stopped by the police about 200 kilometres away from the capital. The farmers are camping on the border between Punjab and Haryana after being blocked by concrete and metal barricades. Police have unjustifiably detained hundreds of protesters who through countrywide remonstrance have appealed the government to review the three fascist conditions that New Delhi imposed on farmers in September 2020. Whereas, the preamble to the first law says it aims to "protect and empower" farmers to engage with wholesalers, exporters and retailers in a "fair and transparent manner." The core of the agrarian movement: most of the protesters are farmers from northern Punjab and Haryana states, the two biggest agricultural producers. They are demanding the repeal of laws passed by Parliament in

'Fascist Modi'

FARASAT LATIF

For any world leader to succeed in implementing their vision, it is essential to consider ground realities as a prerequisite—checking if the plan is workable or not. To start, if a leader chooses the extinction of bodies, murdering the human race, or removing people who disagree with them from the face of the earth, it is a sign of desperation and far less visionary compared to those who have shaped the modern history of the world.

Ideally, the human brain, the vision one should target to win and achieve objectives, should be the focus rather than resorting to killing and increasing the burden of the task. History shows that without applying this strategy, results were devastating, making the target look negative. One historical example is Hitler and others like him, where their vision, whether good or bad, got buried forever when they passed away. Let's try an unbiased analysis of Modi, known for his radical, unorthodox style of running his party and politics, who has given a different direction to the subcontinent's political arena. India, once known as a safe haven for all, once a secular state, is now rapidly turning into a proper Hindu state. It is becoming the centre stage of aggressive, anti-human policies, burying the vision of India's forefathers who had other ideas for a progressive Hindustan.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Modi was banned from the USA for nearly a decade. The 2005 decision was based on deadly riots against minority Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat, where Modi was the Chief Minister. The US State Department invoked a little-known law passed in 1998, making foreign officials responsible for "severe violations of religious freedom" ineligible for visas. Modi was the only person ever denied a visa to the US under this provision, as confirmed by US officials.

Modi's numerous steps for implementing his BJP policies (basically RSS vision) need scrutiny. One of which is when he decided to erect a statue of Subhash Chandra Bose, a controversial figure, in a pride of place in New Delhi's gate. There is little doubt that Bose was a huge admirer of Hitler and a pawn of axis powers. Being the founder of the free Indian legion, which was formed in Germany from 3000 Indian prisoners who had fought with the British, Bose swore an oath of allegiance both to Hitler and India. Bose, while in Tokyo, headed the Indian National Army, recruited mostly after the fall of Singapore, that fought with the Japanese Imperial Army in the jungles of Burma. A question can be asked: why a statue of Bose and not of Nehru or Gandhi? A prime minister should think and act above all personal or political agendas. It's a

September that they say will favour large corporate farms, devastate the earnings of many farmers and leave those who hold small plots behind as big corporations win out. Modi has billed the laws as necessary to modernize Indian farming. Because of the demographics of Punjab and Haryana, many of the protesters in New Delhi happen to be from India's minority Sikh community though their grievances are rooted in economic issues, not religious ones. These protests are also happening in other parts of the country among Indians of other backgrounds. Notably, over 250 farmer unions are marching together to press the ruling leadership on ironclad guarantees. "Last time, they fooled us, but this time we won't be fooled. We will not return until our demands are met," said one of the protestors, according to the *Reuters* news agency. Indian authorities have responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and a beefed-up security presence in the capital, all designed to keep protestors from exercising their right to assemble and protest in peace. Ostensibly observed that the farmers are strictly adhered to their core demand for a Minimum Support Prices (MSP) mechanism. Per se, MSP is a necessary buffer for Indian farmers to navigate increased price volatility and sudden market fluctuations through better state support. A majority of India's population remains deeply dependent on agricultural income for livelihoods and farmers represent the lifeblood of that sector. The lion's share of Indian farmers have less than two hectares of land, face largely stagnant incomes and have struggled to secure ambitious levels of investment and debt relief once promised by the BJP.

The MSP system runs largely on trust, yet policymakers

can effectively dismantle it by setting the price so low that no farmer will want to sell or by not providing accessible product collection centres. In many parts of India today, for example, farmers are told they can sell their grain at a certain price, but there is nowhere in their vicinity to sell it. If a corporation violates a contract with a farmer, the new laws prohibit the farmer from seeking redress in a regular court. Interestingly, the government-passed legislation removes restrictions on stockpiling food grain. BJP's Eco fascists: "The most simple definition would be (someone with) a fascist politic or a fascist worldview that is invoking environmental concern or environmental rhetoric to justify the hateful and extreme elements of their ideology," a social scientist Cassidy Thomas told *DW*. In the 1930s and '40s, Hindutva's founding ideologues V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar extolled Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini for manifesting "national pride at its highest" and thus, Hindutva fanatics are inspired to profit from it. Since 2014, India has been stirred up with a range of protest movements focused on multiple issues—caste discriminations, authoritarian curtailment of freedom of speech, religion-based citizenship issue...."The Modi government's agenda—to repress the dissent voices intrinsically—expose its growing authoritarianism vis-à-vis the Indian minorities. BJP's sponsored existing systems of inequality that target certain people while leaving others untouched is being challenged through the agrarian movement.

(Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi — *Pakistan Observer*,
February 19, 2024)



national agenda that takes priority.

Lately, there has been a boom in the sale of Hitler's biography *Mein Kampf* in India. At certain institutions, on the direction of RSS, the book is taken as a reference for teaching how to become a leader, particularly in Modi's days. Hitler is considered a hero, a bit of a surprise as Hitler ruthlessly executed Jews, who are now very close to Modi. Modi's closeness to Jews and Israel is no hidden secret. It may be a need of the hour, but it is certainly a contradiction in approach. The RSS was formed in the 1920s on the model of Mussolini's black shirts, running on pure extreme views of "do or die" to implement fascism. The founder ensured it used the sword as a means of conquest, not the table. M.S. Golwalkar, the former head of the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization of Modi's BJP, was an overt fan of Hitler. Golwalkar frequently praised Nazi Germany, wrote in 1939 about the choice of facing India's non-Hindu

population (chiefly Muslims and Christians). "Either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture or live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do or quit the country at the sweet will of the national race."

On the evening of January 30, 1948, Nathuram Vinayak Godse shot Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi dead at point-blank range. A year after the assassination, a trial court sentenced Godse to death, and he was executed in November 1949. Before joining the Hindu Mahasabha, Godse was a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological fountainhead of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Modi himself is a long-time member of the 95-year-old mothership of Hindu nationalism. The RSS plays a deeply influential role in his government and outside.

(*The Nation*, February 02, 2024)

Samjhauta Express terrorists

SAJJAD SHAUKAT

The Nation

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Samjhauta Express train was bombed in which 68 Pakistani nationals were killed. A Hindu extremist Sadhu Swami Aseemanand, a leader of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had confessed that he was involved in the incident.

In fact, ideology of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) prevails in every field at the cost of other minority groups. It is even supported by Indian defence forces secretly. This could be judged from the incident, when on April 6, 2008 in the house of Bajrang Dal fundamentalists in Nanded, a bomb went off. The investigation proved that these militants were found in the bomb-making and attack on a mosque in Parbhani in 2003. Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of the Maharashtra arrested a serving Lt Col Srikant Purohit along with other army officials, indicating that they were helping in training the Hindu terrorists, providing them with the military-grade explosive RDX, used in the Malegaon bombings and terrorist attacks in other Indian cities. ATS further disclosed that Lt Col Purohit confessed that in 2007, he was involved in bombing of Samjhauta Express.

India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) was convinced that Swami Aseemanand, was directly involved in the Samjhauta Express blast. Sources in NIA further pointed out that besides Lt Col Purohit, other Indian army officials were also behind that train-bombing. In this regard, a court in Panchkula, Haryana had recorded Aseemanand's statement which confirmed the NIA inquiry. Aseemanand's statement in the Samjhauta Express case was recorded under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code before a magistrate. His earlier admission was recorded in the Makkah Masjid case, which was being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Sadhu Aseemanand stuck to his confession that Hindutva radicals were behind the bomb attack on the Samjhauta Express — Aseemanand, aka Naba and Kumar Sarkar, named absconding Hindutva militants — Ramji Kaisangra and Sandeep Dange as the key plotters in that terror attack. Sources of the NIA also revealed that the confession in connection with the Samjhauta Express blast practically rules out the involvement of other groups. In the Samjhauta Express case, the probe team had found that the bomb used in the train was kept in a suitcase that was bought from a shop of Indore's

Kothari Market. The suitcase had cloth covers stitched by an Indian local tailor. Afterwards, the NIA was trying to get details of those who bought the suitcase and covers. Notably, Dr. J C Batra, who is a senior advocate at the Supreme Court of India, was asked to give opinion on Aseemanand's confession. He appeared very defensive and as usual started accusing Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI — its so-called history for such activities, alleging that even this could be an ISI plot. He further said that Swami's statement does not have much legal value as circumstantial evidence is also needed, while adding that RSS is being wrongly implicated and there could be others involved who are not being exposed. In this respect, a Pakistani parliamentarian, Mian Abdul Sattar, parliamentary secretary for planning and development, who was accompanying him, later stated that that he was told by J C Batra that the Indian Army was involved in this case and there "are efforts to shield it from getting exposed". Swami Aseemanand also confessed in the court that several RSS preachers and Sangh activists were directly involved in planning, financing and executing Malegaon, Samjhauta Express, Ajmer and Makkah Masjid blasts. He stated that various leaders of Hindu communal organizations, including Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Abhinav Bharat, Jai Vande Matram and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram were also behind these blasts. In this connection, exposing the nexus between Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and the RSS, the then Indian Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde disclosed on January 20, 2013 that organized training camps run by the fundamentalist parties, RSS and BJP were promoting Hindu terrorism. He also explained that these extremist parties were behind the Samjhauta Express, Makkah Masjid and Malegaon blasts. He added, "We will have to think about it (Saffron terrorism) seriously. Hindu extremist parties BJP and RSS were involved many times in Hindu Muslim violence in India, especially Gujarat and Babri masjid incident." Despite the confessions of Swami Aseemanand, instead of taking action against the culprits of the Samjhauta Express explosion, the Supreme Court of India accepted the bail of Swami Aseemanand after the covert interference of the Modi-led authorities who changed the investigations in this respect in order to weaken the case.



The Gujarat massacre

Pakistan
OBSERVER

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Indian fanatic Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the extremist ruling party BJP had got a landslide victory in the Indian general elections 2014 and 2021. During the election campaign, Hindu majority was mobilized on 'hate Muslim' slogans and 'anti-Pakistan' jargons. The Muslim community in India had felt alienated, frightened and perturbed as most of them were also effectively disenfranchised. Implementing the Hindutva ideology (Hindu nationalism) against the religious minorities, Modi-led regime particularly targeted the Muslims. In this regard, various developments like unprecedented rise of Hindu extremism, persecution of the Muslims, assaults on them, including their places of worships and property by the extremist Hindu mobs, application of the laws—the Indian Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) on Muslims, abrogation of the special status of the disputed territory of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), deployment of more than 900,000 military troops who have martyred thousands of the innocent Kashmiris, and issuance of domicile certificates to more than 800,000 non-Kashmiris clearly show that encouraged by the Hindu fundamentalist groups such as BJP, RSS VHP, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena, Modi-led government have been promoting ethnic chauvinism in India against Muslims.

Modi's biased policies against the Muslim community were evident during the 2002 Gujarat riots, a three-day period of communal violence in the BJP-ruled state of Gujarat. As chief minister, Modi orchestrated the genocide of Muslims, with extremist Hindus acting under his guidance. Human Rights Watch in 2002 and Amnesty International in 2003 accused the Gujarat state administration of massive cover-up and implicated various police officials, ministers, and leaders of fundamentalist outfits such as RSS, VHP, BJP, and Bajrang Dal.

Rana Ayub in book, "*Gujarat Files: Anatomy of A Cover-up*", Manoj Mitha in his book, "*The Fiction of Fact Finding*" and Sreekumar in his book, "*Gujarat Behind the Curtain*", have all implicated Modi in the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat. Additionally, in an open letter published in *The Guardian* on April 10, 2014, it was pointed out that even

the well-respected international intellectuals of India held Modi as the main culprit behind the Gujarat massacre. According to Ashish Nandy, "The Gujarat pogroms were not just about the number of helpless victims killed (over 3000) and rendered homeless (several hundred thousands). It was about the sheer planning, the brutality and the maniacal genocide that was perpetrated over a population for days on end... Modi not only shamelessly presided over the riots and acted as the chief patron of rioting gangs, the vulgarities of his utterances have been a slur on civilized public life... If Modi's behaviour till now is not a crime against humanity, what is?"

And following Gujarat riots in 2002 and state collusion, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) established that the then Gujarat Chief Minister Modi was linked to communal riots in a significant way. It also pointed to Modi's ministerial colleague Maya Kodnani's full involvement in the massacre of Muslims. Following its findings, the Commission recommended a US visa ban for Modi. Notably, a report of the British High Commission in India had said that the programmes in Gujarat "had all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing...this massacre was planned, possibly months in advance, carried out by extremist Hindu organisations with the support of the state government headed by Modi." Meanwhile, various investigations failed in showing the real criminals of Hindu terrorism in Gujarat, as they were top officials of the Indian government. Hence, the Supreme Court of India had ordered a fresh probe on March 25, 2008, but the same remains inconclusive due to concealment of evidence against the culprits who are members of the dominating political parties of the country. Since the BJP-led Modi became Indian prime minister, covert interference of his regime and those of the extremist parties — BJP and RSS, the investigations of Gujarat riots have been kept the case under carpet. Despite eye witness testimony, implicating the highest elected political officials, justice continues to evade the victims. In this connection, 70 accused persons of the Gujarat pogroms were set free by the court. On January 28, 2020, the Supreme Court granted bail to 14 convicts of 2002 Gujarat riots. Thus, it gave a clean chit to Modi.

(SAJJAD SHAUQAT)

BJP's politicisation of religion

FAIZAN RIAZ

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The celebration and construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya have been heralded as a momentous occasion, deeply embedded in religious and cultural significance. Currently, the Ram Mandir in the sacred town of Ayodhya remains only partially constructed. The completion of the temple is anticipated for next year, leading to objections from certain Hindu holy figures against its early inauguration. Despite being incomplete, this temple has already acquired an unparalleled significance compared with any other religious structure in India. However, beneath the veneer of religious devotion lies a carefully crafted political strategy employed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to secure votes and perpetuate its political dominance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP is meticulously planning to clinch a third successive term, sparing no effort in its drive for electoral triumph.

The BJP's relentless focus on the Ram Mandir, especially in the run-up to the 2024 elections, exposes a calculated exploitation of religious sentiments for political gains. By foregrounding the temple construction, the BJP seeks to consolidate the Hindu vote bank, leveraging the emotional connection that a significant section of the population shares with the Ram *Janmabhoomi* issue. Ram *Janmabhoomi* refers to the site believed, according to Hindu religious beliefs, to be the birthplace of Rama, the seventh avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu. The construction of the Ram Mandir is a symbol of religious and cultural identity for many Hindus, and by prioritising this narrative, the BJP seeks to resonate with the sentiments of the electorate.

In 2019, the Supreme Court of India mandated the allocation of a five-acre plot as compensation for the demolished Babri Masjid, to be situated alongside the 62 acres designated for the construction of the Ram Mandir. However, despite this directive, the BJP has made little progress in fulfilling its commitment, casting doubt on its sincerity in upholding religious harmony and justice. This lack of action is particularly concerning given the party's alignment with Hindutva organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva

Hindu Parishad (VHP), whose agenda aims to bolster the narrative surrounding the Ram Mandir and consolidate support rooted in right-wing ideology.

This alignment with Hindutva organisations not only amplifies the Ram Mandir narrative but also supports the broader vision of *Akhand Bharat*, which envisions a united India under Hindu dominance. However, this agenda poses potential threats to regional peace, given the historical track record of such groups in instigating unrest, particularly in neighbouring countries like Pakistan.

Furthermore, the BJP's relentless emphasis on the Ram Mandir serves as a convenient diversion from pressing socio-economic issues plaguing the nation, including unemployment and economic inequality. Despite the government's focus on economic growth, discontent has intensified, leading to escalations of insurgencies along the Naxalite-Maoist corridor. The deliberate emphasis on the Ram Mandir in political discourse appears to redirect public attention away from addressing these urgent socio-economic challenges that demand immediate policy measures.

To add to the political spectacle surrounding the temple construction, Modi strategically incorporated cinematic glamour and celebrity endorsement. Notable Bollywood personalities like Amitabh Bachchan and Madhuri Dixit were included in the Ram Mandir inauguration event, adding cultural allure and enticing voters through celebrity endorsements. However, the involvement of these celebrities, while portraying themselves as devotees of Ram, also serves as a means of rallying support for Modi and the BJP, reflecting a directive from the party's top leadership.

Under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah's guidance, the directive aims to secure a 50 percent vote share by utilising the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony as a strategic electoral tool. This approach positions the BJP as the primary custodian of Hindu interests, leveraging recent successes and perceived opposition disunity.



Moscow's Indian Ocean strategy

DR. GULI.AYESHA BHATTI

The Nation

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The Tsars of Russia consistently sought warm water ports in the southern regions to exert control over global trade and attain strategic supremacy. The Soviet Union, with its dominant naval presence in the Indian Ocean, also possessed ample naval infrastructure and a significant fleet in these waters for a long period. Ethiopia and South Yemen provided access to warm water ports in the west, while Kam Rahn Bay in the east was also made accessible. This was done to fulfil Russia's longstanding goal of gaining convenient control over warm water territories. Under President Putin's rule, Russia has reemerged as a significant player in the geopolitical and strategic affairs of the Indian Ocean; Moscow recognises the significance of forming alliances in the intricate and multi-faceted global power structure to bolster its economy and geopolitical standing.

The Indian Ocean is a region of significant economic importance and is considered a crucial component of the broader Indo-Pacific geopolitical framework. Russia aims to establish a presence in this region for various purposes, including gaining access to markets and trade routes, safeguarding interests in historical and present territories, and upholding norms such as the freedom of navigation and over-flight exercises. The increase in interest has resulted in the growing military presence of other superpowers in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Consequently, Russia is attempting to broaden the range of partners it has in IOR. Military exercises serve to highlight the political and diplomatic unity between countries and also indicate the recognition of Russia as a military ally. The Andaman Sea naval exercises between Russia and Myanmar in November last year were dubbed "the first Russian-Myanmar naval exercise in modern history." The drill included the participation of two anti-submarine vessels, namely the Admiral Tributs and Admiral Panteleyev, from the Russian Pacific Fleet and a frigate and a corvette from Myanmar's navy. The Russian warships arrived at Bangladesh's Chittagong Port in the Bay of Bengal days after the drill, which is seen as a significant development in Russia-Bangladesh ties. This indicates that Russia's actions suggest a desire to preserve the impression of being a prominent global power in IOR.

Moscow and Delhi also conducted collaborative naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal from time to time. The purpose of these exercises is to collectively address global challenges and safeguard the security of civilian shipping in the Asia Pacific area. Alongside, the Russian Navy has been actively participating in the international maritime exercises AMAN, which Pakistan is hosting in the Arabian Sea. Pakistani assets, the Alamgir and Aslat, participated in joint naval exercises with the Russian Federation Navy, Admiral Grigorovich, and Dmitriy Rogachov in the North Arabian Sea during the Arabian Monsoon exercises, which encompassed Anti-Surface, Anti-Air Warfare, Maneuvering, and Communication drills.

In addition to its joint operations with countries bordering the Indian Ocean, Russia has also prioritized conducting bilateral exercises with Iran and China in the Western Indian Ocean. In January 2022, naval vessels from Iran, Russia, and China engaged in a collaborative military exercise in the Indian Ocean. Russia has also inked bilateral naval and defence agreements with Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mozambique, and the Central African Republics since 2017. While Egypt, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan have let the Russian Air Force use their airspace, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan have granted the Russian Navy port access. These exercises also help in making a chance for the sale of Russian military equipment in the future. Russia has been the oldest military supplier to most South Asian countries. Military supplies also remain its most important source of income besides energy trade. Due to the Ukraine crisis, the Russian military industry might not be in a position to sell equipment in the present times. However, Moscow will not want to lose ground in South Asia, one of the fastest-growing regions for arms imports. Although Moscow has not released any exclusive official document outlining its regional policy for the Indian Ocean, an analysis of key doctrinal papers offers some insights. Russia has focused on certain areas inside and around the Indian Ocean, such as South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. It has not mentioned the Indian Ocean as a whole in either its 2015 National Security Strategy or its foreign policy vision for 2023.

War in Ukraine may end, soon!

DR. MUHAMMAD ALI EHSAN

THE EXPRESS
TRIBUNE
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February 2024 marks the second anniversary of the special military operations that Russia began against Ukraine two years ago. These ongoing special military operations are being perceived by the world in two ways. The first way is based on the western narrative that Russian imperialism is today the greatest threat to the European security and if Russia is not stopped the war will spread beyond Ukraine. The second is the Russian way of looking at what it is doing and why. Russians consider that the special military operations against Ukraine began only after over 15,000 people in Donbas became victims of neo-Nazi regime installed by the western world in Kyiv in 2014. Russia came to the aid of its own people and has now annexed the Donbas territory to the Russian Federation. War's expansion beyond the annexed Ukrainian borders is a western propaganda and not a Russian war aim. "It is not Russia but the western world that is imperialist," says President Vladimir Putin.

Western imperialism was pretty much on display when President Emmanuel Macron of France made a provocative comment last week, suggesting a possibility of putting NATO troops in Ukraine. Ironically, Macron's suggestion was publicly rejected by many NATO member countries including Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Italy. Even NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg told the Associated Press that "the alliance itself had no such plans". The French-Russian animosity has a history and Macron's Bonapartism is reflective of the pain that France suffered when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia in 1812 with an army of over 600,000 only to return back with less than 50,000 men after experiencing a crushing defeat. This comment by the French President and many other statements by the leadership of the western world are reflective of some significant geopolitical changes that concern the current western approach to the war in Ukraine. But first, what is President Putin thinking?

The Russian President's state-of-the-nation speech is an annual event in the Kremlin calendar used to highlight his strategies, priorities and plans for the coming days. On Feb 29, Putin made that speech and replied to Macron without naming him by saying that "anyone considering

invading Russia should remember the fate of those who previously attempted it. But now the consequences of the interventionist will be much more tragic." He also made reference to how the US was offering a dialogue to Russia on strategic stability but at the same time was attempting to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia on the battlefield — this he described as hypocritical.

The biggest geopolitical factor that influences the war in Ukraine is the doubt about the continued western support to Ukraine in this war. The US aid package of \$60 billion which doesn't have the approval of Congress and which is seeking an approval of the House of Representatives is predicted to meet its bureaucratic death there as the congressmen don't seem so keen, and Donald Trump also casts his political shadow not only over the Republican party but also over Mike Johnson who, the speaker.

Ukraine is suffering from a shortage of ammunition and manpower. Most Ukrainian military accomplishments are a consequence of the western military aid, especially the long-range weapons. Ukraine demonstrated the utility of these weapons by hitting and drowning Russian battle cruiser Moskva in April 2022. It was hit by two anti-ship missiles launched from the Ukrainian coast. In the second half of 2023, the Russia navy decided to move further to the east after it realised that nothing was left in the Ukraine's navy that was worth attacking. The other reason was the long-range targeting ability of Ukraine's land-based anti-ship missiles. So, the withdrawal of Russia's fleet in Black Sea further to the east allowed the coastal traffic to move again and Russia, which had backed out of the 2022 agreement of allowing cargo ships carrying the Ukraine grain in the Black Sea, opted not to interfere anymore with the movement of the coastal traffic.

For Russia the earnings that Ukraine makes from the grain export is less important than the poor mouths that this grain feeds in the global south. Russia has taken a consistent position on the destination of the Ukrainian grain — the continent of Europe or the continent of Africa? It is not the lack of military capability that stops Russia from dominating sea warfare as it has sufficient naval presence including five frigates and six modern

submarines operating in Black Sea which can easily stop the coastal traffic flow. On the other hand, Ukraine continues to depend on anti-ship missiles from France, the UK and the US and also anti-submarine weapons and detection equipment — all this costs money and continuity of the military aid. The soft underbelly of Ukraine is its continuous reliance on western military aid, it needs fighter jets, long-range missiles and air defence batteries. All the military aid that West provided to Ukraine gave little result as its long-awaited counter-offensive miserably failed. The successes on the battleground are too few to convince the Western world that the military aid they provide to Ukraine is giving the due results — hence the hesitance.

Ukraine was disappointed last year when NATO didn't yield an invitation to it to join the security organisation. Article 5 doesn't allow Ukraine to become a NATO member as the West doesn't want a direct confrontation with Russia. President Joe Biden has already indicated that Ukraine will not be invited to join NATO during the NATO Summit in Washington in July. Doubts over the continuity of Western military aid and doubts on Ukraine ever joining NATO means fewer options for Ukraine. But what does it mean for the future of the war?

The war in Ukraine may end next year. Why? Because we may have the leadership in power that can end this war. There are presidential elections in Russia in the middle of this month. Putin will get his fifth term confirmed as President of Russia. The US also has elections and Trump's return to White House is being speculated. If that happens, there can be a ceasefire followed by negotiations in 2025 in which Putin will expect Ukraine to cede the territory that he has made part of the Russian Federation in return for accepting Ukraine's sovereignty and the territorial integrity of what remains part of Ukraine. Till then Russia will continue with its limited attritional offensives. The end of war will not just be because of the military factors but the social, economic and political factors — the very inability of Ukraine to continue fighting without the US and NATO support. If Trump returns, he will not allow this, thus triggering the slide of war on the slope of peace. The war in Ukraine may finally end in 2025.

Pacific is quickly sliding into the great power rivalry?

Papua New Guinea (PNG) — an impoverished Pacific island nation which witnessed the killing of a large number of soldiers, mostly Japanese, in Japan's invasion of the country during the New Guinea Campaign in the Second World War — has turned into an epicentrum of great power competition between China and the US. It is also the most sought-after country for the world powers due to its natural resources and minerals such as LNG, nickel and copper.

"We are baffled," Winnie Kiap, a former PNG diplomat, told *The Economist* last year. "It's like watching two elephants (China and the US) playing on a patch of grass and we are that patch." In the Second World War "we were in a war that had nothing to do with us. This is a repetition of that kind of thinking."

The tug of war for influence in the Pacific intensified after China stunned the US and Australia by signing a surprise security deal with the Solomon Islands, raising fear of the Chinese military presence close to Canberra and Guam, the US main military base in the region. But Solomon Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare defended the compact, citing internal instability, and sought all partners to "respect the (island's) sovereign interests", ensuring it was guided by his foreign policy of "Friends to all and Enemies to none". In a bid to counter China's overtures in the Pacific, America after 30 years of absence announced reopening its embassy in Honiara and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken signed a defence and maritime agreement with PNG in an apparent attempt to deter Port Moresby and other Pacific countries from establishing security ties with Beijing.

Here PNG Prime Minister James Marape guarded himself against criticism from former Prime Minister Peter O'Neill and opposition leader Joseph Lelangan who accused him of putting the country "at the epicenter of a military storm" between China and the US and stressed that PNG shouldn't be "blinded by the dollar sign or be coerced into signing (detrimental) deals". But the specter of a

new cold war loomed large with Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India (a Quad member state), arriving in the region at the same time and Marape felicitating him as the “Leader of the Global South”.

But PNG soon found itself between a rock and a hard place once its Foreign Minister Justin Tkachenko, said in January that Port Moresby was in “early stages of negotiation” with Beijing on a potential security and policing deal and US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma warned PNG of the “high cost” that would come with the Chinese commitment, urging PNG to turn down the compact.

PNG isn’t the only Pacific nation, China has also offered assistance on policing. Beijing last year sent police experts and equipment to Vanuatu to maintain public order in the country after signing an agreement with the Solomon Islands on “law enforcement and security matters”. Australia raised concerns about China’s policing role in the country even as Canberra too had its police deployed in the neighbouring island.

Marape is keen to develop economic relations with China

for other than a large economy, it is a key export market of Pacific countries’ natural resources and a major source of incoming tourism. That’s why PNG and others have to navigate a tough diplomatic line in the middle of risks of getting itself trapped in the China-US rivalry.

America’s sharp retort forced Marape to open up a little about his foreign policy approach during his trip to Australia. Stating he couldn’t not ignore huge commercial opportunities being offered to PNG by Beijing, the PNG prime minister said: “We will not compromise our relations with China ... We also believe that someone else’s enemy is not my enemy.” At the same, he attempted to calm the US and Australian concerns. “When I went to Beijing they steered clear of security conversations. They honored us in the economic space.”

The US has been seeing China’s engagement in the Pacific as an effort to “destabilize” the region. One wonders how the Biden administration’s opaque deals – which didn’t provide little details and a budget encompassing more than \$7.1 billion for the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau under the Compacts of Free Association in exchange for basing rights

Making Asia-Pacific more dynamic

We all know that we live in a changing world. In the vast area of Asia and the Pacific that change is most evident. Over the past 20 years, the economies of many nations in the region have been moving out of the category of ‘least developed’ and graduating into a ‘middle income’ status. However, the positive changes that help to make our lives better, healthier and more prosperous, are not happening at the same time equally across all countries, or even equitably within them.

On the one hand, Asia and the Pacific is now home to three of the world’s five largest economies. These and other countries in the region help to feed much of the rest of the world – the majority of aquaculture, rice production and the rapidly growing protein sector is found here.

On the other hand, hunger is still widespread in some parts of the region – indeed more than 371 million are undernourished in Asia and the Pacific – or half the world’s total. Nearly two billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. Despite considerable progress, poverty remains a problem for many families. Meantime, inequalities persist among and within countries, between men and women and for

youth, and indigenous peoples, and between cities and rural areas.

To address these challenges, FAO is increasingly striving to leverage science and innovation, including new technologies – especially digital solutions – developed in both the public and private sectors, particularly through four regional priorities designed to deliver the Four Betters (Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment and a Better Life, leaving no one behind).

FAO’s Regional Priorities for Asia and the Pacific: The first FAO Asia-Pacific regional priority is to transform the region’s agrifood systems to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable, with more affordable healthy diets. Increasing agricultural production is paramount for food and nutrient security, but it needs to happen in a climate-friendly process. To that end, we are supporting countries to bolster climate-adaptation and resilience, low-carbon agriculture, modernise seed systems, implement integrated farming management, control trans-boundary pests and diseases, disseminate good agriculture practices (GAP) and transfer technologies to smallholders and

for military and other activities – would bring stability to the region while intensifying strategic competition with China. Australia in December signed security agreement with PNG to address its security needs and “support each other’s security and regional stability”. Like other deals with China and the US, details of this pact weren’t published either. While Beijing’s compact invited “further regional contest”, how Canberra’s and America’s security treaties could trigger peace and harmony in the Pacific?

Another reason for the profound US interest in the Pacific is to prevent the regional states from cutting ties with Taiwan. Still, another of the Pacific island countries, Nauru, recently severed ties with Taiwan and switched its allegiance to China, leaving Taipei with a handful of allies as Tuvalu prepares to make such a diplomatic shift. Ironically, the US allies in the Pacific, providing a strategic buffer to America

and allowing it to base missiles in Palau, are threatening to shift their diplomatic recognition to China for economic assistance if Washington fails to pass the proposed funding.

These developments related to security arrangements are rapidly culminating in militarisation of the region, and shaping the Pacific into a theater of influence for international powers. The upshots of these phenomena will be highly consequential for the Pacific since they will exacerbate development and climate crises in a region that is exposed to disproportionate impacts of climate change coupled with rising sea levels, extreme weather events and coastal erosion. Hawkish US Congressmen and some Pacific nations’ approach to exploit the US-China tensions is making these challenges and the regional peace situation even direr.

*(Azhar Azam — The Express Tribune,
March 03, 2024)*

family farmers. We are also promoting increasing digitalisation and mechanisation among local communities.

The second regional priority is to accelerate sustainable natural resources management for biodiversity conservation and climate action. FAO is leading the development of a new generation of analysis and tools to support the design and improved targeting of investments in agrifood systems. In Asia and the Pacific, we are supporting countries to strategise and develop proposals to access climate finance and to achieve their climate ambitions in agrifood systems and rural development.

The third priority is to support inclusive rural transformation for equitable rural societies through economic growth, job creation and assistance for the vulnerable populations to reduce inequality, leaving no country and no person behind. FAO’s the 1000 Digital Villages Initiative, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and the One Country One Priority Product Initiative promote sustainable livelihoods and decent incomes in the Asia-Pacific region, while encouraging the wide participation of women and youth in agrifood systems transformation.

The fourth priority aims to achieve the above in the unique context of the region’s Small Island Developing States (SIDS). At FAO, we are working with the SIDS to implement anticipatory actions against multiple hazards and risks, while initiating a process leading to the formulation of the Pacific Action Plan on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across

Agricultural Sectors (2024–2030). This plan is critical for bringing sustainability and resilience to agriculture and natural resources such as soil and water. In working on these priorities, we are speeding up and scaling up tangible and accountable results on the ground through the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 and relevant strategies.

Tailored investment plans and partnerships: In Asia and the Pacific, we are also assisting countries to promote tailored investment plans for poverty reduction including social protection; fighting food loss and waste and conserving water; and building adaptive capacities in response to country and regional needs.

In the meantime, we continue to scale up South-South and Triangular Cooperation and expand partnerships and strategic alliances with a wide range of players, including International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the private sector, regional institutions bodies, civil society and others. Through these partnerships, we aim to bridge investment and financing gaps to ensure that financing reaches those who need it most, especially smallholder and family farmers.

The changes we still need are many. But, together, with strong political will and commitment, and with enabling policies, sufficient investment and innovative business models, this region can be an agent of the changes needed – and continue to inspire the world.

*(Dr. Qu Dongyu — The Express Tribune,
February 18, 2024)*

The Islamophobic world!

The ‘collateral damage’ from Israel’s war in Gaza is now spreading beyond the territories it occupies and threatening the safety of Muslims in the West who have nothing to do with the conflict. The February 23 reports emerged of a man entering a mosque in New York and proceeding to harass the people there and demanding the release of the Israeli hostages taken by Hamas on October 7. What Muslims in New York have to do with hostages taken by Hamas is not known except, perhaps, to the most ignorant of bigots. This is, sadly, not an isolated case, with Islamophobic crimes rising in the aftermath of the Israeli attack on Gaza. Between October 7 and October 24 of last year, the Council on American Islamic Relations received 774 requests for help and reports of bias incidents from Muslims across the US, a 182 per cent increase from any comparable period in the previous year. This is the timeframe during which six-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume was stabbed 26 times at his home in the state of Illinois, showing just how far this kind of indiscriminate hatred can go. Meanwhile, in the UK Tell Mama, a leading agency on monitoring anti-Muslim hate crimes, has documented over 2000 Islamophobic incidents from October 7 to February 7. Some of the incidents are outright horrifying with one Muslim woman being assaulted on a bus in east London and reportedly told “You Muslims are troublemakers” and death threats being sent to worshippers at a mosque. What is striking about this surge is how it, to a great extent, mirrors some of the trends we have seen by Israel in Gaza. The most notable similarity is the inability to distinguish between those responsible for crimes and the rest of the community they happen to belong to or the desire for collective punishment and to exact retribution by punishing any and all associated with a particular community. Given this context, the surge in Islamophobia in the West, where Islamophobia is often at a high level even in relatively more tranquil times, provides us with a troubling reflection of Israeli crimes. The politicians and organizations in the West who have or will stand up to condemn this rise in hate crimes and remind everyone that Muslim citizens and residents have equal rights should ask themselves why then they are not holding Israel to the standards they hold themselves. Failure to do so will send a signal that those who harm innocent Muslims are beyond reproach and that protecting Muslims is not a priority.

Shamima’s story

This decade has helped unmask the much-acclaimed liberal democracies around the world, whose hypocrisies have

finally come to light. While political experts have exposed the hypocrisy of the West in the past, the present has been a horrifying reminder of the disdain these democracies carry for people from the Global South, even if they were born and raised in these countries. The UN defines a child as a person younger than 18 years, and by law, any contract a child enters into is void. There is a reason why a minor does not have any agency; their exposure is limited, and they are not trained to deal with complex issues. But apparently, if a child is a descendant of people from the Global South, s/he becomes responsible for every action s/he takes. Take the case of Shamima Begum, a now 24-year-old girl who had her British citizenship revoked in 2019 because of her involvement with ISIS, a terror group. A UK court rejected her appeal against the government’s decision, making her stateless. But what makes the case interesting is Shamima’s age at the time of her recruitment to ISIS. In 2015, an unaccompanied 15-year-old Shamima – a minor – managed to travel to war-torn Syria all by herself. Shamima got married to an ISIS fighter, a Dutch revert, and gave birth to three children, all of whom are now dead. All the circumstances point to one thing: Shamima was a victim of online grooming and got trapped by predators. But the eyes of the Western world do not see that Shamima. In civilized societies, authorities would be providing counselling sessions to Shamima and understanding what led to her radicalization. Shamima was born in the UK to Bangladeshi parents. She is now stateless in Syria, unable to make things right. In 2019, her father, who now resides in Bangladesh, apologized to the UK government and requested them to forgive her. This incident exposes the apathy the West carries towards brown people in general, and Muslims in particular. Ever since the 9/11 attacks, the West has fanned the sparks of Islamophobia. Miscreants from the Muslim community have been used to collectively punish the entire community. In many ways, the last decade or so has shown how little leaders think about people from the Global South. From former US president proudly declaring a Muslim ban to former UK home secretary Suella Braverman publishing racist and Islamophobic opeds in newspapers, countries that once claimed to be the upholders of human rights and promoted inclusion and diversity have shown that the embrace of a diverse nation was nothing more than a political gimmick. The West should realize that decisions taken in haste are a mockery of the global rules-based order, and its insistence on violating international law will eventually end up isolating these developed countries.

(Editorials — The News, February 25-26, 2024)

Terror war

ANDREA MAZZARINO

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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Many Americans now see the destruction and suffering in Gaza and Jewish settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank as the crises of the day and I agree. It's hard even to keep up with the death toll in the Palestinian territories, but you can certainly give it a college try. More than 30,000 Gazans have already been killed, more than 12,000 of them reportedly children.

The scale of the loss of civilian life has been breathtaking in what are supposed to be targeted missions. For example, in mid-February, in an ostensible attempt to free two Israeli hostages in the southern Gazan city of Rafah, where more than one million civilians are now sheltering under the worst conditions imaginable, Israeli troops killed 74 Palestinians. Between December 2023 and January 2024, four strikes there had already killed at least 95 civilians. And on and on it goes. Anyone with concerns about Israel's response to Hamas's bloody attacks has ground to stand on.

But if war deaths among people of color in particular are really that much of a concern to Americans, especially on the political left, then there are significant gaps in our attention. Look at what's happening in the 85 countries where the US is currently engaged in "counterterrorism" efforts of one sort or another, where we fight alongside local troops, train or equip them, and conduct intelligence operations or even air strikes, all of it in an extension of those first responses to 9/11. Ask yourself if you've paid attention to that lately or if you were even aware that it was still happening. Do you have any idea, for instance, that our country's military continues to pursue its war on terror across significant parts of Africa?

Given Israel's October 7th tragedy, my mention of that date in 2001, which marked Washington's first military response to the worst terrorist attacks on our soil, is more than a play on words. Like Israel, the US was attacked by armed Islamic extremists who sought to make gruesome spectacles of ordinary Americans. Some of them, like the Israeli families smoked out of their saferooms only to be shot, flung themselves from their office buildings in New York's Twin Towers, essentially choosing the least awful deaths under the circumstances. Yet after decades of America's war on terror, whose benefits have been, to say the least, questionable, our tax dollars continue to fund the longest and bloodiest response to terrorism in our history. Our own October 7th and its seemingly never-ending consequences suggest that something more sinister may be

at play in shaping what violence we choose to focus on and condemn, and what violence we choose to overlook.

Too little ink is spilled anymore objecting to the hundreds of thousands of civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen who died in our global war on terror – and, of course, those are just some of the countries where we've fought in these years. Consider, for example, how we continue to arm and train Somali government troops in their deadly counterinsurgency war. And remember that the war on terror, as it still plays out, isn't just President Biden's war, though he has indeed continued it (though in 2021, he did at least get us out of the longest-running part of it in Afghanistan).

Remember as well when you condemn the Israelis for what they're doing that, thanks to American bombs and missiles, civilians in our own post-October 7, 2001, war zones died as they slept at home, studied, or shopped at marketplaces. Some were run over by our vehicles. Some died in NATO air strikes or in strikes by unmanned American drones, or in fires that erupted in the aftermath of such bombing and shelling. Some were run off the road, gunned down at checkpoints, blown up by bomblets left over from our use of cluster bombs, tortured or executed in US-run prisons, or raped by occupying American troops. Here are just a few examples: In 2012, an American soldier in Afghanistan shot dead 16 civilians, nine of them children, as they slept in their homes. This was anything but the first such incident of civilian targeting and would be anything but the last. In 2017, after then-President Donald Trump loosened Obama-era air strike restrictions meant to help protect civilians, the US conducted more individually identifiable drone strikes than in any other year except 2012 under – yes! – President Barack Obama.

The January 2017 raid that killed more than a dozen opposition fighters in Yemen also killed Saudi and Yemeni civilians, among them children as young as eight years old. In 2021, two Yemeni families filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for the unlawful deaths of 34 relatives, including nine children, in US drone strikes between 2013 and 2018, seeking recognition of harm done by the US and its allies. Given that the Pentagon lacks a centralized system for tracking civilian casualties in places where our forces fight and no system at all in areas like Israel where the US only provides military aid, recognition of such horrors has been a rare commodity.

War on Gaza

Strategic aims of Israel?

BRIG TARIQ KHALIL

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 20, 2024

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson announced that the war on Gaza will continue until complete victory, a sentiment echoed by the Israeli Prime Minister. Throughout human history, there have been individuals who built their empires on human suffering. The Prime Minister of Israel appears intent on seeking strategic leverage in the Middle East by conquering Gaza and eliminating its population. The new offensive on Rafah is horrifying due to its disastrous dimensions. Under the pretext of hostages, Israel is prepared to kill and displace 1.5 million Palestinians. It's unfortunate that the world is not moving beyond lip service. However, when the tide turns, the victors are often made to pay for their atrocities, war crimes and genocidal actions. It's ironic that over the past couple of days, the US Administration has warned Benjamin Netanyahu against the Rafah offensive due to its horrific dimensions. It's further ironic that the US President is complaining that Netanyahu is not listening to the United States. The Foreign Office, EU and other nations are condemning Netanyahu's offensive policy, which amounts to nothing short of genocide, yet their efforts seem futile. There are voices of reason within the US itself, but they are not being heard.

It appears that Israel is determined and planning to establish illegal settlements in Gaza. The death toll in the Rafah area has increased significantly, resulting in massive casualties, sometimes exceeding 100 per day. The area is densely populated, with an estimated 1.5 million people residing there. Additionally, Israel has carried out a drone attack on Islamic Resistance, resulting in the death of three individuals. Consequently, Islamic Resistance has warned America that they will target military bases in Iraq and Jordan.

On the seas, Houthi attacks on commercial shipping have intensified despite US and UK airstrikes in Yemen. President Biden has announced they will give an appropriate response. At the same time, world pressure for a ceasefire is increasing. The Russian Foreign Minister has accused the United States of doing nothing and turning a blind eye to the atrocities being committed in Gaza. Sergey accused the United States of very irresponsible behaviour. Similarly, China has come out

strongly against Israeli war crimes and is calling for a ceasefire. October 7, 2023, should not be used as an excuse to carry out genocide in Gaza. The International Court of Justice has also clearly branded Israeli actions as war crimes. Most recently, Israel has closed the Rafah crossing, resulting in the cessation of aid to the affected population of Gaza. By now, almost 30,000 people have died, and over a hundred thousand are injured. Ninety percent of hospital facilities are destroyed and 75 percent of the infrastructure is in ruins. It's time to end this madness. The deadline for the offensive on Rafah is March 10.

Some US Senators are urging President Biden to attack in response to the attacks of Islamic Resistance. Iran is warned that the implication of such an action will be horrendous and devastating for the region. It has blamed United States striking bases in Iraq. So far over 552 Israeli soldiers have been killed and 138 are still prisoners. Two hostages have now been rescued by the Israeli forces in Rafah area inflicting heavy casualties on the Palestinian unarmed civilians. Especially in the Nasser Hospital, it is non-functional now. It is as the Israeli strikes and unending heavy rains have also played havoc in the refugee camps all over Gaza. Medicines and food supply have virtually come to zero. The UN Secretary General has warned of the impending disaster.

Major powers, including Russia and China, urge the United States to recognize global sentiment as the war escalates, risking further regional entanglement. In an election year, President Biden faces pressure to support Israel despite growing calls for peace from the American public. Similar constraints apply to Trump's camp. Consequently, war crimes go unchecked, undermining global order and stability. The Middle East's evolving dynamics and threats to shipping lanes disrupt global supply chains, leading to increased insurance and freight rates, exacerbating inflation in Europe and America. Developing countries, already vulnerable, will suffer most from rising prices and oil disruptions.

Israel's grand strategic plan aims to occupy Gaza in various ways, including the completion of projects like a new canal from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, reportedly with US support. The strategic objectives include (i) occupying

Gaza, (ii) expanding Israel's territory and (iii) gaining financial influence over Middle Eastern States. President Biden appears helpless as Netanyahu is not listening to anybody. Arab states, fearing Israel's financial and nuclear power, are reluctant to intervene. Israeli offensive actions are becoming more severe, particularly in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, where Israeli investment in industry, trade and real estate is increasing. The UAE is granting residential status to a large number of Israelis. With increasing hold on the trade and industry, it is feared that in the next 20/30 years, UAE will become another Gaza, or they will compromise their sovereignty. The impact of Middle East's changed scenario is going to be felt in South Asia as well as most of the labour and manpower comes from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This will affect the jobs and trade of South Asian people. Similarly, Gulf states investment in South Asia, especially Pakistan, where Indian ingress is increasing.

The conclusion: Israel will not stop its offensive planned in Rafah area and will cause immense destruction both in human lives and infrastructure. As the Russian, Australian and other number of Foreign Ministers have warned the world it must not close its eyes. It is obvious and clear that the force can be stopped with force. Israelis will only learn a lesson when they are answered in the same coin. Further, Hamas role is also dubious?

Unrest in the Middle East

JOHN FEFFER

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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On the horizon, shimmering like some heavenly ideal, is a grand bargain to end the war in Gaza, establish an independent Palestinian state, and stabilize the Middle East. Also on the horizon, blazing like an infernal nightmare, is the prospect of an escalation of the current war in Gaza and the spread of destabilizing violence to every corner of the Middle East.

The direction that the region takes could be determined by a feat of imaginative diplomacy. Or an act of murderous stupidity.

Which will it be? The United States still maintains 40,000 troops across dozens of military bases in the Middle East. Since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 and Israel invaded Gaza in response, these US facilities and allied forces have sustained over 160 attacks. A number of militias in the region have demonstrated their solidarity with Hamas by attacking Israel across the Lebanese border (Hezbollah), US, British, and Israeli ships in the Red Sea (Houthis), and US bases in the region (Iran-allied militias in Iraq and Syria).

Last month, an attack on one such base, Tower 22 in Jordan, left three Americans dead. The Biden administration blamed Iran for the attack. Since Tower 22 is a key node in the coordination of US attacks on Iran-aligned militias, it was a logical target. Responding in part to pressure from its more hawkish critics in Congress, the administration retaliated by launching attacks on 85 sites in Iraq and Syria that are linked to Iran. Iran's 'axis of resistance' links up a number of groups that have different ideologies, religious beliefs, and positions within their own societies. Israel's invasion of Gaza has given this constellation of forces a new focus and a new cohesion.

Hezbollah, with 40,000 fighters, is perhaps the most significant, given that its political wing has dominated Lebanese politics. After October 7, Israel and Hezbollah have traded attacks across the border. Most recently, Hezbollah launched drone attacks in northern Israel and Israel responded by destroying weapons depots deep in Lebanese territory. The key to preventing a wider war in the region is negotiating some kind of agreement between the Israeli government and Hezbollah. The United States has also retaliated against the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, through which 12 percent of global trade passes. These retaliatory strikes don't seem to have had much effect on the Houthis' resolve. This weekend, they struck a ship operating under the flag of Belize and also knocked out a US drone.

The Houthis enjoy the advantage that real estate agents always talk about: location, location, location. They've already caused a dip in the global economy as ships have begun to reroute around South Africa, adding time and cost to shipments of oil and other commodities. In Iraq, several

pro-Iranian militias emerged from the wreckage caused by the US invasion in 2003, including the Popular Mobilization Forces and Kata'ib Hezbollah. Although there is overlap, the former has effectively become part of the Iraqi army while the latter has joined with other groups to form an umbrella organization unaffiliated with the Iraqi government called Islamic Resistance in Iraq. They all want the remaining US troops out of their country.

And they are all incensed by the war in Gaza. Israel has defied international law and even common sense by continuing to prosecute its war against Hamas and killing nearly 30,000 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children. It's not exactly news that Israel is ignoring considerations of human rights and basic morality in its destruction and disenfranchisement of the Palestinian community. What's different this time is the failure of the Netanyahu government to put the lives of Israeli hostages first and pursue negotiations for their release.

Approximately 130 of the original 253 hostages that Hamas and related organizations seized in Israel on October 7 remain in Gaza. Hamas released 105 in an exchange and four others unilaterally. Israel rescued three and killed three others in a botched rescue attempt. In addition, at least 30 of the 130 remaining hostages are believed to be dead. These hostages are the only real bargaining chip that Hamas has. With negotiations over a ceasefire stalemated in Egypt, the Netanyahu government is planning to launch a new offensive on Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city. The United States, basically pleading with its obdurate ally not to attack Rafah, has gone so far as to support for the first time a UN initiative for a temporary pause in fighting (even as Washington continues to reject resolutions calling for an "immediate ceasefire").

Hamas has proposed a 150-day ceasefire that turns into a permanent truce, a prisoner exchange that would release thousands of detained Palestinians, and an Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed this proposal as "delusional". He doesn't want to promise a troop withdrawal. And he insists on a ratio of three Palestinian prisoners released for each hostage.

If the details can be worked out – and there's no

guarantee that Netanyahu in particular will budge – this kind of ceasefire could serve as the keystone of a grand bargain in the region.

Antony Blinken, Biden's secretary of state, has been racing around the capitals of the Middle East to build support for an audacious plan. It looks roughly like this: Saudi Arabia extends diplomatic recognition to Israel and the world comes together to support a new Palestinian state. In effect, Blinken is trying to reignite the Abraham Accords that Jared Kushner started during the Trump administration, but linking Saudi recognition of Israel to a two-state solution rather than simply a cash payout to the Palestinians. According to Axios, "There are several options for US action on this issue, including: Bilaterally recognizing the state of Palestine; not using its veto to block the UN Security Council from admitting Palestine as a full UN member state; encouraging other countries to recognize Palestine."

You might think that the spoiler in this scenario would be Iran. After all, Tehran has activated its "axis of resistance" in support of Hamas. It has never been coy about its opposition to Israel. And it's not exactly been cozy with the United States either.

But Iran is actually not the spoiler. In recent days, the Iranian government has been trying to rein in its allies' militias in Iraq. Though not all of these forces agree, there have been no attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria since February 4.

This restraint is not just about avoiding a direct conflict with the United States. Iran's position on Israel has been evolving as well. Even though the Iranian leadership continues to lambaste Netanyahu and his colleagues, it has moved towards embracing a two-state solution. Explains Javad Heiran-Nia at Stimson: "The Iranian position has been that Israel is illegitimate and that a future state should be determined through a referendum of Palestine's pre-1948 inhabitants and their descendants. However, Iran has been trying not to be isolated in the Islamic world and recognizes that other countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey are likely to play a bigger role in diplomacy and reconstruction following the Gaza war."



Unspeakable horrors

GHADA AGEEL

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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For millennia, Rafah has been a resting place and a trade hub for caravans from across Palestine travelling towards the Sinai Peninsula and onwards to Egypt and Africa. A genocide is unfolding in this ancient, precious city. As I witness this genocide from afar and fear what the threatened Israeli invasion would mean for the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians forced to take shelter there, I feel like I am one of those powerless souls who recognised what was happening in Srebrenia or the Warsaw Ghetto, tried to raise the alarm but couldn't do anything to avert the tragedy as the world had already decided to turn a blind eye to the impending massacre of innocents.

Since the beginning of this latest war on Gaza, every new phase in the Israeli onslaught has inflicted more suffering, pain and death on the civilian population. Displaced many times over, those who are now in Rafah have nowhere else to go. The invasion of Rafah would thus be the last, and the most deadly phase of this genocide – the first genocide in human history that has been broadcasted live to the world. Sadly, this is not the first time beautiful Rafah has become the background to crimes against humanity. The border city's recent history is a wound kept open by constant violence. The majority of Rafah's residents, like most cities in Gaza, are the descendants of those displaced during the 1948 Nakba while others are the survivors of a 1956 massacre and the many other Israeli aggressions that came after.

My 89-year-old aunt Rayya, a refugee from Barqa village, which was destroyed by Israel in 1948, has been witness to decades of massacres, violence and oppression in this city. In 1956, during the tripartite aggression involving Britain, France and Israel, also known as the Suez Crisis, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip for about four months, perpetrating horrifying massacres in both Khan Younis and Rafah.

On November 2, when the Israeli military occupied Khan Younis and ordered males aged 16 and older to come out and present themselves at points across the city, my aunt was there visiting family. Then a 22-year-

old newlywed, she witnessed the Israeli military line those men and boys up against walls and massacre them over the course of two days. My aunt eventually decided to leave the family home with her sister's family in search of safety. They walked to the beach in Khan Younis and sought refuge under the trees. They ate anything they could find and dug holes in the ground to sleep, find clean water and use as a toilet. Despite the surrounding danger and the continuous sound of bombardment, Rayya, fearing for the safety of her husband, made the difficult decision to continue her journey on to Rafah.

Upon her arrival, Rayya realised that there had been yet more executions across Rafah. She could not find her husband anywhere. For days, she grappled with the harrowing uncertainty of his fate. Fortunately, her husband had survived that particular wave of violence. He later died during the occupation of Gaza in 1967, killed by the Israeli army while travelling along the beach from Khan Younis to Rafah. After her husband's murder, Rayya found herself alone, a single mother, tasked with raising five children in the hardship and destitution of the Rafah refugee camp.

In the 1970s, she was forced to seek employment in Israel's agriculture sector, labouring in the fields collecting tomatoes to provide for her family. During the first Intifada in 1987, Rayya lost an eye while trying to rescue her youngest son from the hands of Israeli soldiers. She was struck in the eye by the butt of a rifle while trying to prevent soldiers from taking her child.

At the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000, one of her grandchildren, 13-year-old Karam, was shot in the back of the head as he was running away from an Israeli army post after throwing stones at soldiers. The unconscious child was rushed to al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, but doctors said he had no possibility of survival beyond a few hours.

Rayya and her daughter in law, Karam's mother, were presented with an agonising choice: Stay at the hospital and accompany Karam in his final hours of life, or return to Rafah before checkpoints were closed to

mourn his death at home with their loved ones. Uncertain whether they would be allowed to move between cities in the coming days, they eventually decided to go home without Karam's body.

In 2004, Rafah was subjected to what Israel called Operation Rainbow, a cruelly ironic title for what was considered – at the time – the worst episode of violence the city had witnessed. The operation resulted in the destruction of hundreds of homes throughout Rafah. Rayya's home was also partially demolished during this spate of violence. Then, during the 2014 war on Gaza, Rayya lost another grandson – a bright engineering student, recently engaged. Today, 10 years later, Rayya is once again trying to survive military aggression in Rafah. I have not been able to contact her recently, but I fear she is once again displaced, hungry, cold and terrified, digging holes in the ground to find water or go to the toilet at the age of 89.

The story of my aunt Rayya – a story of suffering and perseverance – is the story of Rafah. Her story echoes the tragic stories of more than a million displaced Palestinians who have been forced to seek safety in the border city. But Rafah's story is also one of international solidarity. Rachel Corrie, Tom Hurndall and James Miller all lost their lives at the hands of the Israeli military in Rafah while bravely taking a stand against Israel's brutal occupation. Rafah is now the last refuge for Palestinians in Gaza amid a still unfolding genocide, and it is the place where the international community could and should take action to prevent another Warsaw or Srebrenica.

This is the moment for every member of the global civil society, everyone who believes in human rights, justice and freedom for all, to speak up against the deafening silence of their political leaders and take a stance for the long suffering Palestinian people. As the threat of a catastrophic Israeli invasion looms, we cannot continue to ignore the plight of Palestinian refugees, displaced many times over, sick, hungry and forced to resist a blatant ethnic cleansing campaign with nothing but their fragile bodies.

There's no safe place

JEFFREY ST CLAIR

INTERNATIONAL
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First Hind Rajab went missing, then her rescuers. But missing isn't the right word. Hind is missed. So are the people who tried to save her. So much depends on using the right words now. On being precise. Hind didn't go missing. Her rescuers didn't go missing. Hind was trying to escape. Her rescuers were trying to save her.

But you can't escape from a tank in a small black Kia. Not a tank filled with soldiers who'd fire on a small black Kia, driving away from them. Not a tank armed with the latest explosive shells provided on an emergency order by the US government. Not a tank that would shoot at a frightened young girl. Six-year-old girls who like to dress up as princesses in pink gowns don't simply go missing in Gaza City these days. They don't just disappear. They are disappeared.

Hind Rajab was in her own city when the invaders in tanks came. What was left of it. By late January, 60 percent of the homes in Gaza City had already been destroyed by Israeli missiles and bombs. Hind's own kindergarten, which she'd recently graduated from had been blown up, as had so many other schools, places of learning, places of shelter and places of safety in Gaza City. (78 percent of school buildings in Gaza have been directly hit or damaged amid Israel's incessant bombing, according to a new report by Relief.net. The 162 school buildings directly hit served more than 175,000 kids.)

But to be a child in Gaza City now is to be a target. There are no safe streets, no sanctuaries. The places where you once felt most at home are now the most likely to be bombed. There are no escape routes. Every corner you turn might put you face-to-face with a tank or in the laser-sights of a sniper or under a Hermes drone. Hind was missed, but she wasn't missing. Hind was hiding. Hiding in a car shredded by shrapnel and bullets. Hiding in a car with dead and dying relatives: her aunt, her uncle, three of her cousins. Hiding in a car bleeding from wounds to her back, her hands and her foot. Hiding with her 15-year-old cousin Layan Hamadeh, who was also hurt, bleeding and terrified.

Layan had grabbed her dead father's phone and called the Red Crescent Society. She begged them to come rescue her and Hind. "They are shooting at us," Layan pleaded. "The tank is right next to me. We're in the car, the tank is right next to us."

Then there was the sound of gunfire and the line went silent. The dispatcher asked, “Hello? Hello?” There was no answer. The connection had cut out.

The Red Crescent operator called back. Hind answered. She told them Layan had been shot. She told them everyone else in the car was now dead. She stayed on the line for three hours. The dispatcher read her lines from the Quran to calm her.

“I’m so scared,” Hind said. “Please come, come take me. You will come and take me?” Can you imagine? Can you imagine your daughter picking up the phone from the dead hands of her cousin, who’d been shot to death only seconds before right in front of her?

The dispatchers told Hind to keep hiding in the car. They told her that an ambulance was coming. They told her that she would soon be safe. Hind had been able to tell Rana Al-Faqueh, the PRCS’s response coordinator, where she was: near the Fares petrol station in the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood. Her own neighborhood. She told them the entire neighborhood seemed to be under siege by the Israelis.

It was approaching 6 in the evening. The street was now in shadows. It had been three hours since she and her family had been shot. Three hours in the car with the bodies of her dead relatives. Three hours under fire with darkness closing in.

“I’m afraid of the dark,” Hind told Rana. “Is there gunfire around you?” Rana asked. “Yes,” Hind said. “Come get me.” Then the line went dead again. This time for good. An ambulance had been sent, but it never arrived. Her rescuers came for her, selflessly entered the zone of fire, but never reached her. Hind’s mother, Wissam Hamada, had gone to the hospital anxiously expecting her daughter any minute, but she never showed up. Before the ambulance was dispatched, the Red Crescent Society told the Gaza Health Ministry and the IDF about Hind’s call. They told them she was a frightened, wounded six-year-old girl in a black Kia that had been mangled by tank fire. They told them where she was and that an ambulance was coming. They asked that the ambulance be given safe passage to Hind.

After they’d coordinated a plan for her rescue, the RCS dispatched an ambulance crewed by two paramedics: Ahmed al-Madhoon and Youssef Zeino. As Ahmed and Youssef approached the Tel al-Hawa area, they reported to the Red Crescent dispatchers that the IDF was targeting them, that snipers had

pointed lasers at the ambulance. Then there was the sound of gunfire and an explosion. The line went silent.

A frantic search began for Hind, Ahmed and Youseff. But no one could enter the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood. No Palestinians, at least. Not even to find a little girl. Not even after the tapes of the harrowing calls for help by Layan and Hind had been made public. The IDF had sealed it off. When *CNN* reporters, whose deferential posture toward the Israeli regime has recently been detailed by the Guardian, contacted the IDF about Hind and the two paramedics, giving them the coordinates of the car, the Israelis said they were “unfamiliar with the incident described.” Four days later, *CNN* inquired again about the fate of Hind, Ahmed and Youseff and the IDF replied they were “still looking into it.” The Israelis didn’t look too deeply into ‘the incident’. The evidence was right before them, done by their own hands, likely captured on footage from their own soldiers, tracked by their own drones.

It would be 12 days before the Israelis withdrew from Tel al-Hawa; 12 days before anyone reached Hind, whose body had been left by the Israelis to decompose in the black Kia next to Layan and Layan’s father and mother and her three siblings (also children); 12 days before anyone discovered what happened to the ambulance sent to rescue her; 12 days before anyone found Ahmed and Youssef, left where they had been shot. The headlines in the corporate press said Hind’s body had been “found.” But found isn’t the right word. Hind wasn’t missing. Her rescuers knew where she was and were killed because they almost reached her. The Israelis knew where she was, right where they’d killed her and her family. The media made the double massacre sound like a mystery. But there was nothing mysterious about it. By late January, the killing of Hind and her family and the Israeli attack on a Palestinian ambulance had become routine. Since October, at least 146 ambulances have been targeted by the IDF and more than 309 medical workers killed.

Who will rescue the rescuers? The massacre on that street in Tel al-Hawa took place three days after Israel had been put on notice by the International Court of Justice that it needed to stop committing acts of genocide, stop killing civilians, stop killing children and health care workers – a ruling that Israel has not just ignored but openly defied. Instead, Israel blames the victims of its atrocities.



War against children

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
FEBRUARY 17, 2024

RAMZY BAROUD

On February 8, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was in Washington on an official visit, aimed at working jointly with the United States to make “sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself.”

If such a statement was made soon after the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation of October 7, one may cognize its logic, based on the well-known, inherent bias of both Washington and Berlin towards Israel. The statement and the visit, however, were conducted on the 125th day of one of the bloodiest genocides in modern history.

The purpose of the visit was highlighted in a press conference by White House spokesperson John Kirby, even though, hours later, US President Joe Biden admitted that Israel has gone “over the top” in its response to the Hamas attack on October 7. If killing and wounding over 100,000 civilians, and counting, is Israel’s version of self-defense, then both Scholz and Biden have done a splendid job in ensuring Israel has everything it needs to achieve its bloody mission.

However, in this context, who is entitled to self-defense, Israel or Palestine? On a recent visit to a hospital in a Middle Eastern country which remains confidential as a precondition for my visit, I witnessed one of the most horrific sights one could ever see. Scores of limbless Palestinian children, some still fighting for their lives, some badly burned, and others in a coma.

Those who were able to use their hands have drawn Palestinian flags which hung on the walls beside their hospital beds. Some wore SpongeBob T-shirts and others hats with Disney characters. They were pure, innocent, and very much Palestinian. A couple of children flashed the victory sign as soon as we said our goodbyes. Little kids wanted to communicate to the world that they remain strong and that they know exactly who they are and where they come from.

The children were far too young to realize the legal and political context of their strong feelings toward their homeland. UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 (XXIX) has “affirmed the inalienable right of the Palestinian people in Palestine [...], the right to self-determination, (and) the right to national independence and sovereignty.”

The phrase ‘Palestinian right to self-determination’ is perhaps the most frequently uttered phrase in relation to

Palestine and the Palestinian struggle since the establishment of the United Nations. On January 26, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) also affirmed what we already know, that Palestinians are a distinct “national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Those injured Palestinian children do not need legal language or political slogans to locate themselves. The right to live without fear of extermination, without bombs, and without military occupation is a natural right, requiring no legal arguments and unfazed by racism, hate speech, or propaganda.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a world of common sense, but in topsy-turvy legal and political systems that exist to only cater to the strong. In this parallel world, Scholz is more concerned about Israel being able to ‘defend itself’ than a besieged Palestinian population, starving, bleeding, yet unable to achieve any tangible measure of justice.

Despite this, Israel still does not have the right to defend itself. Logically, those carrying out acts of aggression should not demand that their victims refrain from fighting back.

Palestinians have been victimized by Israeli colonialism, military occupation, racial apartheid, siege, and now genocide. Therefore, for Israel to invoke Article 51, Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations is a mockery of international law. Article 51, often used by great powers to justify their wars and military interventions, was designed with a completely different legal spirit in mind.

Article 2 (4) of Chapter I in the UN Charter prohibits the “threat or use of force in international relations.” It also “calls on all members to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of other states.” Since Israel is in violation of Article 2 (4), it simply has no right to invoke Article 51. In November 2012, Palestine was recognized as an Observer State at the UN. It is also a member of countless international treaties and is recognized by 139 countries out of the 193 UN members. Even if we accept the argument that the UN Charter only applies to full UN members, the Palestinian right to self-defense can still be established.

In 1960, General Assembly Declaration No. 1594 guaranteed independence to colonized nations and people. Although it did not discuss the right of the colonized to use force, it condemned the use of force against liberation movements.

Gaza and manipulation

AFTAB ALI KHAN MUSA

The Nation

FEBRUARY 03, 2024

Within the complexities of global politics, the manipulation of public perception and the exercise of power have reached unprecedented heights. State brainwashing, driven by the concepts of hegemony of consent and Postmodernism, has become a formidable force, blurring the lines between reality and orchestrated narratives. A tragic illustration of this disturbing trend is the ongoing situation in Gaza, where innocent children bear the brunt of geopolitical maneuvers, their lives discarded in a brazen display of power.

Hegemony of consent, a term coined by Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, refers to the subtle but pervasive control that the ruling class exerts over the beliefs and values of society. This control is not enforced through coercion alone but is deeply ingrained in cultural and social institutions, shaping the way people think and perceive the world. In the context of global politics, states often use media, education, and cultural practices to manufacture consent, creating a narrative that aligns with their interests. Postmodernism, on the other hand, challenges the very nature of truth and reality. It questions established norms and encourages skepticism toward grand narratives. In the realm of politics, Postmodernism can be both liberating and perilous. While it fosters critical thinking, it also opens the door to a world where truth becomes subjective, easily manipulated by those in power.

Gaza, a beleaguered strip of land caught in the crossfire of political disputes, epitomizes the consequences of state brainwashing and the erosion of compassion. The ongoing conflict, fueled by historical animosities and power struggles, has resulted in the senseless killing of innocent children who have no political agency. The tragedy lies not only in the loss of lives but in the insidious acceptance and even celebration of such violence by certain segments of society. It is disheartening to

witness how the hegemonic narrative perpetuated by the Israeli government portrays this conflict as a necessary act of self-defense. State-controlled media subtly influences public opinion, framing the narrative to garner support for actions that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable. The hegemony of consent ensures that citizens, even the youth, internalize this narrative, blinding them to the human cost of their government's policies.

In the era of social media, where information is disseminated at lightning speed, it becomes crucial to dissect the layers of propaganda and discern the truth. However, the overwhelming nature of the hegemonic narrative often drowns out dissenting voices, leaving the global populace susceptible to manipulation.

The chilling example of Israeli youth openly expressing appreciation for the Gaza genocide underscores the perilous intersection of state brainwashing and Postmodernism. The erosion of empathy and the dehumanization of 'the other' become normalized, creating a toxic environment where violence is not only condoned but celebrated.

This alarming trend is not confined to the Middle East. Around the world, nationalism and politics have taken precedence over humanity and compassion, echoing the sentiments of political realist Thomas Hobbes. In a world where states prioritize their interests above all else, the collective pursuit of a better, more compassionate world seems to be a distant dream.

The trajectory we are on demands introspection and a collective effort to resist the allure of state-sanctioned narratives. Citizens must become vigilant consumers of information, challenging hegemonic narratives and fostering a global discourse that prioritizes empathy, justice, and shared humanity. Only then can we hope to reclaim a world that is meaningful, selfless, and true to the principles of a compassionate humanity.

Endurance in Gaza

AFAF JABIRI

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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My generation was surrounded by people with vivid memories of pre-1948 life and the harrowing events of the Nakba from 1947 to 1949. These narratives have become a canvas upon which I try to comprehend the profound impacts of atrocities committed in Gaza against the Palestinians. Conversations within the camp consistently hearkened back to the past, with every aspect of daily life measured against the backdrop of pre-Nakba times. The elderly recounted their losses, their painful journeys of exile, the profound trauma they endured, and the continuing sense of injustice in their hearts.

For us, the younger generation, it was not just about hearing historical events; it was a visceral experience of living alongside those who directly witnessed and endured the atrocities of that tumultuous period. The weight of their memories, losses and continuing struggles shaped our understanding of identity and fuelled the quest for justice. Certain stories became enduring narratives within the camp, readily retold and passed down through generations, especially those related to resistance. Yet, there were stories that surfaced rarely or were deliberately concealed, particularly from strangers and researchers who intermittently visited the camp seeking to document narratives.

Among the concealed stories were those entailing the agonising experiences of forced starvation, instances of sexual violence perpetrated by the Jewish Haganah militia against both men and women, and the heart-wrenching narratives of mothers who, amid bombardment, left their children behind. The latter stories, if resumed later by the fortunate reunion of parent and child, were recounted with a certain sense of pride for the strength displayed. For those who never knew the fate of their children and other loved ones, these stories were so painful that they were not spoken of in an attempt to hide the severe sense of loss and guilt.

Yet, it was the narratives of hunger that bore the most profound emotional weight. When recounted,

these stories were often punctuated with the poignant expression, “I pray to God that these days are never relived or experienced by anyone, whether a friend or foe”. Adding to the anguish in these stories was the underlying sense of shame. In a community once skilled in the art of food production, the recollection of starvation represented a dissonance – a stark departure from the strength and resourcefulness that defined their heritage.

The memory of forced starvation reflected not only physical deprivation but a profound departure from the self-sufficiency that had characterised their history. Planting wherever they went marked an important action for Palestinians, not only to prevent the recurrence of such suffering but also to restore a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency for a people that once thrived on its ability not only to produce sustenance but to treat food-making as an art. As I read reports from Gaza about people grappling with forced starvation – unable to secure flour for bread, struggling to prepare a decent meal to nourish their families, and losing children to hunger – the anguished look and expressions of my grandmother while recounting the desperate days of famine persistently come to mind.

The Haganah militia laid siege on her village from around June 1948 to April 1949. During this time, those who challenged the blockade and tried to bring supplies to the village were either killed or forcibly disappeared; one of them was my grandfather, who disappeared and was never heard from again. Not only were there no supplies entering the village, but also the Haganah fighters deliberately destroyed food storages, slaughtered cows and sheep, and burned fields of wheat and orchards of grapes, apples and apricots. My memories of my grandmother’s face as she recounted these hardships become a window into the emotions that accompany the struggle for existence – the feelings of desperation and helplessness, and the crushing weight of responsibility to provide for loved ones.

Guilty as charged

BEELAM RAMZAN

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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When the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to prevent genocide and ensure humanitarian aid to civilians, it was the demonstration of genuine understanding of the nature of crimes and intention of Israel.

However, the decision so far has not stopped Israel and its military force to perpetrate horrific crimes. People in Falasteen continue to die and starve amidst a catastrophic disaster and the looming threat of famine. Without a complete ceasefire, an important measure missed out by the ICJ, there can be no end to this destruction. South Africa filed a complaint on December 29, 2023 at the ICJ Hague and alleged that Israel in contravention to Article I of the Genocide Convention was perpetrating acts of genocide under Article II and III against Falasteeni with an intention to destroy them. The sceptical section of media opined in 'The Economist's' January 2024 edition that South Africa's case was "flimsy" and "making a mockery of the court" by bringing the charges of genocide against Israel who is responding in "self-defense" targeting "a terrorist group".

The analysis fell to the ground as the case marked a legal victory for South Africa; the court entertained the country's stance in opposition to the question of jurisdiction raised by Israeli lawyers.

The court observed the grim figures of death and disaster in the light of reports of various credible UN agencies like the OCHA, WHO, UNRWA, indicating 25,700 Palestinians have been killed, over 63,000 injured, over 360,000 housing units have been destroyed and approximately 1.7 million persons have been internally displaced. Almost 93 percent of the population in Gaza face extreme hunger. South Africa successfully convinced the court that there was intention to destroy Palestinians that constitute a "distinct national, ethnical, racial or religious group and hence a protected group within the meaning of Article II of the Genocide Convention" in the light of genocidal and dehumanizing rhetoric from the senior Israeli government officials on record.

Considering the circumstances and evidence, the court considered that the "catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip is at serious risk of further deterioration" and as a means to address the urgency of the situation ordered six provisional measures on January 26, 2024, with a majority vote of 15-2, directing Israel and its military to take all measures to prevent the killing of people in the besieged strip, causing them

bodily or mental harm, inflicting on them destruction, imposing measures intended to prevent births, and prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide, ensure immediate and effective measures to enable the humanitarian assistance, ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts, and submit a compliance report to the court on all measures taken within one month.

Even though this is a provisional ruling, it is significant as it may be widely seen as a finding that Israel's acts amount to genocide, until the final order, and emphasizing the need for immediate measures that shall be taken by the perpetrator to address the adverse conditions of life of Palestinian people.

Israel failed to convince the court that it was not violating the Genocide Convention, and merely acted in self-defence to combat the October 7 attack by Hamas. It even failed to convince that there was no intent to destroy Palestine and it was assisting humanitarian aid when there was evidence to the contrary. It is shocking that Israel makes no distinction between civilians and combatants and is oblivious to use of force proportionately. Dropping 970 kg bomb in densely populated places is not striking military target or responding in self-defence. It is evidence of genocide.

The court's orders are binding and create legal obligation for Israel to comply and report the progress in a month. The rising death toll and the lurking danger of Israel's another plan of attack on Gaza's densely populated Rafah city raises grave doubts about the intention of Israel to kill and displace thousands. The targeting of medical and hospital facilities and blocking basic health services for Palestinian refugees by UNRWA raises serious concerns whether Israel is meeting its obligations under the court's order.

South Africa is the only country to feel an obligation to prevent genocide from being committed under Article 1 of the Genocide Convention, although it is an obligation on all member states under the Convention to protect and prevent commission of the genocide by stopping arms trade or military aid to Israel and prohibiting politics of war. There is an increased moral and political pressure on the US, the champion of international global order and human rights to play its role in stopping the war. If the member states do not help stop this destruction, they will be considered complicit in the crime of genocide under the convention.

Bushnell's protest

BELEN FERNANDEZ

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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Over the past 143 days, Israel has killed nearly 30,000 Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave. In video footage recorded prior to and during his self-immolation, Bushnell states that he will “no longer be complicit in genocide” and that he is “about to engage in an extreme act of protest – but compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonisers is not extreme at all”.

To be sure, Palestinians have long been accustomed to, well, burning to death at the hands of Israeli weaponry, ever since the state of Israel undertook to lethally invent itself on Palestinian land in 1948. The Israeli military's use of skin-incinerating white phosphorus munitions in more recent years has no doubt contributed to the whole Palestinian “experience”.

After pertinently observing that US complicity in the genocide of Palestinians is “what our ruling class has decided will be normal”, Bushnell plants himself directly in front of the Israeli embassy gate – in full US military fatigues – and proceeds to douse himself with flammable liquid. As he rapidly burns to death, he repeatedly shouts: “Free Palestine”, while security personnel order him to get “on the ground”. One particularly helpful individual points a gun at the blaze.

In the aftermath of Bushnell's self-immolation, the *New York Times* announced: “Man Dies After Setting Himself on Fire Outside Israeli Embassy in Washington, Police Say” – a rather strong contender, perhaps, for the most diluted and decontextualised headline ever. One wonders what folks would have said in 1965 had the US newspaper of record run headlines like: “Octogenarian Detroit Woman Dies After Setting Herself on Fire, Police Say – An Event Having Nothing Potentially To Do With Said Woman's Opposition To The Vietnam War Or Anything Like That”.

Speaking of Vietnam War-related self-immolations, recall renowned US historian and journalist David Halberstam's account of the 1963 demise in Saigon, South Vietnam, of the Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc: “Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of

burning flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly... I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered even to think”.

And while such an intense and passionate form of suicide is no doubt bewildering to many, genocide should be all the more appalling; as Bushnell himself said, self-immolation is nothing “compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine”, where people know all too well how quickly human beings burn.

In Bushnell's case, the US political-media establishment appears to be doing its best to not only decontextualise but also posthumously discredit him. *Time Magazine's* write-up, for example, admonishes that the US “Defence Department policy states that service members on active duty should ‘not engage in partisan political activity’” – as though actively abetting a genocide weren't politically “partisan”.

Furthermore, the magazine specifies, US military regulations “prohibit wearing the uniform during ‘unofficial public speeches, interviews’”, and other activities.

Perhaps Bushnell's ashes can be tried in military court. At the bottom of the *Time* article, readers are charitably given the following instructions: “If you or someone you know may be experiencing a mental-health crisis or contemplating suicide, call or text 988” – which naturally implies that Bushnell was simply the victim of a “mental-health crisis” rather than someone making a most cogent and defiant political point in response to an extremely mentally disturbing political reality.

At the end of the day, anyone who is not experiencing a serious ‘mental-health crisis’ over the genocide going down in Gaza with full US backing can be safely filed under the category of psychologically disturbed.

Of course, the US also perpetrated its very own genocide against native Americans – another bloody phenomenon that has not been deemed worthy of diagnosis as a severe collective mental disturbance or anything of the sort. As per the official narrative, if you think it's crazy for the US or its Israeli partner in crime to commit genocide, you're the crazy one.



Bushnell's call: 'Free Palestine'

SULTAN M HALI

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MARCH 03, 2024

Aaron Bushnell, the United States Air Force cyber defence operations specialist, who self-immolated in front of the Israeli Embassy in Washington, while screaming “Free Palestine” has shaken the conscience of the whole world except Israel. The extreme protest by Bushnell has come in the wake of an assault that Israel launched on Gaza after Hamas fighters attacked Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people and seizing about 250 as hostages. Since those attacks, Israel has bombarded the Palestinian territory from air, land and sea and launched a ground invasion. More than 30,000 people have been killed in the Israeli assault, while the campaign in Gaza has left much of the territory in ruins and displaced more than 80% of its population.

This is not the first instance of self-immolation for support for Gaza victims. In December 2023, a protester set herself on fire outside the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta. A Palestinian flag was found at the scene and the act was believed to be one of “extreme political protests”. The latest protestor, 25-year-old active service airman, Aaron Bushnell, who was stationed at the Lackland Air Force base with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron in San Antonio, Texas, died from his injuries according to the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC. US media reports said Bushnell live streamed himself on the social media platform *Twitch*, wearing fatigues and declaring he would “not be complicit in genocide” before dousing himself in liquid on February 25, 2024.

Shortly before his final act in this world, Bushnell posted the following message on *Facebook*: “Many of us like to ask ourselves, ‘What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow South? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?’ “The answer is, you’re doing it. Right now.” Retaliating to Israel’s war on Gaza, Bushnell appears to have grown disillusioned with the US military and his own role as a service member, according to posts on the online forum *Reddit* under a handle matching one used by Bushnell.

Self-immolation is not a new form of political protest, but it is by no means a common one. Dozens of Buddhist monks committed self-immolation to protest the suppression of

Buddhist leaders in Vietnam in the middle of the last century to draw attention to the US attacks on their homeland. Then the practice spread to the Soviet Bloc. It began when hope died. In 1968, students in Warsaw and Prague protested, much like students elsewhere in the West that year. In Czechoslovakia, the leadership of the Communist Party instituted liberal reforms, relaxing censorship and promising to build “socialism with a human face.” It was known as the “Prague Spring”. Little is known about Aaron Bushnell. His Facebook page shows that he had been following the war in Gaza and admired Palestinian American Rashida Tlaib, a Democratic Congresswoman from Michigan. We know that Bushnell belonged to a generation of Americans—adults under the age of thirty—who express more sympathy with Palestinians than with Israelis in the current conflict. That he was a member of the military surely made matters worse.

Bushnell wrote a will in which he left his savings to the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund. Perhaps he had watched the hearing of a case in federal court in California, brought by Defense for Children International-Palestine in an attempt to stop the Biden Administration from continuing to aid the Israeli attacks on Gaza. Perhaps he saw the US government argue that there is no legal pathway for citizens to stop the government from providing military aid, even if it can be shown that the aid is used to genocidal ends. A few days later, the judge in the case, Jeffrey White, said that the legal system could indeed do nothing.

It is probable that Bushnell was aware of the proceedings of South Africa’s case against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Perhaps, he was exposed to the incessant coverage of the Israeli atrocities against women and children of Gaza and the majority of the besieged and beleaguered Gazans who are experiencing extreme hunger. He was cognizant of the fact that the ICJ ordered Israel to take immediate measures to protect Palestinian civilians but Israel has ignored the ruling, and the United States has vetoed resolutions calling for a ceasefire and argued, in another ICJ case, that the court should not order Israel to end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.



Bushnell's heroic sacrifice

UMAIR ASLAM SHERANI

Pakistan
OBSERVER
FEBRUARY 29, 2024

On February 25, 2024, 25-year-old Aaron Bushnell, an active-duty member of the United States Air Force, carried out a dramatic act of protest that reverberated far beyond the borders of Washington, DC. In a one-airman revolt against the ongoing US-backed slaughter, Bushnell set himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy.

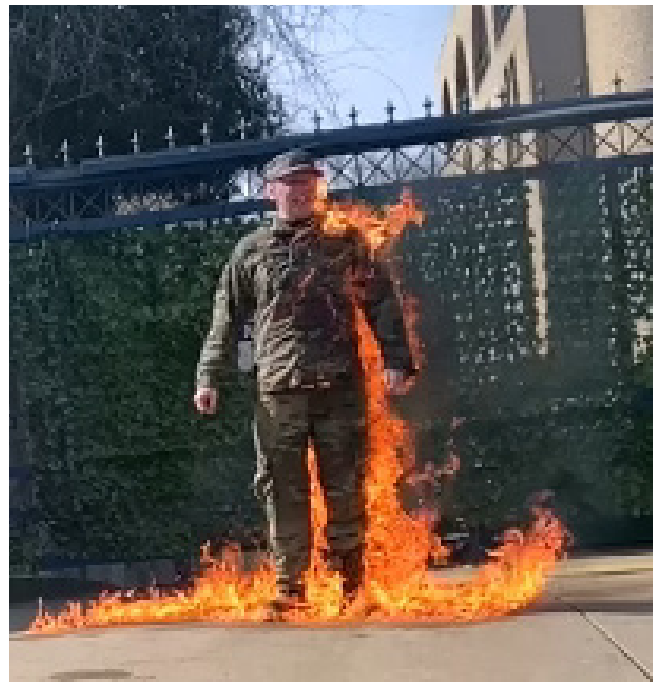
His extreme act of self-immolation serves as a stark contrast between suicide and genocide. While suicide is often seen as an individual's desperate escape from pain, genocide represents the systematic annihilation of entire communities. Bushnell's choice to self-immolate was a visceral cry against the atrocities unfolding in Gaza—a powerful statement that transcends borders and challenges the conscience of the world.

Self-immolation, as a method of protest, is a dramatic and terrible action that emphasizes ongoing conflicts and human rights violations. It is crucial to handle such situations with respect and awareness of the complex political and psychological factors that motivate them.

Bushnell's deed was not the first self-immolation in apparent protest of the Israel-Hamas conflict. In December, a lady set herself on fire in front of the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta, in what authorities described as an "extreme political protest" against the war. The woman survived, although she had third-degree burns all over her body and was hospitalized in severe condition. Police have not disclosed her identity. When a 61-year-old Army veteran working as a security guard at the Consulate attempted to save the woman, he sustained serious burns.

Since the Vietnam War, self-immolation has been a spectacular but unusual form of protest in the United States. Bushnell emailed many politically progressive blogs just hours before his death, informing them of his "highly disturbing" final deed. "Today, I intend to engage in an extreme act of protest against the genocide of the Palestinian people," stated the email, which was shared with the *BBC*.

In the face of such a tragic event, Western corporate media has been put to shame. Bushnell's sacrifice demands that we confront uncomfortable truths about complicity,



silence and the urgency of addressing global injustices. His legacy will forever remind us that individual actions can ignite collective consciousness and force us to reckon with the cost of indifference.

As we mourn Aaron Bushnell's passing, let us also honour his courage—a courage that blazed like the flames that consumed him. May his memory serve as a beacon, urging us to question, resist, and fight for a world where no one is left to burn in silence.

Aaron Bushnell's defiant act of self-immolation outside the Israeli embassy shattered the silence of world leaders and challenged the moral compass of Western humanity. In a bold departure from calculated responses, his blaze of defiance exposed the hypocrisy of our times, demanding an end to indifference. His sacrifice transcends borders, serving as a wake-up call against collective complacency and urging a relentless pursuit of justice and human rights. Bushnell's legacy will forever illuminate the shadows of our moral choices, igniting a fervent commitment to compassion and empathy in the pursuit of a more just world.

Einstein's legacy: The Gaza crisis call

MEHR JAN

**Pakistan
OBSERVER**

MARCH 01, 2024

In today's world, the air feels thick with suffocation. Amidst our daily and mundane routine, we're acutely aware of the anguish engulfing many in Gaza- it's been four and a half months and there is no ceasefire in sight. The weight of witnessing evil reign unchecked is crushing—there's no denying history's darkest moments are unfolding before our eyes and we are powerless to intervene. A restless agony grips many as Israel's onslaught persists. Reuters reports over 30,000 Palestinians have been killed and Netanyahu's relentless pursuit of ethnic cleansing remains unchecked. Despite global outcry, protests and pleas for a ceasefire, the beast of violence continues his diabolical ways of wiping out an entire nation.

In a disturbing comparison, Netanyahu's behaviour mirrors that of another infamous figure tied to one of history's most significant genocides. Like Hitler, he exhibits determination and unwavering resolve, reminiscent of the dictator's ruthless extermination of over six million Jews. The horrifying massacre came back to me on my recent viewing of the Netflix docudrama 'Einstein and the Bomb.' The film shed light on the moral quandary faced by the renowned physicist—a pivotal moment in history as he grappled with his involvement in America's creation of the atomic bomb.

The narration delves into a pivotal moment on August 2, 1939, just before the onset of World War II, when Einstein penned a crucial letter to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This letter, a mere two pages long, would catalyze the United States' entry into the nuclear arms race, altering the course of history. Einstein's urgency stemmed from the revelation that German scientists had unlocked nuclear fission—the process of splitting an atom's nucleus to unleash tremendous energy. His letter cautioned Roosevelt about the potential creation of "extremely powerful bombs of a new type" in light of this discovery. Despite his initial push for accelerated uranium research in the US, Einstein would later ruefully label the letter as his "one great mistake."

While Einstein didn't directly participate in the

infamous 'The Manhattan Project,' his profound influence undeniably changed the course of history. The film's gripping narrative unveils lines that provoke deep reflection, highlighting the delicate balance of power and its responsible use, even in humanitarian contexts. In one of the scenes, Einstein, while confiding with friends, reveals his anguish over Hitler's atrocities and the world's seemingly passive response. Despite his radical pacifism, Einstein recognized the necessity of organized force to counter evil forces as he said "Organized force can be opposed by organized force." His acknowledgment of pushing for nuclear power to combat Hitler's malevolence underscores the grim reality of confronting tyranny.

Nearly 79 years later, we face another tragic humanitarian crisis orchestrated by a ruthless leader, obliterating an entire nation. It's painfully evident that Netanyahu, like Hitler, responds only to the language of 'force.' Diplomatic appeals have failed, leaving the prospect of breaking his hardened resolve through a united show of military might, and if not by all, but at least spearheaded by Muslim states, as being the most viable option. Surely that would have made a difference, and served as a clear warning — the amalgamation of united forces with the potential for catastrophic consequences if his war crimes remained unchecked, the Israeli President would have been forced to reconsider his ways.

However, the lukewarm response from the so-called Muslim Brotherhood stands out as the most significant disappointment in this crisis. The recent self-immolation of a US serviceman who said he did not want to be complicit in the genocide is the standing of a martyr. While his incredibly shocking stance is heartbreaking, it defines helplessness with a resolute to not just idly sit by. Einstein did the same. He spoke of not being complicit as the horror unfurled and even when later he spoke in regret, "Had I known the Germans would not succeed in producing an atomic bomb, I would not have taken part in opening that Pandora's box," the influential scientist took a stand for humanity, even if it meant tugging onto strings of nuclear devastation.

Deceitful post-war Gaza plan!

SYED QAMAR AFZAL RIZVI

Pakistan
OBSERVER
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Israeli Premier Netanyahu unveiled a deviously devised centrifugal post-war Gaza plan. The plan promotes differences between Israel and its western allies, particularly the United States and the UK. As per

this one-sided conceived plan, Tel Aviv will move forward to establish a security buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the Gaza Strip's border, arguing that the said security zone would remain "as long as there is a security need

Greater Israel

ARIF HASAN

The barbaric war waged by Israel against Hamas has violated the UN Charter of Human Rights and the laws of war, and is being judged as possible genocide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Calls for a ceasefire in the Security Council have been vetoed by the US and its allies, all of whom are EU and/ or Nato members. UN agencies have not only expressed their concern about the scale of devastation in Gaza, they have also expressed their horror and called for a ceasefire. Israeli atrocities have led to demonstrations by millions of people across the world censoring Israel and asking for an end to the war and the accommodation of Palestinian rights. The Palestinians have conducted a well-organised campaign explaining the history of their struggle and the role that the European powers and the US have played in the creation of Israel and in maintaining it. This role includes fake media news campaigns in Israel's favour; dehumanising Arabs and Muslims in whose lands oil, gas, and trade routes between the Middle East, Europe, and the US are located; the purchase of US politicians, involving billions of dollars; and the provision of every form of military hardware and intelligence, including massive financial aid.

In previous Palestine-Israel conflicts, religion did not figure overtly in justifying Israel's acts of war, but it does in this one, making discussions at a rational level difficult, if not impossible. In the present conflict, Israel has used religion in trying to create legitimacy for its occupation and its intention of further expansion. The *Torah* (Old Testament) describes God's covenant with Abraham. The chapter on 'Genesis' (15:18) reads, "To your descendants, I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates." But this is not all, Moses, in the chapter 'Deuteronomy' (11:24), tells the Jews that "every place where you put the soles of your feet shall be yours" and that their borders "shall run from the wilderness

of Lebanon and the Euphrates to the western sea".

Israel's politicians, prime minister and ministers, state officials, newscasters, soldiers, and citizens interviewed for the media, and slogans in demonstrations justify Israel's occupation and future annexation of Palestinian land by quoting from the scriptures. According to the borders defined in the Bible, today's Israel would consist of Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and much of Iraq. But the aspirations of the Israelis are much larger. Israel's finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, presented a plan at a right-wing meeting in Paris in March 2023 which included parts of Saudi Arabia. An Israeli politician believes Israel will capture Makkah and Madina and "purify them". Ever since the Iraq-Iran war in 1981, Israel has played a strategic role in providing intelligence, logistics, weapons, and, in many cases, direct armed intervention in support of the US and its allies to weaken and divide strong Arab states along ethnic and political lines, thus reducing their capability to stand up to Israel in an armed conflict. As a result, the US has a military presence both in Iraq and Syria, and it can bomb Lebanon at will. At the same time, the Israelis have wooed right-wing Arab states into agreeing to form a coalition against the more radical societies in the Arab world. Because of the portrayal in Western media and films of Arabs as subhuman, Arab lives did not matter. However, due to the exposure of Western hypocrisy, lies, and Israeli barbarism by social media and *AlJazeera*, Western audiences have come to know of the Palestinians as a cultured, kind, and highly civilised and courageous people, and as a result, an enormous admiration for them and their society has developed. This has increased the distance between Western societies and their governments.

(Dawn, February 17, 2024)

for it". It also envisages Israeli security control "over the entire area west of Jordan" from the land, sea and air "to prevent the strengthening of terrorist elements in the (occupied West Bank) and the Gaza Strip and to thwart threats from them towards Israel," the report said. Given the impracticalities and transgressions attached to it, this plan will ultimately fail.

The Plan lay out: Netanyahu unjustifiably intends to prolong a military presence in the Gaza Strip via "made in Israel right to self-defence". The plan states that Israel will move forward with its already-in-motion project to establish a security buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the Strip's border. The proposal, which Netanyahu submitted to his security cabinet on February 22, sees the Israeli army persisting in its war on Hamas until it achieves key goals.

Netanyahu's plan envisions hand-picked Palestinians—in Gaza administering the territory—who it says would "not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them" – essentially proposing that Gaza's future Palestinian administrators will be appointed at Israel's discretion. Palestinian ministry of foreign affairs spokesman said in a statement, "the plan is an official recognition "of the reoccupation of the Gaza Strip, and Israel's imposition of control over it to prolong the war against our people, and an attempt to gain more time to implement. "Gaza will only be part of the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," he added, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa".

Laleh Khalili, an academic at the University of Exeter's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, said, "This has been a fantasy of revisionist Zionists going back to the grandfather of the Likud Party, the self-identified fascist, Zeev Jabotinsky, who believed that an 'iron wall of Jewish bayonets' would defeat Palestinians and force them into accepting a permanently subservient position." The plan, which is broken down into immediate, intermediate and long-term goals, reiterates Netanyahu's more pressing ambitions to see Tel Aviv's full control over the Gaza Enclave via demilitarization.

Israel' false notion of impunity & self-defence: Netanyahu claimed that Israel was committed to international law after the World Court ordered it to take action to prevent acts of genocide in its war in Gaza, but he reiterated that it had a right to defend itself. The first pillar of Israel's self-styled right to self-defence is its characterization of the entire population of Gaza as armed

enemies.

The right to self-defence, in both international and criminal law contexts, refers to the justified use of force to repel an attack or imminent threat against oneself, others, or a legally protected interest. Under international law, the notion of self-defence can be traced in two different institutions i.e., *jus ad bellum* (international law regulating the resort to force) and *jus in bello* (international law regulating behaviour in war). Article 2(4) of the UN Charter strictly prohibits states from using force that threatens the territorial integrity or political independence of any nation, except in cases of individual or collective self-defence as stated in Article 51.

Moreover, International humanitarian law (IHL) clearly delineates between combatants and civilians and explicitly prohibits targeting civilians alongside military objectives. Indeed, the right to self-defence operates within this framework, and customary international law restricts states' use of force in response to attacks to only the armed targets that are the source of the attack against themselves. By no means, the use of force to non-combatant civilians be justified under the right to self-defence. "The Israeli government has simply ignored the ICJ's ruling, and in some ways even intensified its repression, including further blocking lifesaving aid", according to the Human Rights Watch.

What must draw the attention of the international community that by fostering its false notion of self-defence doctrine, Israeli forces have killed more than 29,000 people in the Gaza Strip, two thirds of them women and children, according to the Gaza-run Health Ministry. Israel says it has killed 10000 militants, without providing evidence. So far, Israel has displaced about 80% of the territory's 2.3 million people who have crammed into increasingly smaller spaces looking for elusive safety.

The US, UK stance: Just after the said plan was revealed, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Israel's expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank was inconsistent with international law, thereby signaling a return to long-standing US policy on the issue, which had been unilaterally reversed by the Trump Administration. While commenting on Israel's post-Gaza war plan, US' National Security Advisor (NSA) Jack Sullivan has also vowed that our position is very clear about what we expect with respect to the future of Gaza and our overall vision for the future of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.



Artificial Intelligence

Pakistan
OBSERVER
MARCH 03, 2024

NAVEED AKHTAR

Humans have never impeded the transformation in their lives throughout history rather humans have records in their history of adjusting themselves with innovations if that had been created on an ad hoc basis or with a comprehensive plan of action. Introduction of Artificial intelligence is a milestone and depicts the intellectual capacity of human beings to create or invent more intelligent and efficient inventions than themselves. Given the fact that human beings had started nuclear weapon research projects back in the 1930s, later on, nuclear invention occurred which has enough potential to serve humanity and at the same

time exploit humanity to an unimaginable extent like human beings witnessed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two cities of Japan in mid-1940s, were destroyed. Now it is solely on the shoulders of mankind and especially world leaders to respond wisely and understand that “Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks, such as pandemics and nuclear war,” The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956 but has now become global discourse and headlines due to increased data volumes, advanced algorithms, and computing power and storage improvements. AI systems like *ChatGPT* are built on neural networks,

Living in AI era

WG CDR JAMAL ABDUL NASIR (R)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the simulation or mimicking of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. Human intelligence processes comprise learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. Similarly, in AI, learning is achieved based on available data by applying techniques known as machine learning (ML). For instance, an AI model trained on medical records can learn to diagnose diseases by analyzing symptoms and historical patient data. AI employs logical reasoning to draw conclusions from available information. For example, in an AI-based time attendance system, AI will reason for the absence/late arrivals of certain employees, with inferences such as weather conditions, traffic routes availability, etc. Whereas a conventional database system will not be able to reason such results. While solving problems, AI algorithms tackle complex problems by breaking them down into smaller components.

Although human beings have been making endeavors to build machines that can replicate human functions for quite some time, a tangible outcome was produced by Alan Turing, who put

forward a test known as the Turing Test. According to this test, a machine is intelligent if it makes humans think. In 1956, John McCarthy introduced the term Artificial Intelligence as the “science and engineering of making intelligent machines.” In 1964, Joseph Weizenbaum built a program named ELIZA, which is known as the first Chatbot. However, an AI winter was observed from then onwards till the mid-1990s when the digital revolution ushered in new enthusiasm for development in the domain of AI. Deep Blue, an AI-aided computer system, defeated chess champion Garry Kasparov. Subsequently, the digital revolution and availability of big data paved the way for more robust solutions in AI. Towards the end of 2022, *OpenAI* came forward with a conversational chatbot known as *ChatGPT*, marking a new era of generative AI.

Research in AI is mainly divided into two subfields, Machine Learning, and Deep Learning. Machine Learning primarily comprises algorithms whose performance improves as they are exposed to more data over time. Whereas Deep Learning is a subset of machine learning where multi-layered neural networks learn from a vast amount of data.

mathematical systems that can learn skills by analyzing data. Around 2018, companies like Google and *OpenAI* began building neural networks that learned from massive amounts of digital text culled from the internet. By pinpointing patterns in all this data, these systems learn to generate writing on their own, including news articles, poems, computer programs, and even humanlike conversation. The result: chatbots like *ChatGPT*. The AI system learn from more data than their creator can understand, this system also exhibits unexpected behaviour. Researchers showed that one system was able to hire a human online to defeat the *captcha* test. When the human asked if it was “a robot,” the system lied and said it was a person with a visual impairment.

Elon Musk, who opened AI with Sam Altman, its chief executive, warns that AI is far more dangerous than we can imagine, from the job market to human

privacy, human capital and even stock markets, nation and nuclear security, all are under the direct radar of AI. According to the International Monetary Forum, AI in advanced markets may impact 60 percent job market, and almost 40 percent of global employment is directly exposed to AI. IMF staff assessed the readiness of 125 countries. The findings reveal that wealthier economies, including advanced and some emerging market economies, tend to be better equipped for AI adoption than low-income countries, though there is considerable variation across countries. The dilemma with AI is that it is now compulsory not an option, but options left for humans are that humans should address AI's anticipated negative impacts with actors and stakeholders within and beyond borders, developing policies to assure that development in AI is directed to augment human and common goods.

With the availability of enormous textual data and improved computing capabilities, another domain of AI commonly known as Generative AI emerged. This is based on deep learning with advanced types of neural networks known as transformer neural networks. This form of AI allows computers to generate all sorts of new and exciting content, from music and art to entire virtual worlds.

Initially, *OpenAI* came forward with *ChatGPT* in November 2022. However, *Google* has also launched its GPT platform known as Bard, which is being further improved as Gemini. Microsoft is working on its own platform known as Copilot. Governments and political actors around the world, in both democracies and autocracies, are using AI to generate texts, images, and videos to manipulate public opinion in their favor and to automatically censor critical online content. In India, authorities in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Administration ordered *YouTube* and *Twitter* to restrict access to a documentary about violence during Modi's tenure as Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat which in turn encourages the tech companies to filter content through AI-based moderation tools. Pakistan is one of the youngest populations of the world. Mobile density in the country is almost 80% of the total population. Pakistan is one of the fastest-growing freelancing economies where remittance by

freelancers exceeded \$400 million. The Pakistani nation in general and the young, in particular, are very active in creating content using generative AI tools. Political actors also embedded generative AI during the recent election campaign for outreach to their intended audience.

It is worth noting that during the 2024 elections, an enormous activity was witnessed on social media platforms where opponent political actors were busy competing to further their message. These elections were less violent and rowdy compared to any other previously held elections in the country. AI is here, and nation-states are competing to maximize their benefits. It is alarming that most of the developments in the AI domain are being done in the private sector, thus without government control for regulation. Like any other previous technological advancement, like the fission reaction which paved the way for nuclear energy besides the development of the ultimate weapon, the nuclear bomb. The adversarial use of nuclear technology was never repeated after WW-II. It is also expected that AI will serve humanity with advancements in healthcare, transportation, education, etc., besides integrating the world by overcoming language and cultural barriers.

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Conquering the language barrier in CSS

Pakistan
OBSERVER
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WAQAR HASSAN

The evolution of human beings can be attributed to their capacity for communication through signs and languages. If they hadn't created means of communication, they wouldn't have made the progress they have gained until today. Language is a means to communicate thoughts and ideas effectively. A strong language command can leave a lasting impression on the audience. Failing to communicate effectively leads to a lack of understanding for the listeners and readers. The significance of language becomes vital for students entering their academic careers. The pinnacle of students' talent and ability is reached when they can communicate in exams without any difficulty. Failing to effectively communicate in their academic career leads to poor grades for students. This has a profound impact on their life, causing them to miss out on many opportunities.

Regrettably, schools and colleges in Pakistan have utterly failed to improve students' communication skills, resulting in a majority who cannot speak or write effectively in English. The situation worsens for individuals from underprivileged areas with subpar educational facilities. English is used as a medium of communication in schools, colleges and other higher educational institutions. However, there is a notable disparity in the development of English communication skills among students from different backgrounds because there are serious disparities in our education sector. Differences in educational background create an opportunity gap for students, where fluency in English becomes a determining factor for career success.

The ones who aim to appear in competitive exams are most affected. Good communication skills are essential in competitive exams. Aspirants struggle to excel in this exam without developing basic writing and speaking skills. To see improvement in English language skills takes years of dedication. Making a difference requires consistent effort and can be a

tedious process. Many students in the competitive exam race fail to realize that excelling in English writing is the first requirement to pass CSS. The misconception causes them to think that CSS can be easily cracked in a matter of months. This misleading illusion is detrimental to students who struggle with English writing and speaking.

They enroll in academies hoping for a life-changing transformation in just a couple of months, only to be crushed by failure and disappointment on result day. The cycle persists until they run out of CSS attempts, with no victories to show for it. Although CSS poses a language barrier for many, students can overcome it by researching and studying the basic requirements to master English in this field. To enhance English writing abilities, one needs to improve sentence structure first. Constructing meaningful statements is the first step toward the development of effective English writing skills. Enhancing sentence structure entails focusing on syntax, including phrases and clauses, to construct sentences. Incorporating phrases and clauses adds variety and diversity to sentence structure. In addition, it grants ample independence to the writer to convey ideas without falling short of any structural ingredients.

Moreover, tenses in the English language are vital for determining when actions occur. Failing to master tenses results in an inability to correctly position verbs in their respective periods. Additionally, punctuation marks in English act like road signs, guiding readers to understand what lies ahead in a written piece. Regrettably, English education in schools and colleges often limits itself to teaching traditional rules, covering only basic parts of speech and teaching tenses in a manner that involves cramming structures to understand tense usage in English. Unfortunately, naïve CSS students face an added challenge to clear CSS due to the availability of low-quality books in the market. These books lack international guidelines and

fail to meet FPSC requirements. Moreover, during their preparation, aspirants hardly use the books recommended by FPSC. This flawed approach hinders CSS aspirants from reaching the necessary skill level to excel in the CSS exam. Furthermore, candidates often find themselves even more perplexed and uncritically adhere to advice from CSS-qualified students on social media, oblivious to the fact that their own inadequate English writing skills are the true reason for their failure, necessitating considerable time and effort to meet FPSC's criteria. Next is the failure of candidates to grasp the concept that improving writing and speaking skills takes time. Many students have very high expectations of making rapid improvements in their language skills. This is something that never occurs because no one can go against the natural time requirement needed for improving language structures.

As a result, numerous hopefuls become disheartened and give up on their journey for months until they are faced with exams and have no choice but to appear with the same poor skillset. It again brings failure for them as they fail to improve their competence owing to their lack of consistency in the process of self-improvement. To add to it, candidates rarely engage in reading quality

books and lack the habit of incorporating reading into their daily routines. This compromise negatively impacts the performance of aspirants in the CSS exam and their intellectual capabilities. Passing CSS may not be difficult, but achieving the necessary proficiency takes considerable effort, time, and investment, which can be a daunting task for many. By following a well-guided path, aspirants can avoid failure and succeed in this exam within a specific time frame.

No one is spared from the merciless nature of opportunities. They meet people who become skilled and competent. Hence, developing capability is a personal quest that demands nothing but determination, commitment and a persistent mindset. While our education system may not fully meet these expectations, aspirants also must create a well-defined plan to prepare for the CSS exam. Being from an underprivileged area doesn't determine one's prospects unless one allows disparities to hinder the path of opportunities. Aspiring candidates can boost their English proficiency and successfully compete in CSS with dedicated introspection and effort. The English language in CSS can be a barrier, but only for those who don't want to overcome it.

Nurturing the seeds of knowledge

Imagine a dynamic country like Pakistan, full of young people who are always curious and have aspirations to learn and grow. Pakistan has the distinction of having the third-largest young population in the world, which makes the scenario unique. But here's where things take an unexpected turn: a large portion of these optimistic people never have the opportunity to visit a university campus, and their ambitions are placed on hold. Pakistan's education system is a complex web of public and private institutions catering to a diverse population. With over 41 million students and 1.5 million teachers, the system faces numerous challenges in achieving its educational goals. Naturally, the question is raised: Why? It appears that they face significant challenges and impediments that prevent them from achieving their aspirations to pursue higher education. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. Pakistan, like many other nations,

has committed to achieving these goals, particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

But despite such initiatives, the nation still has problems with infrastructure, gender inequality, access, and quality which act as an obstacle in students' way. Another significant obstacle lies in financial constraints. College fees can be like mountains for many families, especially in rural areas. Imagine a farmer struggling to feed his family, how can he afford his son's education? If we look at this topic in more detail another hurdle is tradition. Sometimes, girls are expected to get married young, putting their studies on the back burner. Then there's the quality of earlier schooling, which can be bumpy like a dirt road, making it tough for some young people to reach the university finish line. Now, think about what happens when these smart minds don't get the chance to learn. It's a bit like a balloon losing all its air – all that energy and

potential just disappear. Pakistan needs people with good skills to be able to compete with other countries, but unfortunately, many young folks end up without jobs. Businesses are out there looking for capable individuals, and the entire country loses out on the fresh ideas and clever solutions that these young minds could have brought. It's like missing out on a bunch of cool stuff that could have made Pakistan even better. Yet, amidst these challenges, there is still a ray of shine! The Pakistani government is making strides to bridge the educational gap by introducing scholarships and programs. These initiatives aim to transform the daunting prospect of affording college fees into a more accessible and manageable endeavor, akin to conquering a friendly hill rather than a hopeless mountain.

Furthermore, to address the challenges plaguing Pakistan's education system, a multifaceted approach is essential. Firstly, implementing and rigorously executing national education policies and initiatives can provide a comprehensive roadmap for improvement. Introducing a uniform curriculum across all educational institutes ensures equal opportunities for students, fostering a level playing field. Balancing formal and informal education, especially in rural areas, can bridge accessibility gaps and cater to diverse learning needs. Strengthening vocational and technical training centers is vital for producing skilled individuals, aligning education with market demands. Empowering local governments, accompanied by an effective monitoring system, can curb corruption and enhance accountability. Legislative frameworks at the provincial level must be developed to ensure the quality of education. Economic incentives for students and career counseling can encourage enrollment and reduce dropout rates. Moreover, initiatives that challenge traditional norms and promote girls' education are crucial for breaking gender barriers. Collaborative efforts between the government, communities, and international organizations are imperative to transform Pakistan's education system, unlocking the full potential of its youth and paving the way for a brighter future.

Despite facing difficulties, Pakistan's journey in education is filled with hope and progress. Think of it like putting together a puzzle where some pieces are missing, but dedicated individuals are diligently working to complete it. The key lies in supporting girls' education, making college more affordable, and ensuring a focus on high-quality learning. This concerted effort has the potential to unlock the incredible abilities of Pakistan's young minds. Just imagine a future with millions of graduates, doctors, engineers, teachers, and artists – that's the vision Pakistan is constructing, step by step, page by page. So, let's rally behind them because every child deserves the opportunity to learn and shine. Together, we can turn Pakistan's education narrative into a success story for the world!

(Nazakat Hussain — The Nation, February 21, 2024)

Pakistan
OBSERVER
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Challenges to research integrity

DR. ZAFAR KHAN SAFDAR

The pursuit of knowledge through research is a fundamental pillar of higher education. Research is the lifeblood of academia, driving innovation, progress and the dissemination of knowledge. Universities and educational institutions play a pivotal role in fostering research culture, yet concerns have been raised about the quality and integrity of research conducted in Pakistani universities. Pakistan's higher education landscape has grown significantly in recent decades. However, it faces numerous challenges, including limited research funding and resources, outdated infrastructure, barriers to international collaboration and insufficient faculty development. While research is recognized as an integral part of the university experience, contributing to both individual growth and the advancement of knowledge that equips students with valuable skills and experiences, relevant to their academic and professional journeys, the existing gap in research output is a matter of concern.

Low citation rates can be indicative of the impact and recognition of research in Pakistan. High-quality research often garners more citations, and this, in turn, can attract more attention and funding for further research. Developing a robust research culture takes time and concerted effort. A strong research culture includes a focus on innovation, critical

thinking, and knowledge dissemination. This might involve fostering a culture of curiosity, academic mentorship, and promoting interdisciplinary research. Adequate funding is essential for conducting high-quality research. The allocation of funds for research, whether from government sources, private sector investment, or international grants, plays a critical role in the research ecosystem. When funds are scarce or misallocated, it can stifle research progress.

Modern research often relies on state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. The absence of such resources can hinder researchers' ability to conduct cutting-edge experiments and studies. Investing in infrastructure and technology is crucial for overcoming this challenge. Addressing these issues and closing the research gap in Pakistan requires a multi-faceted approach. The government, private sector, and international organizations can collaborate to increase funding opportunities for research. This includes research grants, scholarships, and funding for infrastructure development. Institutions can invest in training and capacity-building programs for researchers and students. This might involve workshops on research methods, ethics, and communication skills. Encouraging collaboration with international researchers and institutions can help bridge the research gap. Joint projects, exchange programs, and access to global research networks can enhance the quality and impact of research.

Upholding research ethics is crucial for building trust and credibility in the research community. Institutions should have clear guidelines on plagiarism, data manipulation, and authorship. Improving research facilities, laboratories, libraries, and access to online databases can significantly enhance the research environment. Recognizing and rewarding high-impact research, whether through awards, promotions, or tenure decisions, can motivate researchers to excel. It's important to note that addressing these challenges is a long-term endeavour, and it requires cooperation between government agencies, academic institutions, industry partners, and the research community itself. By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can make strides in contributing to global research and innovation.

Online technologies have revolutionized research globally. Access to vast digital libraries, academic databases, and research tools has the potential to

boost research productivity. However, their influence in Pakistan's higher education sector has raised questions about ethical research practices. Plagiarism remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan's universities. It manifests in various forms, from verbatim copying to paraphrasing without citation. The prevalence of plagiarism damages the integrity of research and erodes academic values.

The prevalence of cut-and-paste culture in research, alongside plagiarism, undermines academic integrity, devalues degrees and hampers genuine progress. It erodes credibility and authenticity, exacerbating with the lack of research ethics education. Integrating such education into academic programs is crucial to uphold scholarly quality and integrity. Additionally, prioritizing impact and rigor over quantity in publishing can combat unethical practices like plagiarism, ensuring the integrity of research.

Limited access to academic journals, research databases, and modern research tools can lead researchers to plagiarize or copy-paste content. This issue can be alleviated through institutional support, subscriptions to digital libraries and collaborative partnerships. To combat plagiarism and unethical research practices, institutions must prioritize research ethics education. This should include mandatory courses on proper citation, research methodologies, and the consequences of academic misconduct.

Academic institutions should prioritize quality research over quantity, encouraging innovative and impactful work. Open-access publishing and collaboration with international scholars can improve access to quality resources. Research integrity issues in Pakistani universities, such as plagiarism and cut-and-paste, undermine academic degrees' credibility and hinder research progress. In order to tackle these obstacles, proactive measures pertaining to research integrity concerns, including increasing consciousness and encouraging novel research, must be implemented. Our colleges and universities should prioritize research ethics education, foster quality research, and promote open access and collaboration, thereby restoring research ethics and academic excellence.



Innovation in academia

DR ABIDA NAURIN

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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Pakistan's academic landscape is at a critical turning point that demands an immediate and comprehensive review. It is clear to me, both as an observer and a participant in this system, that a radical change is necessary to improve education nationwide. Undoubtedly, Pakistan has a long history of academic institutions that have produced outstanding researchers and intellectuals. However, the current situation of academia presents a different image, one tainted by a host of issues that impede advancement and excellence.

In the context of Pakistan's socio-economic development, the relationship – often referred to as university-industry connection or collaboration – bears great significance. Research and innovation are facilitated by university-industry collaboration.

The integration of scholarly knowledge with practical industrial perspectives fosters the creation of solutions for real-world issues. This partnership can help Pakistan overcome many obstacles, such as improving agricultural practices and making technological advancements, which will boost the country's economy. Industries frequently need specific skill sets, and universities can provide academic programmes that cater to these needs. Universities may generate graduates who are better prepared to fulfil the demands of the labour market by coordinating their courses with industry needs. This relationship may benefit Pakistani industries and graduates alike by bridging the skills gap and improving employability.

One of the most urgent problems is the out-of-date curricula being taught in many universities in Pakistan. They frequently fall behind the rapid changes in the world, leaving graduates without the skills necessary to succeed in a fast-paced, modern culture. In academic and professional domains, research conferences and seminars are essential because they create a space where knowledge is exchanged, collaborations are formed, and creative ideas are nurtured. The majority of Pakistani faculty in universities neither give seminars nor attend them. In fact, they regard them as useless. They cannot give citations to support their theories or hypotheses.

Reading is unnecessary and asking questions at

conferences or webinars is merely giving statements without any thought. University owes them lifetime employment and a house – no mobility required for idea development. The focus on memorization and rote learning stifles critical thinking and originality, two skills that are essential for promoting creativity and problem-solving.

Differences in the availability of top-notch education exacerbate pre-existing societal divisions. In rural and poor areas, inequality is made worse by a shortage of resources, qualified teachers, and academic building infrastructure. It is impossible to overstate the value of research and development in academia.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's research culture is beset by a lack of funding, resources, and incentives for researchers to undertake meaningful research. This impedes not only academic advancement but also the country's capacity for technological innovation and advancement.

The education system usually places too much emphasis on exam results, which inhibits holistic learning by fostering a competitive environment. A student's overall improvement is commonly inferred from their grades, which ignores crucial aspects like character development, emotional intelligence, and practical abilities.

To address these problems, a total overhaul of the educational system is required. The introduction of relevant and up-to-date curricula, funding of teacher training programmes, reduction of the educational divide between urban and rural regions, and promotion of a research-oriented environment are all significant steps towards revitalizing Pakistani academia.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors, academic institutions, and civil society is essential to advancing these reforms. Sufficient funding, alterations to the law, and a change in public opinion that values holistic education are all significant components of this transition.

A comprehensive reassessment of Pakistani academics is not only necessary but also vital to the country's progress. We must welcome change, encourage innovation, and give inclusive, high-quality education priority if we are to reach the nation's full potential and build a brighter future for coming generations.

Revamping business education for economic recovery

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FEBRUARY 28, 2024

Close to 300 business schools now exist in Pakistan. The number of business graduates produced by these schools keeps on increasing every year. Yet, not all the graduates land the employment of their choice in the skilled sector. Many end up switching careers by making a compromise to take jobs in customer service, sales and general office administration looking after admin, accounts and tax work. It is important to address the skills-job misfit and gap in academia and industry in terms of understanding the demands of modern day skills set and preparing the business graduates accordingly. To foster industry-academia linkage, some reforms are necessary in curriculum and pedagogy. These reforms centre on faculty development. The single-factor key performance indicator of published research in globally recognized indexed journals has not and will not lead attention towards local socio-economic issues and industry problems.

To get published in such globally indexed journals requires addressing a broader research problem taking global datasets which does not allow investigating the local issues more rigorously. Given the resource squeeze faced by the universities and HEC, it is also not easy to carry out multiple field studies on the local industry. To resolve this paradox, key performance indicators need to add social impact attributes, such as how many start-ups were mentored, how many corporate consultancies were provided and how many trainings or workshops were led by the faculty member.

It is not appropriate to have a single criterion of 10 or 15 HEC recognized publications for academic promotions with no regards to the research area and any social impact or even academic impact in terms of citations in top journals and academic awards for the research. To motivate practicality in pedagogy, it is important to introduce Professor of Practice

and Teaching Apprenticeship positions in business schools. This will help in diversifying the knowledge base of faculty and reduce academia-industry gap as far as practical knowledge is concerned.

Industry academia linkage should neither be seen as an expense basket with topping up travel and logistics budgets, nor should it be pursued as a race to rack up the number of stale MoUs. Rather, it can be looked at as a way of diversified funding source. Extended and customized trainings are needed for small and medium enterprises, micro-enterprises and family businesses to help them scale up, get into formal sector, access more diverse source of finance, access global markets and improving service quality and packaging. This can help in establishing export oriented businesses and such scaled up enterprises with wide and sustainable source of revenues globally can potentially become the source of job placement of business graduates.

Currently, students are required to conduct a research as part of degree requirement. Many do not want to eventually become academics, yet they end up doing academic research supervised by academic faculty with limited industry exposure. Often, the topics are repetitive which provide no utility to the industry. Meaningful applied research with capstone projects shall be pursued rigorously and that is where, the role of Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) becomes important. Focusing on these aspects and making them mandatory in program structure and delivery can bring quality in business education and also filter out the high-performing business schools from others.

Technology is a great enabler as we have seen in Covid-19 period. Many of the top business schools in the country have single campus in an urban area only. Even more than telecommunication and banking, education needs to be more inclusive. Besides encouraging opening campuses in small cities, online courses,

webinars and podcasts need to be introduced to make education more inclusive and interactive. For greater outreach of academic research, podcasts on research and small documentaries on business cases can help in increasing outreach of academic and case study research by the faculty.

In the short run, security situation may not yet encourage foreign students to come physically to Pakistan for higher education like they used to be in the past, but, joint Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can be organized in collaboration with foreign universities to encourage more diverse learning and enrolments. Summer schools can be utilized as a vehicle to increase outreach and also developing all round skills in a business graduate to learn different arts and skills beyond the curriculum.

Finally, the curriculum needs to be skills-driven. It is better to introduce skills based outcomes besides course learning outcomes to create more focus on skills in outcomes based education. Having said that, even addressing these reasons is not enough. Recent trend shows that even the top business schools are not able to claim 100% job placement in relevant area in desired management position soon after graduation of their students. It is because of the general overall decline in economic activity. Due to the economic crisis and inconsistent policies with perverse incentives, the country is witnessing deindustrialization with trade taking more share in economy relatively as compared to value added manufacturing than in the past.

Though, we need improvement in business education to make it more relevant to industry demands, the industry itself also needs to embrace innovation and competition as well as think global and be export-driven. Trading can help in meeting local consumption needs, but to generate more exports, we need to venture in value added manufacturing. This requires political and economic stability, easily accessible energy as well as consistency in policies for a longer duration to bridge trust deficit between investors and the government. Thus, these suggested reforms in delivery of business education and economic policymaking can contribute to economic recovery.

What economic challenges loom ahead?

DR. ABID QAIYUM SULERI

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As Pakistan is getting ready to usher in a new government, the nation's economic trajectory is a focus of attention. The question that looms is whether the change of guard in Islamabad can truly steer Pakistan's economy out of its challenges or if the perils persist despite recent promising macroeconomic indicators that reflect a positive trend compared to the previous year. During the last few months, fiscal consolidation maintained its course, foreign exchange buffers improved, and the current account deficit narrowed, suggesting a robust economic foundation. Yet, a closer look reveals the undercurrent complexities and uncertainties.

For instance, take the example of headline inflation (including energy and food prices). It has receded from 38 per cent to around 30 per cent from May 2023 to January 2024. However, substantial energy price adjustments (including the latest increase of Rs7 per unit in the electricity tariff) pose a challenge to disinflation. The precarious global energy market, marked by disruptions in the Red Sea supply route, adds additional risk. Any hike in global fuel prices will escalate inflation in Pakistan.

Likewise, the government's pledge to reduce food prices hinges on factors such as weather conditions and the ability of provincial governments to curb hoarding and profiteering. Initiatives like the establishment of a dedicated department for price control by the new chief minister of Punjab indicate a proactive approach. One hopes such initiatives will be replicated by other provinces, too. However, the actual relief from food inflation depends on the success of such measures.

While positive strides in exports compared to the previous fiscal year offer a glimmer of hope, concerns arise when analyzing the contributing factors. The low baseline impact boosts export volumes (mainly rice), but the reduction in export unit value raises questions. Notably, high-value-added textile exports continue to struggle, presenting a nuanced picture of the export landscape. A decline in imports, contributing to an improved trade balance, masks a lacklustre recovery in the manufacturing sector, grappling with high energy tariffs and interest rates.

Energy tariffs seem to continue to haunt Pakistan's manufacturing sector (and the residential customers) throughout

2024. It is a fact that energy circular debt (ECD), which has already touched Rs5.7 trillion, should be contained and reduced. However, increasing tariffs is not the only solution for it. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's (Nepra) latest performance evaluation report of electricity distribution companies (DISCOs) is an eye-opener.

The report reveals staggering losses by DISCOs in 2022-23 (Rs166 billion as transmission and distribution losses and Rs263 billion in losses through non-collection of bills). For comparison, the losses by DISCOs during the last fiscal year are equivalent to BISP's annual allocation for social safety nets. Minimizing DISCOs' losses can help contain ECD and

create fiscal space for an additional budget for BISP.

The buoyancy in workers' remittances during the last quarter is encouraging, but shadows loom over its sustainability. Visa restrictions for Pakistani workers in the Gulf countries (especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE), coupled with constraints on changing employers (restrictions on the 'Azad visa'), and deportations pose challenges. The new government will have to use its acumen with the Gulf rulers to negotiate a favourable visa regime for Pakistani workers. The FBR's commendable revenue growth, while impressive at twenty-nine percent from July 2023 to January 2024, loses its lustre when accounting for the thirty percent inflation during

Empowering the workforce

The enactment of the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act 2023 marks a transformative moment in Pakistan's legislative landscape. It's a pivotal step in representing the country's resolve in safeguarding the rights of home-based workforce. With an estimated 20 million individuals engaged in home-based work across Pakistan, this legislation addresses a longstanding gap in the legal framework.

This groundbreaking legislation comes after years of advocacy and campaigning by grassroots organisations, trade unions and civil society groups to address the plight of home-based workers (HBWs) who have historically endured neglect and exploitation due to the absence of legal recognition. Therefore, it is pertinent to analyse the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act, tracing its historical progression, elucidating its key provisions and critically examining its implications for HBWs.

A critical aspect of the Act lies in its definition and scope of home-based work. While the Act offers a broad definition aimed at inclusivity, it warrants a closer examination of the various sectors and occupations encompassed within this definition. Understanding the diverse nature of home-based work is essential to address the specific needs and challenges faced by different categories of HBWs.

Moreover, the Act's prohibition of child labour underscores Pakistan's commitment to protecting children from exploitation. However, ensuring the effectiveness of this provision requires robust enforcement mechanisms and complementary measures that address the root causes of child labour. Initiatives focused on poverty alleviation, enhancing access to education and raising awareness about

children's rights can contribute to eradicating child labour in the long term.

The establishment of a Welfare Fund under the Act marks a proactive step toward ensuring transparency and providing financial support to HBWs. Nevertheless, equitable access to the Fund and transparent management of contributions are crucial for its effectiveness. Exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnership could strengthen the Fund's sustainability.

Addressing the challenges in enforcing the Act necessitates a multifaceted approach. Strengthening institutional capacity through training programmes for regulatory authorities and enhancing coordination among relevant stakeholders can enhance enforcement mechanisms.

Incorporating a gender-sensitive approach into the Act's implementation is vital for addressing the specific needs of women HBWs. This involves targeted interventions, such as providing access to childcare facilities or offering vocational training programmes tailored to women's needs.

While the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act represents a significant leap forward in protecting the rights of HBWs, it is not without its flaws. The Act's effectiveness hinges on robust enforcement mechanisms and adequate resource allocation, which may pose challenges given Pakistan's resource constraints and institutional capacity limitations.

Moreover, the Act's broad definition of home-based work may result in ambiguity and difficulty in enforcement, necessitating clarity and precision in its implementation. The term "home" in section 2(m) stipulates a temporary or permanent resident. It's suggested to remove the phrase

this period. Broadening the tax net and improving the quality of taxes (shifting from indirect to direct taxes) is a must for revenue growth in real terms. Successive governments in the past failed to tap the true tax potential of sectors such as real estate, retail, and income on agriculture. How the new government will fare on this front needs to be seen.

While the State Bank of Pakistan's foreign currency reserves show improvement (\$8 billion versus \$3 billion a year ago), the looming Euro Bonds payment of \$1 billion in April 2024 and the necessity for an additional \$10 billion by June 2024 for external liabilities underscore the fragility of Pakistan's economic position. Any delay in securing the next International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal could cast a shadow on Pakistan's forex reserves and creditworthiness. One expects that the IMF will link the release of the first tranche of its next program with the upcoming federal budget. Maintaining a critical balance between IMF commitments and electoral promises will be a daunting challenge for the new government. Any policy misstep here may take Pakistan back to the abyss of sovereign default that it narrowly escaped in June 2023. The list of challenges confronting the incoming government does not end here. Debt management, entwined with economic policies and foreign relations, is at the forefront. A closer look reveals a debt composition where 57.7 per cent is domestic, while 42.3 per cent is external. Unpacking external debt reveals a delicate balance, with loans from China and Chinese commercial creditors surpassing combined loans from the IMF and the World Bank. In a world witnessing growing geopolitical polarization, the new government will have to maintain equally good relations with the Western

world and China in pursuit of its debt sustainability.

Besides debt, the new government faces an array of challenges, from reviving or privatizing state-owned enterprises to enhancing GDP-contributing sectors' productivity, rectifying trade imbalances, curbing exchange rate volatility, reducing non-developmental expenditures and addressing deficits – not only fiscal and current account but also the trust deficit with the people of Pakistan and the international community.

However, there are challenges beyond economic balance sheets that, if left unaddressed, could render our society uninhabitable, irrespective of economic recovery. The recent harrowing incident in Lahore, where an innocent woman faced the threat of a mob lynching based on false blasphemy accusations, serves as a chilling reminder. Although the victim was miraculously rescued by the courageous intervention of ASP Sheharbano Naqvi, who risked her own life to save her. Yet the incident underscores the pervasive religious fanaticism in our society. Amidst such insanity, aspirations of attracting foreign investment and curbing brain drain seem utopian. While economic challenges demand attention, the new government must ensure society remains a safe place to live. Economic issues may find external support, but combating extremism requires more than financial assistance. Adopting a stance of zero tolerance towards hatemongers, fostered under shortsighted policies of the past, is crucial. All stakeholders must recognize that unaddressed extremism poses a threat to everyone, including those fostering it. Balancing economic prosperity with societal security is the true challenge for the new government.

“along with his family” to include HBWs don't live with their families when doing such work. Additionally, definition of “disablement” under Section 2(e) should be expanded to include “temporary damage” as well due to its prevalence.

Looking to the future, there are opportunities to enhance the Act's impact and address its shortcomings. Strengthening coordination among government agencies, civil society organisations and international partners can facilitate more effective implementation. Additionally, investing in research and data collection on HBWs' working conditions would yield evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions. Moreover, ongoing monitoring, evaluation and adaptation will be essential to ensure that the Act remains responsive to the changing dynamics of the labor market.

The enactment of the Punjab Home-Based Workers Act of 2023 represents a significant milestone in Pakistan's

journey towards ensuring the rights and dignity of its home-based workforce. This landmark legislation reflects Pakistan's commitment to promoting social justice, gender equality and inclusive economic growth. However, the Act's effectiveness hinges on robust implementation, enforcement and resource allocation.

In essence, the Act represents not only a legislative milestone but also a testament to the power of collective action and advocacy in advancing social justice and human rights. By embracing the principles of inclusivity, empowerment and solidarity, Pakistan can build a more just and equitable society where HBWs can realise their full potential and contribute to the nation's socio-economic development.

*(Iqra Bano Sohail — The Express Tribune,
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Pioneering sustainability in Pakistan's financial landscape

FAYYAZ SALIH HUSSAIN

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The discourse surrounding green finance has gained significant traction worldwide as nations grapple with environmental challenges. Pakistan, with its diverse ecosystems and burgeoning economy, stands at a pivotal juncture where green finance could play a transformative role in shaping its future.

Green finance encompasses a spectrum of approaches, each with its own set of assumptions and implications. Understanding these nuances is essential for policymakers and financial stakeholders as they chart the course towards sustainable development.

At the forefront of green finance discourse are the principles of neoliberalism. Initiatives such as the introduction of green bonds and the establishment of green investment funds in Pakistan have demonstrated the potential of private capital to fund sustainable projects. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that these initiatives prioritize environmental impact over profit motives.

Market-making neoliberal green finance seeks to address the limitations of voluntary measures by advocating for binding regulations and increased transparency. Pakistan can draw inspiration from global initiatives such as the European Union's taxonomy to enhance transparency in green investments and foster investor confidence.

Standard neoliberal green finance involves market corrections through taxation or subsidies to incentivize green investments. For instance, Pakistan could explore the implementation of carbon pricing mechanisms to steer its economy towards a low-carbon future.

Beyond the neoliberal paradigm lie reformist and transformative-progressive approaches to green finance. Reformist strategies advocate government intervention and regulation to steer financial markets towards sustainability. Pakistan can take cues from countries like China, where stringent environmental regulations have catalyzed investments in renewable energy and clean technologies.

In contrast, transformative-progressive green finance calls for a fundamental restructuring of the economic system. Rooted in ecological economics and political ecology, this

approach challenges the inherent contradictions of capitalism and advocates a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources. Pakistan can explore innovative policies such as public banks and community-driven investment initiatives to foster inclusive growth.

Embracing green finance offers Pakistan a pathway towards inclusive and sustainable development. With its rich natural resources and growing economy, the country has the potential to emerge as a leader in green finance innovation. By adopting a holistic approach that incorporates elements of regulation, transparency, and equity, Pakistan can pave the way for a greener and more prosperous future.

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture in its developmental trajectory. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and population growth have placed immense pressure on the country's ecosystems, exacerbating environmental degradation and climate change.

In recent years, Pakistan has acknowledged the importance of environmental sustainability and incorporated it into its policy frameworks. The government recognizes the imperative to transition towards a green economy, characterized by low-carbon emissions, resource efficiency, and social inclusivity. Central to this transition is the concept of green finance, which seeks to mobilize financial resources towards environmentally sustainable investments and projects. Pakistan's journey towards green finance mirrors global trends, with a predominant focus on neoliberal principles and market-based mechanisms. Initiatives aimed at promoting private sector involvement in green investments have garnered interest from domestic and international investors.

One challenge facing Pakistan is balancing environmental objectives with economic growth imperatives. Greenwashing remains a concern, highlighting the importance of robust regulatory frameworks and transparency measures.



CPEC Phase-II and strategic priorities

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New provincial governments have almost been sworn in across the country. The formation of the federal government will be completed very soon, completing the democratic transformation through ballots, where the free will of voters played an important role in the country. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Phase-II comprises social development, massive industrialization, formation of SEZs, agricultural cooperation and last but not the least, science & technology. Relocation of qualitative industries from China to Pakistan would be a value addition in this regard.

The anticipation of a Shehbaz Sharif-led federal government augurs well for the continued progress and expansion of CPEC Phase-II, leveraging his extensive experience and expertise. However, vital challenges such as resolving pending dues to Chinese companies, ensuring the safety of Chinese workers, and providing sovereign state guarantees for investments remain pressing. Moreover, the establishment of the newly formed SIFC and the removal of operational hurdles are essential for enhancing the efficiency of CPEC projects. Promptly addressing these issues will communicate positive signals to the Chinese government and investors, fostering further investment in the country's economic landscape. Despite the government led by Shehbaz not yet being formed, the prospect of his leadership instills confidence in championing shared prosperity and driving economic growth and prosperity in the nation.

The recent commemoration of the 10th anniversary of BRI's CPEC reaffirms their significant contributions to both the nation and the global community. CPEC has emerged as a transformative force, catalyzing socio-economic development activities in the country. Notably, Chinese track-II diplomacy has facilitated a diplomatic breakthrough, fostering closer ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which augurs well for the broader acceptance and productivity of BRI and CPEC initiatives. Moreover, the recent agreement to upgrade and include third-party participation in CPEC Phase-II is poised to expedite its development, offering substantial benefits for immense social development, poverty alleviation, job creation

and the provision of basic necessities and human rights. Furthermore, the establishment of corridors focusing on science and technology, green energy, AI, digitalization, human capital, SMEs, hybrid agriculture, health, smart settlements and good governance will be instrumental in advancing the goals of CPEC Phase-II, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth for the nation.

According to latest figures (December 2023), under CPEC many mega projects (15) have been completed including coal, windmills and hydropower. There is an urgent need to change the mix of energy production under CPEC so that real benefits of green energy and transformation may be achieved and institutionalized in the country. In this regard, building of lithium, quantum and nuclear batteries, solar panels production, Hydrogen Power Generation Units, massive production of EVs and last but not least, converting sandy lands into green fields must be one of the key strategic priorities of the new government in the country.

While rigorous work is ongoing on six projects, including the Suki Kinari hydro project of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, its 70 percent work has also been completed. With the completion of all these projects, hopefully thousands of megawatts of electricity will be added to the national grid. Therefore it is necessary to make better use of the help of the Chinese investments to remove the current hurdles in the way of electricity trans-mission at the grassroots level.

Additionally, under CPEC, the project Rashakai Special Economic Zone in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is near to its completion, in which 247 acre of area have been prepared and ready for FDIs. Several enterprises have been registered while a few have started construction of their industrial units. Sincere and systematic efforts should be started to promote Public-Private-Partnership to boost FDIs, industrialization and productivity channels in the country.

Even surplus assets of the domestic banking industry should be diverted into productive projects instead of constantly investing in the Treasury Bills and earning easy money. The domestic banking industry should realize its national reasonability of socio-economic prosperity and

come forward to invest in ongoing projects of the CPEC in the country. Agriculture and tourism industries are considered to be the main pillars of macro-economy in the country. There is an urgent need to develop numerous tourist resorts, parks and picnic points parallel to mega infrastructure projects of the CPEC in all provinces. Innovative ideas are needed to develop tourism industries in the country in which rich experiences of China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Oman may be prime examples for tourism development in the country.

In this regard, infrastructure investments in rural areas should also be promoted. The roadmap of newly elected Chief Minister of Punjab Maryam Nawaz may act as a game changer in the days to come. Rural connectivity with SEZs will further foster economic growth, rural revitalization creating opportunities for the poor to uplift their economic status, which is a precursor to inclusive growth.

People, investment and business friendly policies should be the mantra of new governments, which will give hope of economic revival, stability and sustainability. Denial of political stability and social harmony has been damaging the core fabric of the society due to which community development and overall national economic growth remained below par in the country.

There is an urgent need to recognize and formalize national duties and responsibilities among all key stakeholders to steer the fragile economy onto the right path. It's time for collaborative efforts to pursue the common objective of socio-economic prosperity without succumbing to individual ambitions or resorting to political strife and character attacks. Indeed, the task of economic revival is formidable and cannot be tackled alone. Embracing economic nationalism, fostering political consensus, achieving social cohesion and uniting the efforts of both civilian and military establishments are imperative for charting the course forward.

BRI's future and expectations

The Chinese BRI has become the biggest mega development project of the 21st century which is successfully negating the spillover repercussions of geopolitics, protectionism, unilateralism, war-theatre mentality, isolation, marginalization and gearing the developing countries and Global South towards greater socio-economic integration, connectivity and industrial productivity and cooperation.

Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the biggest recipient of the BRI. Since democratic activities

of the post-general election 2024 have commenced in Pakistan, there is hope that political stability will be restored, leading toward much-needed economic stability and sustainability in the country. The CPEC will play an important role in the days to come. Hopefully, CPEC Phase-II will empower the commencement of ML-I and other mega projects in the country. Additionally, the upcoming Chinese two sessions have also become beacon of hope for regional as well as world economy, brightening new prospects for greater socio-economic cooperation, connectivity and integration between the two iron brotherly countries i.e. China and Pakistan.

Hopefully, China would promote its national plan to achieve new productive forces for The Two Sessions as the annual meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National People's Political Consultative Conference (NPPCC) will be held on March 4 and 5, respectively. According to some prominent Chinese economists, the policy makers of China may set its GDP target at around 5 percent again for 2024 during the Two Sessions. Last September, Chinese Communist Party (CPC) General Secretary and President Xi Jinping presented the idea of building "new productive forces" for the first time. It may be branding of "new quality productivity" or "high quality development."

It refers to China's plan to leverage science and technological innovation to generate new industries and speed up the country's economic development. The Chinese President Xi pinpoints these as deviations from traditional economic growth modes and productivity development paths, features high technology, high efficiency and high quality and comes in line with the new development philosophy which may also be beneficial for the further development and expansion of the CPEC Phase-II in the country. Xi emphasized that sci-tech innovations should be applied to specific industries and industrial chains in a timely manner. He rightly suggested that integrated efforts should be made to transform and upgrade traditional industries, foster emerging industries, make arrangements for future industries and improve the modern industrial system.

Ironically, the Western nations are using decoupling and delinking policies to suppress the remarkable economic growth of China and halting scientific cooperation with China. This is why China needs to achieve new productive forces to enjoy "first-mover advantage."

Unfortunately, the US fatally refused to extend a 45-year-old science and technology agreement (STA) with

China by another five years. It only extended the STA by six months. The US and China will probably delay the renewal of the STA, which expired on February 27.

The US and its allies in recent years have also encouraged their companies to diversify their new investment to countries other than China. However, China is still the most attractive destination for seeking more and more inflows of FDIs in the world. It is hoped that the Chinese economy will be able to achieve 5 percent growth this year, given that the central government will continue to boost domestic consumption, upgrade its supply chain and nurture new businesses.

Furthermore, its local governments will extend their supportive measures to boost the catering, retail, new energy vehicle, tourism and elderly-care sectors and will play an important role in achieving the desired goals of socio-economic prosperity and sustainability. On the national level, the central government's plan to develop the advanced manufacturing sectors will be a main theme of the "Two Sessions."

In 2023, China's economy grew by 5.2 percent in real terms compared with 2022, while developed economies, by 1.6 percent. For 2024, the IMF forecasts a moderate slowdown in China, to 4.6 percent. High-income nations are expected to grow by 1.5 percent. Critical analysis revealed that China's GDP growth was higher than that of other emerging markets and developing countries in 2023 and, thus, China's share of the world economy increased again, to the dismay of those who projected or wished for a reversal of this trend. Short-term projections published by the IMF, for instance, still show China rising relative to the rest of the world. Evidently, the US is no longer the largest economy. China's GDP, measured on purchasing power parity (PPP), has been, for a decade, larger than that of the US. On a PPP basis, China currently represents about 19 percent of the world economy, while the US, around 15 percent. Per capita GDP is much higher in the US, but in terms of absolute economic size China has overtaken the US. China is busy preparing for the annual two sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), some Western media have been enthusiastically hyping that the Chinese economy is collapsing which is untrue.

Admittedly, China-provided public goods including the BRI have been gradually transforming global connectivity, cooperation, and people-to-people communications, and have become an indispensable element in global livelihood and sustainability. China's GDP grew by 5.2 percent year on year to 126.06 trillion Yuan (\$17.71 trillion) in 2023,

according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). It has contributed more than 30 percent to world economic growth for many years in a row, ranking among the top major economies in the world as the largest engine of world economic growth.

Over the past decade, China has implemented numerous opening-up measures, reducing restrictive measures and promoting a more favourable environment for foreign investment. China has remained a strong magnet for global investors, with the country's landmark Foreign Investment Law offering a powerful guarantee for law-based opening-up. The implementation of the Foreign Investment Law and alignment with international economic and trade rules have further improved the legal framework for foreign investment. The central government's timely and effective macro-control measures have helped navigate economic challenges and ensure steady growth. This has provided a favourable environment for both domestic and foreign businesses to thrive, contributing to China's rapid economic development and improvement in living standards. According to the IMF's analysis when China's growth rate rises by one percentage point, growth in other countries increases by around 0.3 percentage points. It seems that China unswervingly promotes a business environment for investors, and is injecting more impetus into world economic recovery. In summary, it is suggested that more investment should be made in advanced technologies to update the country's sectors that produce fundamental parts, material and software, high-end semiconductors and industrial software, especially the industries that are facing suppression of foreign countries.

China should nurture its own technology firms and research institutions that are engaged in work on artificial intelligence, the next iteration of the internet (termed the "metaverse") and the making of humanoid robots and brain-computer interfaces. Building of Corridors of CHIP and AI among the selected member countries of the BRI would be a long term strategy to move forward and achieve the desired goals of modernization, qualitative industrialization, digitalization, diversification of economy and last but not least trans-regional connectivity. Thus China should use AI, internet of things (IoT) and big data to increase the competitiveness of its advanced manufacturing sectors.

*(Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan — Pakistan Observer,
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Climate justice

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THE NEWS
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ZILE HUMA

The World Day of Social Justice is celebrated every year on February 20. The International Labour Organization (ILO) unanimously adopted the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization on June 10, 2008 and termed equal opportunities for development and seeking justice as important pillars for the prosperity of the nation.

Climate change is a global challenge that is creating problems of social justice in multiple ways. There are socioeconomic and geographical structural inequalities, and social injustice caused by climate crises is based on the exploitation of the global economic model. It has deepened the existing inequalities at the local and international levels.

Climate change is an outcome of the Industrial Revolution that led to the adoption of unsustainable patterns of economic growth and prosperity. The beneficiary countries of this revolution were a few countries in the Global North, which became rich. They are still enjoying financial growth and control over the world economic system at the expense of the poor countries of the Global South.

According to the UNDP, globally, 10 per cent of households with the highest per capita emissions contribute 34-45 percent of global household greenhouse gas emissions, while the bottom 50 percent contribute 13-15 percent.

Climate change is negatively impacting poor countries whose contribution to global carbon emissions is negligible. For example, Pakistan's contribution to carbon emission is less than 1.0 per cent, but it is declared by German Watch as among the top countries at risk of climate-led disasters. Many climate-led disasters have hit Pakistan in the last five years like floods in 2022, heatwaves, smog, and glacier lake outburst floods (GLOF).

According to the World Food Program, the following eight countries are facing severe food crises due to the negative impacts of climate change: South Sudan, Madagascar, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Sahel (a region that spans across Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and includes Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali) and the Dry Corridor (a region in Central America).

All of these countries are poor nations and challenges like food insecurity further deteriorate their economic conditions and create social unrest in these countries. Also, when they are still in the process of healing their economies hit by climate-led distaste, they face another calamity caused by climate change.

Climate change-led disasters badly hit vulnerable groups like women, children, differently-abled persons, transgenders and elderly persons. During the financial crises caused by climate change disasters, women and girls become victims of domestic violence due to tension; crime against women and girls also increases manifold. Women do not get appropriate health facilities during a climate-led disaster due to demolished health infrastructure and the diversion of human resources in relief efforts.

During an emergency, it is difficult to evacuate differently-abled and elderly persons. Their specific needs and care are ignored. Moreover, indigenous communities who have less role in policymaking and decision-making processes face the severe effects of climate change since they mostly depend on natural resources for their livelihood.

As the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights has noted, "emerging evidence suggests that the livelihoods and cultural identities of the more than 370 million indigenous peoples of North America, Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific are already under threat."

Climate-led disasters make the poor even poorer, and they remain stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty. For example, due to financial crises caused by climate-led disasters, the poor can no longer afford to send their children to schools. So, one opportunity to educate their children to get better jobs is also lost, and they are pushed further into the poverty trap. Whereas rich people normally have diversified sources of earnings and savings in multiple forms to resist such calamities and can sustain financial losses.

Some decarbonization strategies can also adversely affect the poor class of a country. Transport companies will increase their fares to recover the cost of carbon tax.

When disaster strikes

ALI REHMAT SHIMSHALI AND RAMSHA MEHBOOB KHAN

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Climate-induced disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, tend to have a more severe impact on vulnerable populations, especially those living in poverty. Pakistan, according to the INFORM Climate Change Risk Index 2024, is categorized as a high-risk country for such disasters. This classification underscores the heightened susceptibility of Pakistan to the adverse effects of climate change.

The country has already experienced a series of significant natural disasters, including the devastating earthquake in 2005, as well as the floods of 2010 and 2022. These events have resulted in extensive socio-economic and infrastructural losses, exacerbating the challenges faced by already marginalized communities. The aftermath of these disasters has further entrenched poverty and compounded existing vulnerabilities among affected populations. Disaster is the disruption to the functioning of a community that exceeds its resilience. Yes, natural disasters immensely impact people, but disruptions are further aggravated by unsustainable developmental approaches and practices.

These practices involve the ongoing overexploitation of mountain ecosystems, illegal encroachments in riverbeds, artificial alterations to natural river flows, and haphazard infrastructural development in both the main Indus River and its tributaries. In 2022, the capacity of the Indus River System (IRS) to manage and absorb flood peaks was significantly reduced due to a range of unsustainable land use and water management practices.

The 2022 floods impacted over 33 million people and caused more than \$40 billion in economic damages. The floods submerged one-third of the country and displaced around eight million people. The flooding left 1,700 people dead, 2 million homes destroyed, and killed over 900,000 livestock. Sindh was the worst affected province with close to 70 per cent of total damages and losses, followed by Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. The major issues that emerged due to floods include mass displacement, food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and an increased risk of waterborne diseases, drowning, and malnutrition.

The Post Disaster Need Assessment Report 2022 preliminary estimates suggest that as a direct consequence of the 2022 floods, the national poverty rate will increase

by 3.7 to 4.0 percent points, pushing between 8.4 and 9.1 million people into poverty. The 2010 monsoon flood disaster in Pakistan was both massive and unprecedented, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake. The Federal Flood Commission Report 2010 shows that the floods of 2010 caused a cumulative financial loss of \$10 billion, about 2000 deaths, destroyed 17,553 villages, and impacted 160,000 sq km area of the country.

The floods damaged 392,786 and destroyed 728,192 houses; around 436 health facilities were damaged. The overall production loss of key crops such as sugar cane, paddy, and cotton was estimated at a staggering 13.3 million metric tons. Particularly in Punjab and Sindh, between 60 and 88 per cent of farming households reported losses exceeding 50 per cent for major crops like rice, vegetables, cotton, sugar, and fodder. The devastating floods in 2022 and 2010 exposed critical deficiencies in disaster preparedness and response mechanisms. Weak coordination among various agencies and duplicated roles further hampered response efforts. Emergency response gaps, such as inadequate supplies, lack of communication, and infrastructure damage, compounded the challenges. These issues highlight the urgent need for improved coordination and preparedness measures.

Coordination issues persist at various levels, including inter-agency and international collaboration. The 2022 flood response shows that the global community's response has fallen well, and the consequences of a debt-reliant recovery and rehabilitation plan pose severe challenges to the country. The convergence of climate-related disasters and broader economic issues has created a vulnerable environment for Pakistan, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and equitable financial support to break free from this detrimental debt cycle.

There is a need to learn from past disaster events, anticipate the gaps in response mechanisms, map the challenges, and devise practical coping strategies. Centralized coordination mechanisms at the national level serve as linchpins for effective planning and execution of developmental and relief activities.

Pakistan needs to transition towards a technologically driven, forward-thinking, and adaptable disaster risk reduction (DRR) framework and approaches. The revised

emergency management paradigm can effectively mitigate the evolving nature of disasters and safeguard vulnerable communities. Given Pakistan's diverse topography covering from north to south, a one-size-fits-all approach to crisis response is unsustainable. Therefore, an indigenous, need-based, and geographical-specific disaster risk reduction and response mechanism is necessary.

Communities are the first responders to disasters; therefore, communities need to be taken on board while devising any policy or disaster response mechanism to ensure a more agile and responsive framework. Various tools, apps, and weather forecasting systems in Pakistan are appreciable however there is a need to move towards more authentic and reliable sources of information.

The SMS alert and weather forecasting systems do not provide details of the impacts and duration of the disasters. Therefore, the integration of impact-based weather forecasting systems and the consolidation of reliable, up-to-date data sources need to be incorporated into the overall disaster management mechanisms. By embedding disaster risk reduction principles into public-sector initiatives and harnessing community perspectives through inclusive engagement, Pakistan can strengthen its defences against the ravages of natural and human-induced disasters.

Climate change & infectious diseases

Infectious disease distribution involves compound social and various demographic factors. These include human population density and attitudes, community type and position, water force, sewage and waste operation systems, land use and irrigation systems, vacuity and use of vector control programmes, access to health care, and general environmental hygiene. Meteorological factors that impact the transmission intensity of contagious conditions include temperature, moisture, and downfall patterns. Social and demographic factors such as population growth, urbanization, immigration, changes in land use and agrarian practices, deforestation, transnational trips, and breakdown in public health services have been substantially responsible for the recent renaissance of contagious conditions.

Global climate change is an extraordinary phenomenon that's now considered explosively associated with human conditioning. Atmospheric carbon dioxide situations, which have remained steady at 180-220 ppm for the last 420,000 years, are now close to 370 ppm and rising. Due to advancements in meteorology, we're now able to understand long-term climate changes. A similar understanding might enable the prediction of where and

when contagious complaint outbreaks may occur. The effects of climate change on human health in Pakistan are a broad content, covering areas from extreme rainfall events to shifts in vector-borne conditions. Scientists predict an increased frequency of cataracts due to a lower intensity of downfall events and to glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFs) in mountainous regions.

In the Himalayan region of South Asia, the frequency of GLOFs rose during the second half of the 20th century, and GLOFs have passed lately in Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bhutan. Cataracts produce conducive surroundings for multitudinous health consequences performed from complaint transmission. If floodwaters come defiled with human or animal waste, the rate of fecal-oral complaint transmission might increase, allowing diarrhea complaints and other bacterial and viral ailments to flourish. Fecal-oral transmission of conditions is of particular concern in regions, because of limited access to clean water and sanitation. In developed countries, flood tide control sweats, sanitation structures, and surveillance conditioning to describe and control outbreaks minimize complaint pitfalls caused by flooding, but in developing countries, an increase in diarrhoea complaints, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid is of specific concern.

Flooding can also contribute to increased vector- and rodent-borne and other contagious conditions. Collections of stagnant water give breeding grounds for mosquitoes, potentially abetting in the spread of malaria. A warmer climate could cause water-borne conditions to become more frequent, including cholera and diarrhoea conditions similar to Giardiasis, Salmonellosis, and Cryptosporidiosis. Diarrhoeal conditions were formerly a major cause of morbidity and mortality in Pakistan, particularly among children.

As ambient temperatures increase, bacterial survival time and proliferation, and therefore the prevalence of diarrhoeal conditions, might further increase. Diarrhoeal conditions are largely attributable to unsafe drinking water and lack of introductory sanitation; therefore, reductions in the vacuity of freshwater are likely to increase the prevalence of similar conditions. Rapid urbanization and industrialization, population growth, and ineffective water use are formerly causing water dearth in Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Climate change will complicate the lack of available freshwater as periodic mean downfall decreases in numerous areas.

*(Dr Syeda Sadaf Akber — Pakistan Today,
February 08, 2024)*

Uniting theory and action for climate

DR. KHALID WALEED

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
MARCH 02, 2024

Karl Marx popularized the quote “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. Given the quote, let us not forget that Earth has its needs too, and it is our collective ability that must rise to meet the challenge of climate change.

In the quest to address the escalating challenges of climate change, it is imperative to draw upon diverse theoretical frameworks to understand and formulate effective policies. Among these, Karl Marx’s conflict theory and the paradigm of structural functionalism offer unique insights that can be applied to the realm of climate change policy, particularly in the context of Pakistan.

Karl Marx’s conflict theory posits that societal structures are inherently characterized by conflicts arising from unequal distributions of power and resources. When applied to climate change policy, this theory highlights the stark disparities between those who contribute most to environmental degradation and those who bear the brunt of its consequences. In Pakistan, the impacts of climate change are felt acutely by marginalized and impoverished communities that have limited access to resources and decision-making power. The conflict theory perspective underscores the need for climate policies that address these inequalities, ensuring that the burdens and benefits of climate action are equitably distributed.

On the other hand, structural functionalism, a theory that emphasizes the interdependence of societal components and their contribution to overall stability, offers a different approach to climate change policy. According to this, each sector of society, including government, industry, and civil society, has a specific role to play in mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts. For Pakistan, this implies the necessity of a coordinated and integrated approach to climate policy, where all stakeholders work collaboratively towards the common goal of environmental sustainability. By fostering synergy between various sectors, structural functionalism advocates for a holistic strategy that leverages the strengths of each component to achieve effective climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Comparatively, while Marx’s conflict theory focuses on addressing the power imbalances and social injustices exacerbated by climate change, structural functionalism emphasizes the importance of a cohesive and cooperative societal structure for successful climate action. For Pakistan, both perspectives offer valuable insights: the former calls for policies that rectify inequalities and empower vulnerable communities, while the latter stresses the need for a unified and systematic approach to climate governance.

To develop a comprehensive, effective and equitable climate change strategy for Pakistan, the following detailed recommendations can be employed, integrating insights from both Karl Marx’s conflict theory and structural functionalism.

First, equity-based financing mechanisms can ensure the equitable distribution of resources for climate action. Pakistan should implement progressive taxation mechanisms such as a carbon tax on high-emission industries and compliance with the carbon market. The revenues generated should be earmarked for climate adaptation and mitigation projects, with a focus on marginalized communities.

A national climate fund should also be established to pool resources from various sources, including international climate finance, to support grassroots initiatives and community-based adaptation projects. This will require building climate-smart infrastructure, instilling climate-smart civic sense into the population, climate-aware government, climate-conscious politicians/leaders and logistics. Indeed, this is a politically, diplomatically, economically and financially intensive task.

Second, participatory governance models can empower local communities and include vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. The establishment of community-based organizations (CBOs) and local climate action committees can facilitate direct participation in the planning and implementation of climate policies at the local level. Participatory budgeting processes should be implemented to allow communities to have a say in the allocation and spending of climate finance within their regions.

Third, decentralizing policy frameworks can enhance

regional autonomy in climate action. Provincial and district governments should be empowered to develop and implement their own climate action plans, tailored to local environmental conditions and socio-economic contexts. Technical and financial support should be provided to local governments for capacity building in climate policy planning, implementation, and monitoring. Inter-provincial coordination and knowledge sharing should be encouraged to ensure consistency and synergies in climate action across different regions.

Fourth, utilizing integrated assessment models (IAMs) and adopting a systems-thinking approach can help analyze the interconnections between social, economic, and environmental systems. A national climate change strategy that aligns with sustainable development goals and incorporates multi-sectoral action plans should be developed. This strategy should consider the impacts of different climate policies on economic development, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

Fifth, it is crucial to put our noses to the grindstone and invest in programmes that build the capacity of government bodies, civil society, and grassroots communities. We should also extend an olive branch to international organizations and experts for technical assistance, bolstering our ability to craft, execute, and keep a watchful eye on climate policies. Additionally, setting up a climate change knowledge hub would be the cherry on top, acting as a treasure trove of best practices, case studies, and technical know-how for those at the helm of policymaking and implementation.

Sixth, nurturing public-private partnerships is like a catalyst for climate action, tapping into the private sector's treasure trove of resources, expertise, and innovation. Sweetening the pot with incentives like tax breaks or subsidies can entice private investment into clean energy and green infrastructure projects. It is time to break down silos and encourage a meeting of minds between government bodies, businesses, and research institutions to cook up innovative solutions for climate resilience and reduction efforts.

Moreover, the strategy may propose regional climate cooperation. Pakistan aims to foster collaboration with other South Asian countries to share knowledge, resources, and strategies. This cooperation is intended to enhance regional climate resilience, recognizing that climate change is a challenge that transcends national borders. In this context, SAARC may be renamed South Asia's Resilience for Climate Change (SARCC) to make it more purposeful.

Seventh, it is time we put our best foot forward and enact comprehensive climate legislation, laying down the law with binding targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions and

establishing a robust legal framework for climate action. Implementing regulations that mandate environmental impact assessments (EIA) for all major projects is a must to ensure we're not caught off guard by climate risks.

We need to tighten the screws on enforcement mechanisms to ensure everyone plays by the rules and adheres to environmental standards. Furthermore, IMF's Climate-Public Investment Management Assessment (C-PIMA) can provide insights for public planning, which involves an assessment of the five institutions of public investment management that are key for climate-aware infrastructure. It starts with climate-aware planning, followed by coordination between entities, project appraisal and selection, budgeting and portfolio management and risk management.

Eighth, it is time to set up a national climate change monitoring system that acts as a central hub, weaving together data from a variety of sources like satellite imagery, weather stations, and grassroots observations. Employing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can help us chart the course, pinpoint climate vulnerabilities and mark the X on the map for critical intervention areas. We need to establish a rhythm of regular reporting and evaluation for our climate policies, using indicators that track our strides toward emissions reduction, adaptation achievements, and social equity.

Finally, it is crucial to dip our toes in the water with pilot projects, testing the waters of climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. We should cultivate a garden of iterative learning and policy fine-tuning, taking cues from stakeholder feedback and the latest scientific discoveries to nurture our ongoing climate efforts. Let's throw our hats into the ring of innovation and experimentation in climate governance, fostering an environment where novel ideas and technologies can take root and flourish.

By incorporating these detailed recommendations into its climate change policy framework, Pakistan can enhance the effectiveness, equity, and adaptability of its climate action, ensuring that it addresses both the root causes and the impacts of climate change comprehensively and inclusively.

In conclusion, integrating insights from Karl Marx's conflict theory and structural functionalism into Pakistan's climate change policy framework can provide a more comprehensive and equitable pathway to addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change. By acknowledging the interplay between social structures, power dynamics, and environmental sustainability, Pakistan can devise climate policies that are not only effective but also just and inclusive.



Climate vision for South Asia

DR. KHALID MAHMOOD SHAFI

Daily Times
Your right to know A new voice for a new Pakistan
FEBRUARY 12, 2024

A vision is the planning and ability to imagine how an institution, country or region can develop in the future. The first and foremost requirement to formulate a vision is to carefully identify the prevailing environment and its allied issues. Climate Change is a global phenomenon which defies manmade boundaries and is anti-thesis to the state system. Its global outreach and similar effects on the countries, pave the way for transnational cooperation, and regional solutions built on common grounds. South Asia is most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and therefore requires a regional climate vision. South Asia, with eight nations (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), constitutes about 25 percent of the world's population. The academic discourse about the region revolves around the oldest civilizations, extremism and terrorism, Kashmir and border conflicts, nuclear weapons, lack of regional cooperation, low human development index, and cricket. However, climate change and environmental issues are less focused which are more disastrous than other issues.

Quantification of the South Asian region in the climate context is also very intriguing. Climate Risk Index (CRI), a combination of three elements: sensitivity, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity, is used to measure the effects of climate change. Sensitivity is geographically oriented, which cannot be changed, and states must live with it. Vulnerability occurs due to planning or lack of planning. Switzerland and Nepal are equally sensitive to the effects of climate change, but Nepal is more vulnerable as compared to Switzerland. The adaptive capacity is another challenge, usually, some states behave in a reactive and firefighting mode rather than being proactive and the same is the case with South Asia.

Due to these factors, the eight South Asian nations are among the top twenty on CRI. Moreover, eight out of the top ten polluted cities in the world are in South Asia. Northern South Asia comprises the biggest glaciated areas after Polar Regions, which are fast

melting which leads to flash floods in various areas. Siachen, the highest conflict zone in the world, is also located in South Asia and it further exacerbates the effects of climate change. It is time to adopt a joint climate action which can convert Siachen from the 'glacier of war' to the 'glacier of peace' and a global case for solar geoengineering.

The bulk of the population from South Asia is youth who are suffering from ecological anxiety, and it is much more dangerous as they don't even know that they are suffering. Coupled with this is the lack of climate literacy. In this part of the world, climate change is not a priority. Here people say that it is difficult to meet end of the month, so why worry about the end of the world? One may deny it but a substantial number of people in South Asia believe that climate action is an elitist talk and is not a popular topic among masses.

Climate being a cross-cutting subject needs a whole of the nation and region approach. It needs to be dealt with both with bottom-up and top-down approaches, implying state and societal actions.

At the state level, the developed and underdeveloped countries have varied preferences. In advanced countries, crafting a climate strategy is important for winning elections. This is evident from the change of Mr Trump to Mr Biden in the USA, Mr Bolsonaro to Mr Lula da Silva in Brazil, and Mr Moris Scott to Mr Anthony Albanese in Australia. However, it is the opposite in the underdeveloped countries of the Global South. In South Asia, Bangladesh had elections on 7 Jan 2024, Pakistan will have on 8 Feb 2024 and India in April 2024. Is the environment a consideration in the election manifesto and the top leadership? Surely not.

At the societal level, are the people of South Asia even aware of the fact that they are living in a danger zone? Are the living habits following the sustainable requirements? Do they follow the 5R (realise, reduce, reuse, recycle and rest in nature)? The answer is a big no. Their lifestyles are not sustainable in a region with a growing population and finite resources.



National Aviation Policy 2023

RAMEEN SHAHID

The Nation

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

On 10 August 2023, the Federal Cabinet of Pakistan approved the National Aviation Policy 2023. After four long years, this policy has been revamped with a strong emphasis on promoting public-private partnerships and fostering a low-tax regime to attract investments in the aviation sector. This comprehensive policy outlines a strategic plan for addressing current issues in the country's aviation industry and prioritises enhancing safety standards, strengthening security processes, and cultivating a more progressive culture. All eyes are now on the NAP-2023 as it sets the stage for unprecedented growth in Pakistan's aviation industry.

A vital aspect highlighted in NAP-2023 is the shift towards a new safety ideology. This emphasises the crucial role of embracing a proactive safety culture supported by a comprehensive approach, including risk analysis, Safety Management Systems (SMS), and the Civil Aviation Safety Protocol (CAS). This marks a significant change from reactive strategies to a more preventive and proactive approach in accordance with global standards. Furthermore, the integration of SMS is an essential aspect of this approach as it has been mandated by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). This makes it imperative to adhere to these protocols, which are now an essential part of daily operations for both airlines and airports. It allows for constant monitoring and improvement, leading to the evolution of aviation safety. With the implementation of SMS and the launch of NAP-2023, Pakistan has established itself as a responsible entity that adheres to global standards. NAP-2023 stands out as a forward-thinking policy that effectively tackles the evolving security landscape, particularly within the aviation industry. By integrating innovative measures like advanced passenger screening, baggage checks, and surveillance, NAP-2023 is a pivotal step in enhancing the security framework of the country.

One of the most critical topics addressed under NAP-2023 is the cyber-security aspect, which is an integral component for safeguarding aviation infrastructure. The detrimental consequences of digital vulnerabilities on air travel security make it crucial to implement vigilant

cyber-security protocols. By prioritising these concerns, the policy aims to stay ahead of potential adversaries. NAP-2023 prioritises human capital development for the aviation industry, recognising skilled professionals as the bedrock of safety. It outlines career advancement programmes, skills transfer initiatives, and staff training to cultivate a competent, accountable, and responsible workforce equipped to navigate aviation's complexities. This focus on human resources ensures that Pakistan's aviation system soars through contemporary challenges. Hence, the vision of Pakistan's National Aviation Policy 2023 extends beyond ensuring security and safety. The policy recommendations aim to elevate aviation as an industrial asset that drives economic growth by revitalising the national carrier, encouraging private investment, and fostering enduring partnerships. Tax reductions are designed to create an advantageous environment for domestic and foreign companies, while modern infrastructure and logistics restructuring will open up new business prospects. This emphasis on interdependence is evident in the focus on regional integration, positioning Pakistan as a crucial air transport hub for South Asia and beyond. The 2023 policy builds on the 2019 national aviation policy by emphasising security and safety, filling gaps by enhancing regulatory monitoring for proactive risk control. This approach ensures safe and secure air travel while maintaining efficiency and sustainability. An important lesson learnt from the 2019 policy is the necessity to prioritise security alongside efficiency and sustainability, which is now reflected in the 2023 strategy.

However, Pakistan faces challenges in terms of infrastructure development, resource allocation, and technological advancement to effectively implement the 2023 aviation policy. These hurdles encompass modernising airport facilities, allocating sufficient funds for security measures, and adopting advanced cyber-security technologies to meet international standards. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for successfully executing the policy and ensuring a safe and progressive aviation industry.

ANF: A potent force

The Nation
FEBRUARY 14, 2024

AHSAN MUNIR

Youth in general and educated youth in particular are the asset of any nation. Any nation's progress and future depends upon how the youth is educated, trained and equipped to deal with the future challenges. Such an investment in youth helps any nation to progress and live proudly among the comity of nations. Concurrently, progressive nations are also alive to any challenges which hamper or handicap youth in their progress. Among other challenges, the demon of drug menace has menacingly taken over the lives of youth, especially in countries such as Pakistan, which has porous borders with countries known for poppy cultivation around the world.

Drug consumption has assumed an alarming proportion among our youth. General depressing economic conditions, high cost of living, low employment opportunities are the factors which are driving more and more youth to drug abuse to escape reality.

Fortunately, under the Ministry of Narcotics Control, the country has a strong, potent Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) to combat the drug menace in the country. ANF is a multi-faceted force, which is combating the drug menace both at national and international level. ANF has a strong training academy, where competent officers are selected through Federal Public Service Commission, while staff level recruitment is made through a rigorous and robust criterion. At academy, the recruits, both male and female, are put through rigorous physical, educational and psychological training. There are simulation labs where recruits are put through various scenarios which they would encounter in the field. Many courses in the academy are sponsored by various international agencies such as United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. ANF academy also has the honor of training personnel from regional countries such as Maldives, UAE, Dubai.

Along with its trained manpower, army, rangers and police have representation in ANF board, which helps ANF to seamlessly integrate with various law

enforcing agencies and call upon their resources when and where required. ANF has regional directorates in all the four provinces of Pakistan, which monitor drug related activities in their respective regions. Resultantly, ANF has been making drug busts all over Pakistan, arresting drug peddlers and disrupting their networks. Further, ANF has also dovetailed with judiciary to speed up drug related cases, and thus ANF has a high conviction rate. However, in its fight against drugs, several ANF personnel have embraced martyrdom. Services of shuhada for the country can never be forgotten and ANF has taken special steps for the welfare of shuhada families.

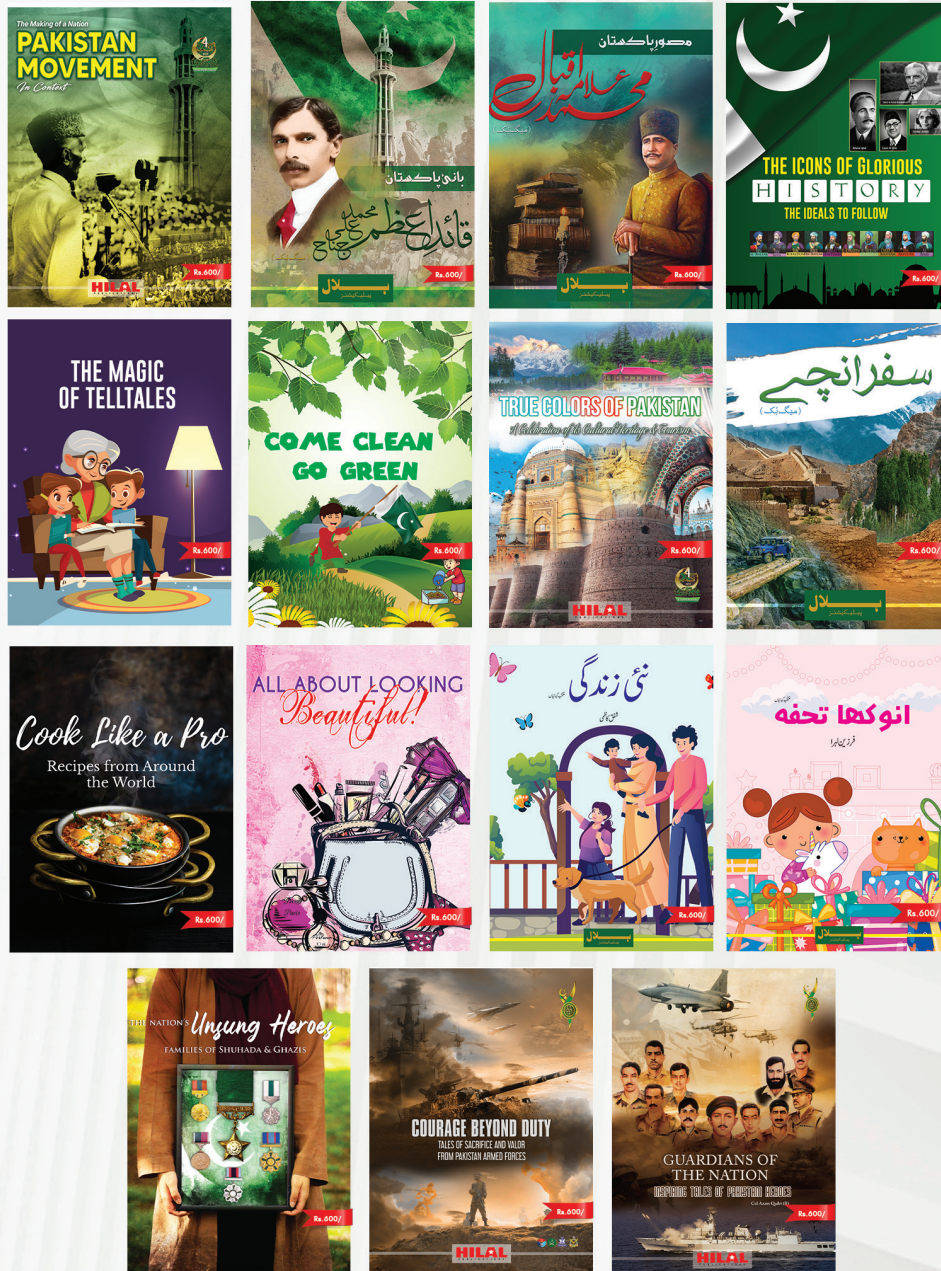
ANF also holds seminars inviting local academics, celebrities, students and various local and international stakeholders to engage with and to create awareness about its efforts, challenges faced and successes achieved in war against drugs. These seminars also help to integrate various inputs and generate consensus for future strategies to be employed and capabilities to be developed or acquired. Inputs from foreign agencies at these seminars are also invaluable as this also helps ANF to integrate at international level.

On the welfare side, ANF has setup a drug rehabilitation centers where drug addicts are comprehensively treated to help them again become useful members of the society. Many success cases have become goodwill ambassadors of ANF, who speak about their experiences at various forums, especially in educational institutions.

Thus, ANF, under its present DG, Maj Gen Aniq ur Rehman, has evolved into a dynamic organisation with multi-faceted capabilities. However, continued vigilance and evolution is of essence. Accordingly, continued support of the government, intelligentsia, celebrities and international bodies is required towards the aim of a drug free Pakistan: to save our youth and our future generations from drugs.



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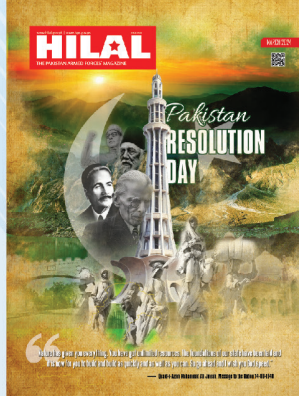
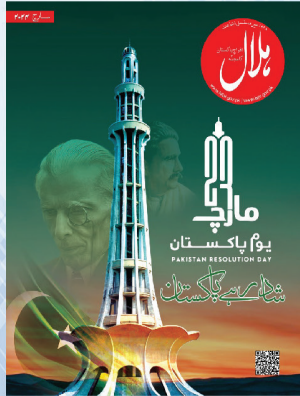
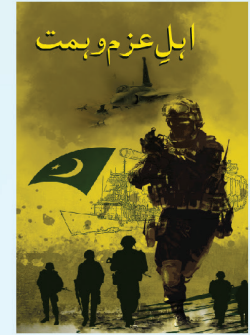
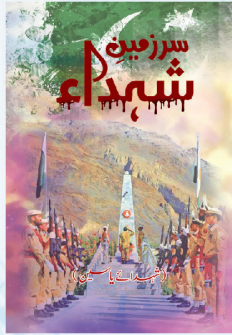
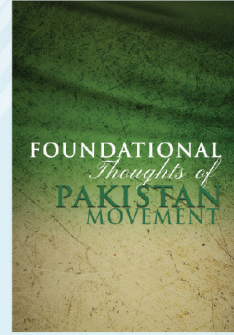
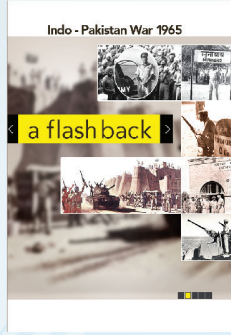
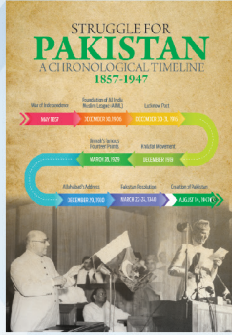


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