

Subjectwise Regional Press

Dated: November 10, 2018

Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad

Contents

Defence and Security.....	4
India.....	5
India Defence Purchase.....	5
Pakistan.....	7
Pakistan Defence CJCSC.....	7
Foreign Affairs.....	9
India.....	10
India – China Relations.....	10
Pakistan.....	11
Pakistan – Afghanistan Relations.....	11
Pakistan – China Relations.....	13
Pakistan – India LoC Issue.....	16
Pakistan – India Relations.....	17
Pakistan – Israel Relations.....	19
Pakistan – UAE.....	21
Pakistan – US Relations.....	22
Sri Lanka.....	25
Sri Lanka – EU Relations.....	25
Sri Lanka – Russia Relations.....	25
Internal Affairs.....	28
India.....	29
BJP.....	29
Congress.....	29
Pakistan.....	32
MQM.....	32
PPP.....	33
TLP.....	34
PTI Govt.....	38
Economy and Cultural and Social Affairs.....	41
Bangladesh.....	42
Election Commission.....	42
Elections.....	45
Women Crime against Women.....	46
India.....	47
Chhattishgarh Elections.....	47
Demonetisation.....	51
Election Commission.....	57
Environment.....	57
Exports.....	61
Health.....	62

Illegal Immigrants	63
Judiciary	64
Kashmir Uprising	65
Madhya Pradesh Elections	67
Rajasthan Elections	70
Talanganana Elections	73
Women Crime against Women	75
Women Harassment	76
Pakistan.....	77
Accountability	77
Aid to Pakistan IMF	86
Blasphemy	91
Blasts	100
Corruption	100
Education Higher	102
Education.....	103
Extradition.....	105
Fake Degrees.....	106
FATA	107
Health Polio.....	109
Inflations.....	111
Money Market.....	112
Narcotics.....	113
Panama Leaks.....	114
Privatisation.....	115
Remittances	117
Taxation.....	118
Terrorism.....	118
Thar	120
Trade.....	121
Water Resources.....	123
Sri Lanka.....	126
Sri Lanka Political Development	126
Afghanistan.....	128
Afghanistan Peace Talks	128
Terrorism.....	134

Defence and Security

India

India Defence Purchase

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Triple boost to firepower

155mm, 39 calibre howitzers have been procured from the US under government-to-government foreign military sales

Will be assembled in India by BAE Systems in partnership with Mahindra Defence

Is versatile, light weight and can be heli-lifted; has proven mettle in Afghanistan, Iraq

K-9 Vajra self-propelled gun

First 10 of 155mm/52 calibre guns imported from S Korea in semi-knocked down state; assembled by L&T in India

Remaining 90 will be made in India; with some assemblies coming from S Korea

Induction will give huge fillip to the firepower capability of Army on western front

6x6 Field Artillery Tractor

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

First induction of artillery guns since Bofors, minister credits NDA

Speaking at the induction ceremony, Sitharaman said, "It must go to our credit, and the credit of the present government, that two most modern and state-of-the-art gun systems are being inducted into the Indian Army."

Written by Sushant Kulkarni | Nashik

Although negotiations for procurement for Howitzer guns had started in 2006, they gathered steam only under the present NDA government, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said after induction of M777 Howitzers and K9 Vajra guns into the Indian Army on Friday.

These are the first major induction of modern artillery guns since the Bofors in the 1980s, which became controversial over allegations of kickbacks. The induction ceremony was held at Deolali Field Ranges of the Regiment of Artillery of the Indian Army in Nashik.

The Army will get 100 K9s and 145 M777 guns over the next two years – at Rs 4,366 crore and Rs 5,000 crore, respectively, it was announced. The 155-mm M777 A2 Ultra Light howitzers are US-made guns that can be transported by helicopters. The K9 Vajras are South Korea-made self-propelled artillery guns that have been assembled by Larsen & Toubro in India.

Speaking at the induction ceremony, Sitharaman said, "It must go to our credit, and the credit of the present government, that two most modern and state-of-the-art gun systems are being inducted into the Indian Army. The first gun to be inducted today is 155-mm M777A2... The negotiations to procure gun systems started back in 2006. However, for whatever reasons it just didn't move forward. The procurement process gathered steam only under the present government."

She said that "rapid movements in procurement process" led to fruition of this deal in the last three years. "This gun is being procured from the US government as a foreign military sale at a cost of \$737 million – 25 of these guns are being provided by the BAE Systems, and 120 more guns are being assembled and integrated in India."

On K9 Vajra, Sitharaman said the first 10 guns have been assembled in India and the next 90 will be "manufactured largely in India and, of course, assembled in India." Minister of State for

Defence Subhash Bhamre and Army Chief General Bipin Rawat were present at the ceremony, which also saw a firepower display of existing and newly inducted guns.

Post-ceremony, Sitharaman told the media, “A gun induction programme for the artillery of Indian Army is being held after nearly 30 years. Negotiations for the procurement like this had started in 2004, and even in 2006 and 2007. But that could not gather pace. After 2014, when the new government came to power, several issues such as lack of equipment, weapons and ammunition came to the fore. I am proud to say that the Prime Minister immediately gave directions in this regard.”

She said, “(On the PM’s direction) negotiations went ahead and after procurement within four years, we are witnessing the day of induction. There are more guns in line for induction. This also marks the contribution of ‘Make in India’ in the entire process. This is an important step for the operational readiness of Indian Army.”

Asked about her statement that the negotiations could not materialise under previous governments, Sitharaman said, “Today I am speaking about how we are delivering without delay. I can speak about it because it is happening in this government. I am sure you all are quite informed on reasons of delays in the past.”

Asked when the operational regiments of the newly inducted guns will be raised, Gen Rawat said, “The process has already started. The field guns are being phased out and medium-range guns are being inducted. The implementation and training in that direction has already started.” The Army plans to raise seven regiments of M777 howitzers, with all the guns to be inducted by August 2021.

The process to induct the K9 Vajra guns will be completed by November 2020. The first batch of 10 guns will be delivered this month, the spokesperson said. The next 40 guns will be delivered in November 2019, and another 50 a year later.

— with ENS, Delhi

Pakistan

Pakistan Defence CJCSC

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Strategic balance with India to be restored: CJCSC

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Gen Zubair Hayat, on Friday said that credibility of the country's deterrence capability would be ensured and strategic balance with India would be restored.

"We have and we will continue to provide necessary response to ensure that strategic balance is maintained and Pakistan's deterrence remains credible. Let there be no doubt on that account," Gen Hayat said at the launch of a book *Shaking Hands with Clenched Fists* at the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS).

The book has been authored by Dr Asma Shakir Khawaja of the National Defence University. Gen Zubair's statement came against the backdrop of first deterrence patrol by Indian nuclear submarine INS Arihant and Indian deal for acquisition of S-400 missile systems from Russia.

The chairman joint chiefs of staff committee said the 'deterrence patrol' by Indian submarine showed New Delhi's determination "to maintain its long-standing tradition of introducing new instruments of instability with which it can attempt eroding deterrence stability in the region".

Gen Zubair saw the deterrence patrol and dropping of 'minimum' from India's concept of credible deterrence as Indian attempts at dramatically altering the strategic landscape.

However, he said, Pakistan was unfazed by these developments. "This is neither surprising for us nor it rattles us."

Elaborating on Pakistani response to the developments, he said it would be defined by restraint and responsibility for peace and stability in the region.

At the book launch, Gen Zubair also spoke about the world powers helping India with its unprecedented military build-up and granting it exceptional access to high technology. He stressed that these actions were also undermining regional stability.

Gen Zubair said that Pakistan remained committed to peace and conflict resolution with its neighbour, although such offers had been spurned in the past.

"We are willing to herald a new era of regional peace, progress and prosperity that can help over 1.5 billion South Asian people 'recover' from their tragic and tumultuous legacy of 'surviving' from 'crisis to crisis' and 'conflict to conflict'," he said and hoped that India would meet Pakistan at least halfway.

"This vision of a peaceful, stable, prosperous and secure South Asia cannot be unilaterally achieved. This would require reciprocity of political intent, revival of diplomacy and composite dialogue process and responsible and restrained strategic behaviour," he added.

Gen Zubair said that Pakistan's proposal of Strategic Restraint Regime was still awaiting a positive response from India.

CISS Executive Director Amb Ali Sarwar Naqvi said that South Asia was a crisis-prone region due to unresolved disputes between India and Pakistan. These issues, he said, had resulted in trust deficit and lack of communications between the two countries.

Mr Naqvi said that failure of some CBMs between Pakistan and India was due to the difference between their respective approaches towards the CBMs. He also stated that the clenched fists were on the Indian side.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Foreign Affairs

India

India – China Relations

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

India to export sugar to China

Priscilla Jebaraj

Initial contract is to despatch 50,000 tonnes to COFCO

In a boost to sugar mills sitting on surplus stocks, India will start raw sugar exports to China in early 2019, and is in talks to finalise exports to Indonesia and Malaysia as well.

In a statement on Thursday, the Commerce Ministry said the first contract to export 50,000 tonnes of sugar had been entered into by the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) and Chinese public sector company COFCO.

A senior official told *The Hindu* that the decision to export sugar to China had been taken “at the highest level.” When Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping in April, they had committed to a volume of sugar exports of about two million tonnes, said the official.

“Raw sugar is the second product after non-basmati rice that China will import from India,” said the Ministry. “It is a move to reduce the \$60 billion trade deficit that China has with India.

India’s exports to China in 2017-18 amounted to \$33 billion while imports from China stood at \$76.2 billion.”

The Ministry official said government delegations were also travelling to Malaysia and Indonesia next week, for talks to finalise sugar exports to those countries as well.

India is the world’s largest sugar producer with a production of 32 million tonnes in 2018.

However, domestic consumption is only around 25 million tonnes.

Pakistan

Pakistan – Afghanistan Relations

The News

November 10, 2018

Ignoring instability

Saleem Safi

Pakistan and Afghanistan are not only geographically closely linked but are also socially, economically and strategically interdependent. Pakistan has neither been able to safeguard itself from the fallouts of instability in Afghanistan nor been able to stay aloof. Today, millions of Afghans live in Pakistan and thousands cross the Pak-Afghan border on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, though, Pakistan has become a much-talked about subject in Afghanistan and the majority of the Afghans blame Pakistan for their internal situation. Even the US and its allies try to pass the buck of their failure on to Pakistan.

However, the Pakistani leadership seems indifferent and unmindful towards the situation across the western border, and is instead busy in sowing seeds of hatred inside Pakistan by promoting a culture of abuse against political opponents.

Afghanistan is on a path of unprecedented disaster with little hope of averting anarchy. The Taliban's resistance is increasing and suicide attacks have become an almost daily exercise. The grip of the Afghan government is also becoming weaker with each passing day, and the battle ground has extended from south and east towards the west and north of Afghanistan.

The trust deficit between Afghanistan and the US has increased and proxy wars are in full swing. The recent deadly attacks by the Taliban in the heavily-guarded facility in Kandahar show how far the country is from stability. Two days before the parliamentary election in Afghanistan, the Taliban, disguised as security guards, killed Kandahar Police Chief Abdul Razzaq Achakzai and the provincial chief of intelligence Amin Hassan Khel and severally injured Kandahar Governor Zalmi Wesa. US General Scott Miller was also present but survived mysteriously. This attack was alarming in the sense that, for the first time, the Taliban attacked at a time when a top American commander was present in the facility. Had he been killed too, what would have been the repercussions?

Though Abdul Razzaq was a police chief, he was seen as the strongest person in southern Afghanistan. Razzaq was considered staunchly anti-Taliban – and also seen as being opposed to Pakistan. His father, a former mujahid commander, was killed by the Taliban. Razzaq himself escaped from the captivity of the Taliban.

When Hamid Karzai came into power, Razzaq was initially appointed in Spin-Boldak and then posted as head of the Kandahar police. He held that position for many years and survived more than a dozen assassination attempts. Although he was accused of harsh and brutal treatment of his opponents and of keeping private jails, it is a fact that he played a decisive role in the protection of Kandahar from the Taliban. He was also seen as a hardliner opponent of Pakistan and a blue-eyed boy of India and the US. His power could be gauged from the fact that when President Ashraf Ghani decided to remove him from the post, he refused to listen and ultimately Ghani had to back off.

The killing of such a daring commander in the office of the governor and in the presence of his intelligence chief and a US commander shows how precarious and unstable the situation in the country is.

The tragedy is that the Afghan government is facing internal disturbance and dispersion and the US has no clear plans. The Taliban's offensive and deadly attacks are creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. However, in spite of all their strength of attack, it is also a glaring fact that the Taliban cannot manage to occupy a single city in Afghanistan. US airpower will never let them and the rest of the world will never accept their rule.

It is also a fact that the Taliban do not have any problem with the continuous war, and their morale is high. In fact, the continuation of war in Afghanistan is a source of their strength and a guarantee of their survival. But they have realised the fact that they cannot become masters of Afghanistan through war. The Taliban are indeed negotiating with the US but do not seem to be in the mood to give any reasonable space to the Afghan government. Over the last 17 years, the Afghan government has been trying to negotiate with the Taliban, who have refused to talk – calling the Afghan government a puppet. During that period, the Americans were also not amenable to direct negotiations with the Taliban.

But now, on Pakistan's demand, the US has agreed on negotiations with the Taliban and the US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, has had talks with the Taliban. But here they committed a big blunder by sidelining the Afghan Government and Pakistan. The Afghan government feels that the direct negotiations between the US and the Taliban are diminishing its credibility and standing. Pakistan too is highly suspicious of the negotiations. The Afghan government and the US are asking Pakistan to pressurise the Taliban for a deal. But the million dollar question is: how can Pakistan annoy or force the Taliban when it is the US itself that entered into negotiations with the Taliban.

The harsh reality is that no party in the Afghan war theatre has any clear road map for the resolution of the problem. The US seems to be in a hurry and wants a quick solution to save face and avert being blamed for failure and defeat. Which is why it pressurises Pakistan to do more. At the same time, Washington does not pay heed to the Taliban's basic demand of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. It asks Pakistan for cooperation but does not address Islamabad's concerns of limiting and restricting Indian role in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the Afghan government wants a solution to the issue but is also angry and apprehensive about the direct negotiations between the US and the Taliban. Unlike the Karzai government, Ashraf Ghani has given permission to US forces for aerial attacks and other operations but it also wants to be in the driving seat of negotiations with the Taliban.

Pakistan's policymakers had been teaching us that the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan was the root cause of the instability in the country – but now our Foreign Office spokesperson says that US forces should not withdraw before resolving the conflict.

Similarly, all these neighbouring countries cannot foresee the US being successful in Afghanistan. However, they are also afraid of the fallout of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. If such confusion remains, what will be the outcome?

The situation across our western border is getting worse and we should be mindful of its repercussions. Unfortunately, it seems we continue to follow an ostrich-like policy and forget the fact that Pakistan will face the worst repercussions of Afghan instability. If the US withdraws, it will not affect its interests to much extent except perhaps the taint of defeat. China, Iran and the Central Asian countries will also manage to safeguard themselves. But Pakistan will be a real victim of Afghanistan's economic, social, political and strategic destruction.

This demands that Pakistan, through vibrant and dynamic diplomacy, should try to find a political solution to the Afghanistan problem along with Russia, China and Iran. But our current diplomacy and indifferent approach towards the imminent threat knocking at our door is very disappointing. One can only pray that both Pakistan and Afghanistan are protected.

The writer works for Geo TV.

Email: saleem.safi@janggroup.com.pk

Outlook, Kabul, November 10, 2018

Pakistan, Afghanistan Discuss Return of Afghan Refugees

ISLAMABAD - Pak-Afghan second meeting of the Refugee Working Group (WG) on Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) was held at the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) here Thursday.

Both sides deliberated on the ways to enhance mutual cooperation for a dignified, gradual, time-bound and complete return of the Afghan nationals to their country, said a press release.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged and agreed on the rules of procedure for the meetings of the working group.

The next meeting of the APAPPS Working Group on Refugees will be held in Kabul in January next year. The first meeting was held in Kabul on 22 July 2018 as part of the inaugural session. The Afghan delegation was headed by Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Dr Alema. SAFRON Secretary Mohammad Aslam led the Pakistan side in the meeting, which discussed matters related to Afghan refugees and other categories of Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan. (Agencies)

Pakistan – China Relations

The News

November 10, 2018

Pakistan, China can shape Asian destiny: Sanjrani

Mumtaz Alvi

ISLAMABAD: Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani on Friday said Pakistan and China could play a vital role in shaping the destiny of Asia.

He said during a meeting with the 15-member Chinese parliamentary delegation, which called on him at the Parliament House. He contended that Pakistan and China shared a common objective of regional development and both the countries could play a vital role in shaping the destiny of Asia.

The Chinese delegation was led by Zhang Chunxian, Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of National People's Congress (NPC). Sanjrani said that Pakistan valued its cordial and friendly relations with China and wanted to further expand relations by opening up new vistas of cooperation.

He greeted the Chinese side for organising a successful first ever International Import-Export Expo and hoped that it would further pave the way for enhancing trade and economic links. He said that the event was organised at a time when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was visiting China and participated in the expo to explore new avenues of bilateral cooperation besides holding high level meetings.

Sanjrani noted that Pakistan takes pride in its ties with China and remarked, "Relations between the two are time tested and have strengthened with the passage of time." The Senate chairman also appreciated Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision of shared prosperity specially the steps

taken for social development through millions of people have been lifted out of poverty by improving their standard of life.

He said that agenda of domestic reforms of current government, including improving governance, poverty alleviation and anti-corruption resonates closely with President Xi's agenda of national development. He added that both sides could learn from each other's experience.

The Senate chairman apprised the delegation of the recently held Asian Parliamentary Assembly Standing Committee on Political Affairs in Gwadar. He said that Gwadar has the potential to push forward the regional development agenda as envisaged by China and Pakistan. He thanked the Chinese government and people for the green Gwadar project through which one million trees would be planted in Gwadar.

He said that 100 delegates from 23 Asia countries have participated in the meeting in future's port city of Gwadar, which is a testimony to the fact that Asian countries acknowledge the role Gwadar in the overall socio-economic development of the region.

Leader of the Chinese delegation welcomed remarks of the Senate chairman and said that trade is highly important for both the countries, and economic development is given high importance.

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Talks being held in Beijing to finalise 'cooperation modalities'

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China began formal talks in Beijing on Friday for finalisation of modalities on economic cooperation.

A delegation led by Finance Secretary Arif Ahmed Khan and State Bank of Pakistan Governor Tariq Bajwa is negotiating with its Chinese counterparts details of the assistance package.

Talks are a follow-up to Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China during which the two sides signed 15 agreements and Memorandum of Understanding to enhance cooperation in economy, trade and other sectors.

A Finance Division official said the two sides had agreed to elevate the Pakistan-China strategic partnership to new heights.

PM Khan on Thursday apprised the cabinet of his visit to China and said Beijing had assured Islamabad "of every kind of assistance" and Pakistan will reap its benefits in the days to come.

Finance Minister Asad Umar, soon after the visit to China, had claimed that immediate balance of payments crisis had been averted with the help of financial assistance from China and Saudi Arabia. However, he did not give a figure of assistance from China.

He had further said that the Chinese assistance would be forthcoming but the size and form were yet to be worked out. Now the delegation to China will work out details of the assistance, an official of the Finance Division said.

The IMF's technical level team had started sharing data to determine the gap to be bridged for averting the balance of payments crisis. The package will be finalised following confirmation reports from China, said the official, while the IMF package will be announced by Nov 20.

Several other measures were announced during the visit to China which, according to Pakistan, will help in reducing the pressure on its falling reserves, especially the swapping currency agreement.

The only announcement that came from the adviser to prime minister on commerce was regarding the Chinese government agreement to increase its imports from Pakistan to \$2.2 billion by the end of 2018-19 from the existing level of \$1.2bn and to \$3.2bn by end of next fiscal year.

For past many years, Pakistan has been calling upon the Chinese government to grant market access similar to those Beijing had offered to Bangladesh and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Express Tribune

November 10, 2018

The future of yuan

By M Ziauddin

The writer served as executive editor of The Express Tribune from 2009 to 2014

Settling all bilateral trade between China and Pakistan in yuan is not a new facility. It has been there since December 2011 when a currency swap arrangement was signed between the two countries.

However, our traders had seemingly continued to feel more comfortable with the dollar because the PML-N government had kept a tight grip on the value of the rupee vis-à-vis dollar, never allowing it to tumble to its actual worth until the fag end of its five-year term, while on the other hand the yuan had looked to these traders relatively unstable as it was creeping up from Rs14 to Rs17 to a yuan.

China on its part has been signing similar arrangements with several countries in order to internationalise the yuan and prepare for an era when China's currency could rival the US dollar as a global currency.

Indeed, if China switched from the greenback to the yuan to pay its oil-sector suppliers, it would eliminate annual dollar demand in such contracts by \$876 billion, leading to historic depreciation of the dollar.

Joining the IMF's SDR basket in 2015 may have involved financial risks for China, but it also promised an intangible reward in the form of international prestige. Beijing's SDR policy has been more about affirming China's national identity than about advancing its material interests. Jeffery Moore II, senior analyst at Global Risk Insights, in an article (Can Emperor yuan dethrone king dollar as world's currency? published on March 1, 2018 in the ozy.com) says: "As the world's No 1 oil importer, China may have the leverage to demand such a dollar-to-yuan switch, which would directly influence nearly 40% of global oil production and create a massive oversupply of US dollars.

"The US dollar is immense — it makes up 64% of known central bank foreign exchange reserves; more than 85% of world forex trading; and 39% of all debt issued in the world. In addition, more than one-third of world GDP comes from countries whose currencies are pegged to the dollar. The sudden fall of the dollar would be hard indeed. It would lead to a massive inflation in the US, threatening the smooth function of debt markets that make the financial world go round.

"After all, China is already making moves to displace the dollar. In late July, China proposed pricing oil in yuan to Saudi Arabia. China has been reducing Saudi Arabia's share of its total imports, which fell from 25% in 2008 to 15% in 2016. Chinese oil imports rose 13.8% year-on-year during the first half of 2017, but supplies from Saudi Arabia inched up just 1% year-on-year. With the US increasingly becoming energy independent, Saudi Arabia may have no other option than to yield to yuan-denominated oil in order to keep its biggest customer.

"And that's just oil, of which China consumes approximately 12% globally, according to the World Economic Forum. While oil is the lifeblood of any industrial economy, the share of global

consumption by China in other commodities is even higher, including more than half of all aluminium and nearly half of all steel and copper.

“Some experts believe that changing the world’s working currency would occur at a glacial pace. In fact, it could happen overnight in response to geopolitical conflagrations. Like the Iran sanctions. Pressures building, undetected beneath fault lines, an unexpected and sudden release could send King Dollar hurtling off its throne, with Emperor Yuan ready and waiting to take its spot. Such is the nature of black swans.”

Now that the easy part of yuan internationalisation—trade settlement—has been achieved, the rest of the process will depend on market forces and the Chinese authority’s will and ability to liberalise its domestic financial markets.

Japan, the second-largest economy in Asia, with a sophisticated financial sector and experience in financial liberalisation, has been slow to ride on the yuan internationalisation wave perhaps not to annoy the US, Tokyo’s security guarantor. In turn, Japan has contributed to the dollar’s persistent dominance in Asia. At the same time, the Japanese economy is becoming sensitive to currency competition as the country deepens its financial integration with the rest of the world.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 10th, 2018.

Pakistan – India LoC Issue

The Nation

November 10, 2018

India continues violation of ceasefire at LoC

Altaf Hameed Rao

MIRPUR (AJK) - In yet another attempt to assert her aggressive posture in the region, India resorted to unprovoked firing at the Line of Control (LoC) intermittently in Leepa valley sector of Azad Jammu Kashmir Friday afternoon, local civil authorities confirmed.

When contacted, Deputy Commissioner Jhelum Valley district Raja Imran Shaheen told The Nation on the telephone Friday evening that the Indian forces resorted to unprovoked shelling at around 3pm on Friday.

"The Indian force targeted various forward villages along the LoC including Lubgaraan, Nakote, Bheejles Dhaar and Chatgarhi in the top mountainous Leepa valley, the sub-division of the Jhelum valley district of AJK," the officer informed.

"The firing lasted for about half an hour intermittently", the DC said quoting the instantly-landing reports at the district headquarter from the firing-hit villages of the remote and far-flung belt of the scenic valley.

"No loss of life was immediately known or reported because of the area being a far-flung location", Shaheen said while responding to a question. "Details are awaited", he added.

It is to mention here that various parts of the Leepa valley have been lashed by heavy rains and snowfall about three days ago.

Friday was the second consecutive day of the unprovoked Indian firing from across the LoC in AJK.

Earlier on Thursday, a Pak Army soldier was martyred in the unprovoked shelling by Indian troops in Thub sector of Azad Jammu Kashmir.

Hindustan Times, Delhi, November 10, 2018

Army jawan killed in Pakistan sniper fire in Sunderbani sector of Jammu-Kashmir

An Army jawan was killed in sniper fire in yet another ceasefire violation by Pakistan along the Line of Control in Sunderbani sector of Jammu and Kashmir.

HT Correspondent

Hindustan Times, New Delhi

An Army jawan was killed in sniper fire in yet another ceasefire violation by Pakistan along the Line of Control in Sunderbani sector of Jammu and Kashmir.

“There was a ceasefire violation by Pakistan in Sunderbani Sector. At about 0945 hours (9.45 am), unprovoked ceasefire violation was initiated by Pakistan in which a soldier was shot by a sniper who succumbed to his injuries,” said an army officer.

The identity of the slain soldier has not been revealed yet by the army.

On Friday evening, an army porter identified as Deepak Kumar, was killed in Pakistan sniper fire in Akhnoor sector of Jammu district.

In September, a BSF jawan was killed in Pakistan sniper fire Jammu region’s Samba district, a day after Union home minister Rajnath Singh launched India’s smart fence along the international border with Pakistan.

The truce between India and Pakistan along the International Border, the Line of Control and the Actual Ground Position Line in Jammu and Kashmir came into force in November 2003 but has frequently been violated by the neighbouring country.

Pakistan – India Relations

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Strategic balance with India to be restored: CJCSC

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Gen Zubair Hayat, on Friday said that credibility of the country’s deterrence capability would be ensured and strategic balance with India would be restored.

“We have and we will continue to provide necessary response to ensure that strategic balance is maintained and Pakistan’s deterrence remains credible. Let there be no doubt on that account,”

Gen Hayat said at the launch of a book *Shaking Hands with Clenched Fists* at the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS).

The book has been authored by Dr Asma Shakir Khawaja of the National Defence University.

Gen Zubair’s statement came against the backdrop of first deterrence patrol by Indian nuclear submarine INS Arihant and Indian deal for acquisition of S-400 missile systems from Russia.

The chairman joint chiefs of staff committee said the ‘deterrence patrol’ by Indian submarine showed New Delhi’s determination “to maintain its long-standing tradition of introducing new instruments of instability with which it can attempt eroding deterrence stability in the region”.

Gen Zubair saw the deterrence patrol and dropping of ‘minimum’ from India’s concept of credible deterrence as Indian attempts at dramatically altering the strategic landscape.

However, he said, Pakistan was unfazed by these developments. “This is neither surprising for us nor it rattles us.”

Elaborating on Pakistani response to the developments, he said it would be defined by restraint and responsibility for peace and stability in the region.

At the book launch, Gen Zubair also spoke about the world powers helping India with its unprecedented military build-up and granting it exceptional access to high technology. He stressed that these actions were also undermining regional stability.

Gen Zubair said that Pakistan remained committed to peace and conflict resolution with its neighbour, although such offers had been spurned in the past.

“We are willing to herald a new era of regional peace, progress and prosperity that can help over 1.5 billion South Asian people ‘recover’ from their tragic and tumultuous legacy of ‘surviving’ from ‘crisis to crisis’ and ‘conflict to conflict,’” he said and hoped that India would meet Pakistan at least halfway.

“This vision of a peaceful, stable, prosperous and secure South Asia cannot be unilaterally achieved. This would require reciprocity of political intent, revival of diplomacy and composite dialogue process and responsible and restrained strategic behaviour,” he added.

Gen Zubair said that Pakistan’s proposal of Strategic Restraint Regime was still awaiting a positive response from India.

CISS Executive Director Amb Ali Sarwar Naqvi said that South Asia was a crisis-prone region due to unresolved disputes between India and Pakistan. These issues, he said, had resulted in trust deficit and lack of communications between the two countries.

Mr Naqvi said that failure of some CBMs between Pakistan and India was due to the difference between their respective approaches towards the CBMs. He also stated that the clenched fists were on the Indian side.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Indian obsession with Pakistani spies

To start with why would Pakistan launch spies with identifications papers of its army, secondly since when did Pakistan Army start using the ranks of “constable” and “head constable”?

S M Hali

Indian obsession with Pakistani “spies” is so deep rooted that it is bordering on being delusional. On 28 October 2018, Indian media was in a state of frenzy reporting that it had captured two Pakistani spies infiltrating into Indian Territory at Ferozepur Sector. Entire India went berserk, gloating over the arrest of the alleged spies but no sane Indian would stop to ponder over the probability that it was a comedy of errors.

Take the India Today story of 30 October, titled ‘ID Cards of arrested Pakistanis say they are Pakistan Army Jawans’. Manjeet Sehgal from Chandigarh reports, “The Border Security Force (BSF) arrested two Pakistani citizens believed to be ISI spies on October 28. The suspects were arrested in Ferozepur sector and have been identified as jawans of the 30 Baloch Regiment of the Pakistan Army. Identity cards were recovered from their possession. According to the identity cards, Siraj Ahmed, 31, son of Shaukat Hayat is a resident of Mansoor and Mumtaz Khan, 38, son of Iqbal Khan is a resident of district Attock. Siraj Ahmed is a constable and Mumtaz Khan is a head constable with the 30 Baloch Regiment. BSF sources, however, also suspect that the identity cards might be fake. The Indian security agencies are trying to find whether the arrested Pakistanis were army jawans, spies or drug smugglers. BSF has also recovered Pakistani currency worth Rs 4,000 and a smartphone from the suspected spies. According to sources, the suspects are being interrogated by the Indian security agencies in Amritsar.”

To start with why would Pakistan launch spies with identifications papers of its army, secondly since when did Pakistan Army start using the ranks of “constable” and “head constable”?

Ultimately Indian media had egg on its face when it embarrassedly reported that the Jawans were released after investigation as they were not spying and had inadvertently crossed over to the Indian Territory when they were cleaning the bunkers located on the Indo-Pak border.

Readers may recall that on 29 May 2015, BBC reported that a pigeon had been arrested by police in India on suspicion of being a spy from Pakistan. The bird was seized after being spotted carrying a “stamped message” on its body. The message was written partly in Urdu and also contained a Pakistani phone number, according to reports. The bird was discovered by a 14-year-old boy in the village of Manwal, around two miles from the border. He took it to the nearest police station where the bird was X-rayed. Although police confirmed nothing unusual was found they “have kept the bird in our custody”, according to one senior local officer. The bird has been logged as a “suspected spy” in the area’s official police diary.

On 11 June, 2018, Times of India reported that a Pakistani “spy” pigeon was nabbed in Ajnala town near Amritsar and was being x-rayed for espionage gadgets. In February 2017, the country claimed to have caught a “spy pigeon” it said came from Pakistan. The authorities later claimed it escaped to Pakistan due to police negligence.

Similarly, in May 2016, Indian authorities claimed that a pigeon they caught in Pathankot carried a message stamped in Urdu. Later that year, in October, police officials clipped the wings of a pigeon they caught in Bamial village with a similar message to prevent it from “escaping”.

In August 2015, Indian security forces had arrested a deranged person identified as Usman Khan aka Qasim aka Navaid who claimed he travelled for 12 days through the jungle with an accomplice and had been in India for two days to do ‘Gods work’.

Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) dismissed Indian allegations stating that Usman Khan is not Pakistani but the mainstream Indian media kept on beating their chests that they had nabbed a spy.

The obsession with espionage has permeated into Indian fiction writing as well as Bollywood.

Bollywood production Raazi (Agree) is a 2018 Indian spy thriller film directed by Meghna Gulzar and produced by Vineet Jain, Kiran Johar, Hiroo Yash Johar and Apoorva Mehta. The movie is an adaptation of Harinder Sikka’s 2008 novel Calling Sehmat, reportedly a true account of an Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) agent who, upon her father’s order, is married into a Pakistani family of military officials to relay information to India, prior to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. She allegedly informed India of Pakistan’s plans to sink its aircraft carrier INS Viraat and saved it. She returned to India pregnant after Kargil and her son is now an Indian military officer.

According to India Today of 2 February 2018, an Indian Air Force Group Captain was arrested on the charges of being honey trapped and spying for Pakistan. India even captured an allegedly spy balloon and has now reportedly moved on to “spy fruits”- the latest technology from “Apple Inc”.

*The writer is a retired Group Captain of PAF. He is a columnist, analyst and TV talk show host, who has authored six books on current affairs, including three on China
Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.*

Pakistan – Israel Relations

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

The mysterious plane

The PTI government needs to categorically address recent reports of an Israeli aeroplane landing in Pakistan. For it will no longer suffice to dismiss this as fake news or propaganda. Online news outlet Middle East Eye (MEE) has run an exclusive report confirming that it is, in fact, true; while quoting Pakistani sources including a pilot as well as those working at the Nur Khan military airbase in Rawalpindi.

In light of such claims, the Centre needs to offer a credible explanation. For such a lack of transparency between state and citizenry gives way to conspiracy theories. No matter that the Foreign minister denied the rumours before Parliament. After all, Pakistanis have been here before. Such as when former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani protested US drones before the National Assembly while consenting behind-the-scenes to a beefed-up programme. This is not to cast aspersions on Shah Mehmood Qureshi. But it is simply to point out that political leaders can be economical with the truth when it comes to keeping their fellow lawmakers abreast of certain developments. Sadly.

Hypothetically, the landing of an Israeli plane is big news since Tel Aviv and Islamabad do not enjoy diplomatic relations. Former General-President, Pervez Musharraf, broached the subject of recognising the Jewish state back in 2003. At the time, he had just spent two days at Camp David with then President George W Bush; returning with some \$2 billion in aid. Predictably, this did not sit well with the religious right who threatened to launch a mass movement to oust him from power.

Fast-forward to today and pundits are busy speculating that, if true, Saudi hands could be at play. After all, Riyadh has just given Pakistan a \$6bn-bailout package. And as is said, there is never any such thing as a free lunch. In addition, analysts point to the way the Kingdom responded to Donald Trump's unilateral Jerusalem shuffle. Not to mention how some leading Saudi intellectuals went on record as saying that the Palestinian cause would no longer be the primary Arab concern. Therefore the conclusion, right or wrong, is that Pakistan may well have opened itself up to a change in policy.

The country is passing through turbulent times. It is faced with a resurgent and violent religious right as the recent riots and calls to have Asia Bibi executed underscore. At the very least, if the reports are true then the Parliament should be briefed in an in-camera sitting. After all, more details are likely to follow; potentially causing more unrest.

We, here at *Daily Times*, will support a shift in government policy if it serves the national interest. And if conducted in a transparent and democratic manner. *

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Pakistan – UAE

The Nation

November 10, 2018

Pakistan expects financial package as UAE FM meets Qureshi

| Pak-UAE JMC to be held early next year in Abu Dhabi

SHAFQAT ALI

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is expecting a financial package from the United Arab Emirates as Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Islamabad Friday to meet Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

A foreign ministry statement issued after the meeting said Pakistan and the UAE had agreed to participate in the 12th round of Joint Ministerial Commission of the two countries that would be held in Abu Dhabi early next year.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Dr Mohammed Faisal said: “The two sides also agreed to meet on the sidelines of Sir Bani Yas Forum in Abu Dhabi later this month,” he added.

There was no word on any ‘package’ after the yesterday’s meeting but the two ministers were understood to have discussed Pakistan’s economic crises.

Last month, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi had said that Pakistan had requested a Saudi Arabia-like deal from the UAE to stabilise the economy.

He said Islamabad had urged the friendly country to provide a ‘fiscal space’ to Pakistan amid the economic crises. He said Pakistan wanted to counter International Monetary Fund’s tough conditions through support from the friendly countries.

“We may still have to go to the IMF but we have to be in a reasonable position. If we are weak (and need more money) there will be tougher conditions. This will put burden on the general public. We are working to have some base before (we go into talks with) the IMF,” he said.

A high-level UAE delegation comprising senior officials of major companies, including Mobadla Petroleum, ADIA (Sovereign Wealth Funds), Etisalat, DP World, Dubai Investment Authority, Emaar Company, Aldahra Agriculture and Abu Dhabi Fund for Development had met the Foreign Minister in October.

The visit was a follow up of the Prime Minister Imran Khan’s official visit to Abu Dhabi on September 19 and his understanding with Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan to forge closer economic, trade and investment relations between the two countries in all areas of common interest.

Last month Pakistan took a big step forward to avert the IMF programme as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia agreed to provide \$3 billion for one year as balance of payment support and a further one-year deferred payment facility for oil payments up to \$3 billion. Economists calculated the impact of the support at \$12 billion.

The PM is also expected to visit Malaysia to discuss economic issues with Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad.

An IMF team is already visiting Pakistan to negotiate the programme, likely to cover a period of three years. The Institute of International Finance in its latest report said a potential IMF programme for Pakistan could be valued at \$15 billion.

The IIF expects an agreement on a three-year IMF programme of \$ 15 billion by end of this year. However, Finance Minister Asad Umar now believes \$6-7 billion from the IMF could settle the economic crises.

Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had formed the federal government in August pledging to bring a ‘change’ in its election campaign. There had been massive criticism against the government after Imran Khan and Asad Umar announced to borrow money from the international financial institutions to improve the country’s economy.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and Japan reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthen their bilateral relations taking the partnership to a new and higher level.

The resolve came at the 11th Round of Pakistan-Japan Bilateral Political Consultations held in Tokyo, said a foreign ministry statement issued yesterday.

Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua led the Pakistani delegation while Kazuyuki Yamazaki, Senior Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, led the Japanese side.

The Consultations provided a good opportunity to the two sides to explore new possibilities for further strengthening cooperation, especially in the spheres of trade and economy, investment, people-to-people interactions, human resource development and education, said the statement.

The two sides discussed the evolving peace and security situation in their respective regions. The Foreign Secretary briefed on Pakistan’s efforts towards promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. Indian atrocities and human rights violations in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir were also highlighted, it said.

The Japanese side appreciated Pakistan’s efforts in fighting terrorism and acknowledged successes achieved in improving the security situation. “This encourages greater investments in Pakistan,” the statement said.

Pakistan – US Relations

Pakistan Today

November 10, 2018

Pak-US relations and Afghan quagmire

By Waqar Masood Khan

Vagaries of Consciousness

Anybody learning the right lessons here?

After a hiatus of several months the Americans are back taking a swipe at Pakistan in the aftermath of a tragic ‘insider’ attack on senior American and Afghan security officials in Kandahar. The Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was his usual self in sending a blunt message: “We expect Pakistan to curb terrorists fighting in Afghanistan and it will be held accountable if it fails to do so”.

He went on to say: “We don’t believe we can get to the place that everyone wants, right.

Everyone wants reconciliation in Afghanistan, and to achieve that, you can’t have a safe harbour for Taliban, for Haqqani, and for others inside of Pakistan”. He also made it clear that “the Pakistani government knows that that’s our view and this administration has already made significant efforts to hold them accountable, and we hope that they’ll achieve the goal that we’ve set for them”. It was perhaps a reference to suspension of reimbursement of expenses Pakistan’s security forces provide in support of the US operations on the alleged ground of presence of Afghan militants in the country, which is vehemently denied by Islamabad.

The message, laced in a language suitable for a master-servant relation, was given in a news briefing in response to a question from an Afghan journalist. Earlier, soon after the Kandahar incident, the Afghan president, Mr Ashraf Ghani, had claimed that the planning for the attack was done in Pakistan. He did not disclose the basis of this assertion. Clearly, Secretary of State’s

response could well be aimed at giving credence to Afghan government's view. But it could also be a result of the sheer audacity and nerve-racking nature of the attack in Kandahar.

For the first time, the commander of the NATO forces, a US army general, was the target of the attack who narrowly survived unhurt. Three senior Afghan officials, including the police chief Abdul Raziq, who had earned considerable notoriety in stamping out Taliban from wherever he was posted, were not so lucky and two American guards were also wounded. The job was done by Taliban sleeper cells embedded in the provincial governor's (who was also killed) body guards. This was the most lethal insider attack, which has become the leading cause of deaths of coalition troops in Afghanistan since they were disengaged from active combat. A total of 102 insider attacks have taken place. This has perverted the symbiotic relationship between the US and the Afghan forces. How can a mission aimed at training and mentoring the Afghan forces be successful when the very people trained and mentored open fire on their trainers and mentors, and that too, in most of the cases, from behind, the most symbolic form of treachery? The distrust and demoralisation sowed amongst coalition servicemen by such attacks saps more energies than during active combat. A notable politician being the Mayor of a town in the State of Utah had gone for a second round of his national guard duty in Afghanistan where he was killed by a gunshot suspected from an insider.

Once the anger had sub-sided, the US dispatched its Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells, an accomplished diplomat with long experience of South Asia

In the backdrop of Kandahar tragedy, Danny Sjrursen, a retired US army officer, who served on several combat and reconnaissance missions in both Afghanistan and Iraq asked a fundamental question: What, then, can we say about this near miss ambush, and how does it reflect on the war effort – America's longest – in Afghanistan writ large? *He gives the reply: "the US mission is failing by every measurable metric – notably in politics and security. The attack, and the identity of those killed, demonstrate the murky nature of the entire mission in this landlocked, inhospitable corner of the globe.* Two salient facts stand out – 1) the Taliban contest a record number of districts, and, obviously can strike where and when they choose – killing a provincial governor, police chief, and nearly hitting the top US general in the country; 2) some of the Afghan dead were *themselves* shady figures – demonstrating the gray zone of the US operations in the Central Asia". [Emphasis added]

It is a curious response from the senior State Department officials to attempt to turn their ire and bile on Pakistan. May be this is because Pakistan is a plausible scapegoat, given its sturdiness to withstand countless challenges it has been subjected to since the Russian invasion and the endless war-like situation that has prevailed in Afghanistan since then.

As if what the secretary of state said was not enough, the ante was upped by a report that a day earlier at a seminar held at the Woodrow Wilson Center, a Washington-based think tank, the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Pakistan Henry Ensher referred to alleged "safe havens" for Taliban, attacking the US forces, and Pakistan's "nuclear weapons and materials" as the two main concerns of the Trump administration. He claimed that the US has and will continue to exert "pressure of all sorts" to persuade Pakistan to change its policies. In his keynote address, he said that "We can no longer be silent about the fact that some externally focused terrorist groups enjoy safe haven in Pakistan's territory".

Mr Ensher, who assumed the charge of his new position only in October, is a novice in Pak-US relations. Much of his career was spent in Iraq and Afghanistan mostly acting as civilian adjunct to military missions: "... bringing stability to Afghanistan was the "primary and major area of policy divergence" with Pakistan, and reminded Islamabad that "no partnership can survive such

disconnect”. He was not impressed by recent gains Pakistan made in clearing its territory from militants, as he complained that this was not helpful to them since Haqqani network was not eliminated. He further said “Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our peace effort in Afghanistan and much to lose by providing safe haven to terrorists...” In a mix of excitement of the new job and ignorance of the dynamics and history of Paki-US relations, he was quite brash when he said: “Pakistan would be held accountable if terrorists operating from its territory were not curbed”. He further warned that “Pakistan’s battlefield nuclear weapons pose a greater risk from theft and misuse and increase the risk that a conventional conflict between India and Pakistan could escalate to use of nuclear weapons”.

These outbursts could well serve some domestic purpose, but they are utterly unhelpful in cementing a stronger partnership with Pakistan. The tone and tenor of discourse is downright undiplomatic, if not insulting. Pakistan is not a servant and the US is not a master; yet enough compost has been heaped by Trump administration on a sovereign country. Top Pakistani leadership both civil and military has repeatedly said that Pakistan seeks no assistance from the US. We do want a friendly relation based on trust, respect and mutual interest. Furthermore, we have the ability to determine our own interests, without others lecturing us on this subject. We have red lines that we would not allow these to be crossed come what may.

Once the anger had sub-sided, the US dispatched its Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells, an accomplished diplomat with long experience of South Asia. She saw in Pakistan what the department must have suspected: pure indignation and resentment. She was not given high level meetings by key leaders of civilian and military establishments. The message she brought was disclosed by the Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi (ironically, that too as part of his briefing on Chinese visit): the US is broadening the engagement with Pakistan; trade and market access talks would resume; Mr Ensher would come to Pakistan and revive a long stalled energy cooperation dialogue between the two countries, and many more moves to normalise the relations.

The lesson is clear: US has to respect Pakistan; despite the US supporting India at the expense of its friendship with Pakistan, we continue to remain engaged and desire to deepen our ties.

Necessary forums should be evolved to iron-out differences rather than announcing them through the public messaging system.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka – EU Relations

Daily News, Colombo, November 10, 2018

EU has no power to take action against Sri Lanka - Keheliya

Mahinda Aluthgedara

The European Union Constitution does not permit them to take any action against Sri Lanka, Co-Cabinet Spokesperson and Mass Media and Digital Infrastructure, State Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said.

The State Minister was speaking on the statement released by the European Union, calling for Parliament to have a vote on the Prime Minister.

He added that these actions of the EU can in no way be acceptable to a sovereign nation.

“The European Union has no power to take action against the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and it is unfortunate that a foreign entity is thus interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.

The opportunity to interfere thus has been granted through the invitation of individuals like former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, Mangala Samaraweera and Malik Samarawickrama,” he said. The Minister further added that it was shameful to see such countries interfering with the independence of a sovereign nation and that the Government was and will always only act in accordance with Parliamentary procedures, tradition and its own Constitution.

Sri Lanka – Russia Relations

Daily News, Colombo, November 10, 2018

Political re-convergence a boost for Russia-Sri Lanka ties

Ambassador Dayan Jayatilleka briefs Russian Officials about Sri Lankan Situation:

The political development in Sri Lanka is a re-convergence of our President Maithripala Sirisena and the new Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. This is a re-convergence of the broadest political forces which among other things have the same strong friendly views towards the Russian Federation and the President of Russia. And those who have been displaced are those who have residues of Russophobia and Sinophobia, said Sri Lanka’s Ambassador to Russia Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka addressing Russian officials in Moscow.

He was briefing them about the political changes in Sri Lanka.

The text of Ambassador Jayatilleka’s speech:

I am honoured to represent my country in the Russian Federation at this point of the world’s history, and may I assure that the sentiments of the people of Sri Lanka stand with you in this complicated moment in global politics and world affairs. It will be a mistake from my part, if I do not speak a few words about the complex situation in Sri Lanka, which you may be curious about, and even may be concerned about.

It is not difficult to understand what is happening today in Sri Lanka if you look at it from the point of view of your own experience and the experience of the world at least from the 1990s onwards. From your own experience you know that there were certain tendencies that prevailed in Russia in the 1990s, which were going in a certain direction but the Russian people decided to make a course correction and to return to the path that is mostly suited to the national and the state interests of Russia.

We have been going through a similar experience ourselves. And now there is a moment of political complexity, even political tension, political struggle between these two tendencies that you experienced in the 1990s and at the dawn of the twenty first century. We are seeing in Sri Lanka today certain efforts on the part of certain players, which remind us of what happened during the so-called coloured revolutions, and the so-called Arab Spring.

Policy prescriptions

And we are unhappy at some of the voices we hear from our friends in certain parts of the world because there are very clear policy prescriptions made from certain capitals of the world. There are some who actually have media conferences, way across the oceans and tell us, tell our elected President, what he should do and when he should do it. But since we live in the time where there are voices which tell your President what should be done in your country, we are not surprised that there are those who try to tell us and our elected President what we should do in our country. These are the same voices. Sri Lanka will not allow itself to be drawn in to an attempt to retain a declining global hegemony.

We hear voices of our friends saying that the views of the elected representatives should be heard but these voices forget that the highest elected representative in our country is the executive President who would be elected by the country as a whole and can take the office if he or she has over fifty percent of the vote.

The President visited Russia last year and had a very successful meeting with President Putin, whom he had made it publically known was his favourite world leader. I must acknowledge the role of my predecessor Dr. Saman Weerasinghe, who is with us this evening and who made that meeting possible, and it was a success.

Move forward

I must also make a fundamental point that this re-allying is actually the re-convergence of our President and the new Prime-Minister. This re-convergence is the re-convergence of the broadest political forces which among other things have the same strong friendly views towards the Russian Federation and the President of Russia. And those who have been displaced are those who have residues of Russophobia and Sinophobia.

I am very convinced that anything that has been retarding the pace of our agreements and bilateral cooperation will now be removed, and once this crisis is settled, we can move forward in accordance with agreements we have signed at a much faster pace, and with greater political cohesion. We are very grateful as a people, and a state, that the Russian Federation at this moment, and any other moments, has never told us what to do in our own country. Russia always respected us, and helped us protect our national independence, our national sovereignty, our territorial integrity, and our unity.

At one level this evening gathering is conventional, traditional event which the first presentation I am hosting since the presentation of the credentials to President Putin. But we decided very clearly to have this event on November 7 for a very specific reason. The reason is that whatever is one's ideological orientation and sympathy may be, history cannot be forgotten. And we, in Sri Lanka, are deeply grateful to Russia for more reasons than one. Those friends of mine, who are here today, and who served in Sri Lanka, would know the emotional ground with which Russia is regarded in my country.

Russian contribution

I served as Ambassador in France, and France is quite rightly proud of its contribution to human thought. But as a political scientist by training, I know that Russia has contributed a great diversity of ideas in every field related to human thought. And this contribution has not been

purely ideological, purely intellectual; the Russian contribution has been translating its contribution into action. And November 7 is one of the most important days in the modern human history, so that is the reason why we have chosen to have this celebration here.

The contribution of Russia, which we in Sri Lanka recognize, was far before and beyond November 7, 1917. We are very conscious that if not for the major predominant role played by Russia and the Red Army in defeating the fascism, countries such as ours, would not have achieved independence through the weakening and the collapse of the old colonial order. Few peoples of the world, few nations have contributed so much to humanity in the impact beyond their borders, as has Russia. This is why we shall always be grateful to Russia.

I'm particularly proud and happy to be here this time for another reason. Apart from Russia's contribution in terms of ideology and in terms of affecting the world's history, there is at least one, if not more, area of the contribution (and I do not speak about science and technology because it is not a lecture), but in terms of the role of individual leaders in the world's history, you've made a great contribution. For my generation and preceding generations of my father, my grandfather, Russia is identified with at least two great leaders. And now, we in the Global South, and humanity in general, are thankful that you, the Russian people, have chosen the third such leader.

Internal Affairs

India

BJP

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Rahul trying to save black money: BJP

Special Correspondent

The BJP on Friday accused Congress president Rahul Gandhi of lying and trying to “save black money” by criticising demonetisation, as opposed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was trying to curb it.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said at a press conference here that demonetisation destroyed the “ill-gotten wealth of four generations of the Gandhi family” and benefited the country by widening the tax base and hitting Naxalism.

In a statement on the second anniversary of demonetisation, Mr. Gandhi had said it was a planned “brutal conspiracy” and a “shrewd scheme” to convert the black money of Mr. Modi’s “suited-booted friends.”

Referring to Mr. Gandhi’s remark that the rich people did not stand in queue to deposit their demonetised notes and demonetisation had affected only the poor, Mr. Patra said the country had seen Mr. Gandhi alight from his “Rs. 4 crore car” and stand in a queue at a bank. “Income Tax searches had yielded a revenue of over Rs. 35,000 crore and a law against ‘benami’ property had led to the seizure of assets worth over Rs. 4,300 crore,” he said.

Mr. Patra said the deaths due to Naxal violence had come down by 60% during 2017, compared with 2009, and he attributed the decrease to demonetisation. He also quoted a report that said the maximum number of Maoists had surrendered in a month after demonetisation.

Congress

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Rahul promises loan waiver to farmers

Press Trust of India

Congress president Rahul Gandhi said on Friday that his party, if voted to power in Chhattisgarh, would write off the debts of farmers within 10 days.

At a rally in Rajnandgaon, Chief Minister Raman Singh’s home turf, he criticised the BJP government at the Centre for the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which he called “Gabbar Singh Tax.”

‘No false promises’

Mr. Gandhi said he did not want to make “false” promises as the BJP did. The Congress had promised farm loan waiver during the Punjab and Karnataka Assembly elections and kept its word after coming to power, he pointed out. “If elected to power, the Congress will write off the debt of each farmer in the State in 10 days.” He also promised farmers a bonus.

The election to the 90-member Assembly will be held on November 12 and 20, and the votes will be counted on December 11. The Congress has been in the Opposition for the last 15 years in the State.

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Cong manifesto promises loan waiver in 10 days, ‘ghar-ghar rozgar’

‘People’s document’ mainly focuses on farmers

Aditi Tandon

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, November 9

The Congress on Friday unveiled its ambitious manifesto in poll-bound Chhattisgarh, promising farm loan waiver, a job per household, special focus to help minorities do business with ease and enhanced pension for the families of policemen killed in Naxal attacks.

Party chief Rahul Gandhi launched the manifesto describing it as a “people’s document” based on interactions with stakeholders across spheres. Congress leaders said they had toured all districts to engage the electorate in the exercise.

The first to be released in the current election cycle for five states, Congress’ Chhattisgarh manifesto twists Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s famous 2014 Lok Sabha election slogan “Ghar ghar Modi, har ghar Modi” to read “Ghar ghar rozgar, har ghar rozgar”. It has 36 focus points but the primary thrust is on farmers.

TS Singh Deo, Congress Legislature Party leader who headed the manifesto committee, said immediate loan waiver for farmers within 10 days of formation of the Congress government was the party’s top promise.

“A major thrust on agricultural sector also includes fixing minimum support price for various crops as per the MS Swaminathan Commission report and provisioning of pension for farmers above 60 years of age to support them,” Deo told The Tribune.

Taking a cue from the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP government in Delhi, Congress has decided to cut power bills by half for domestic consumption in Chhattisgarh if it wins.

Asked how they proposed to create jobs, party leaders pointed to apprenticeship programmes and a proposed Rajiv Gandhi Mitr Yojana for monthly stipend to 10 lakh unemployed youth of Chhattisgarh.

For women’s safety, the manifesto speaks of providing “special conveyance” for late night commuting. On minorities, the document says: “Minority communities and their interests have been given due importance in the manifesto with proposals in place for their security, job opportunities and special help for ease of doing business.”

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

PM has mastered art of conning: Rahul

Cong leaders court arrest during anti-DeMo protest; PC calls note ban ill-conceived move

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, November 9

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday fired a fresh salvo at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of betraying his 2014 Lok Sabha election promises to people and “cheating them”.

The party too stepped up its offensive on the government over the two-year-old demonetisation drive, with former Finance Minister slamming his successor Arun Jaitley for defending an “ill conceived move”. While Gandhi attacked the PM during his election tour in Chhattisgarh, top Congress brass marched in protest against note ban in the Capital and later courted arrest after the Delhi Police rounded up several leaders.

Among those arrested were party general secretary organisation Ashok Gehlot, former Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, senior leaders Anand Sharma, Mukul Wasnik, Mahila Congress chief Sushmita Dev and Youth Congress president Keshav Yadav.

The sharpest attack of the day, however, came from Gandhi who took to Twitter to accuse the PM of mastering the “art of conning and misleading”. His tweet in Hindi read: “2014 thag vidya 1: Muje pradhan mantri banao, main 2 crore rozgar dilaunga (Make me PM, I will give you two

crore jobs); 2016 thag vidya 2: note bandi mein mera sath do, main kala dhan wapis launga (Support demonetisation, I will retrieve black money); 2018 asliyat: suit boot wale doston ko Rafale mein uraunga, naujawano ke sapne mitti mein milaunga (Reality: I will fly my friends in Rafale and crush the dreams of youth).”

Almost parallel to Gandhi’s jibes came a series of P Chidambaram tweets that questioned the RBI for failing to stand up to demonetisation. “RBI Board, with many members absent, met at 5.30 pm on November 8, 2016, and disagreed with the key reasons given by government, yet obediently endorsed demonetisation. That was a black day in RBI’s history,” Chidambaram said, referring to reports that the RBI did not buy government’s logic that demonetisation would help purge the economy of black money and fake currency.

Chidambaram said: “Shockingly, the government paper calculated GDP growth in real terms and growth in money circulation in nominal terms and yet compared the two and reached absurd conclusions. So much for the competence of the government.”

He questioned government’s jargon about “fixing the economic capital framework of the RBI, saying: “You fix what is broke. Which part of RBI is broken that the government is anxious to fix?”

He also quoted Gita Gopinath, IMF chief economist, as having said that she had not come across an economist who had a good word to say about demonetisation. “It was an ill-conceived move inspired by persons totally unqualified on matters concerning the economy,” he said.

Pakistan

MQM

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Farooq Sattar's basic membership of MQM-P revoked

Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Dr Farooq Sattar, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan leader — who many believed saved the party following its London-based founder Altaf Hussain's Aug 22, 2016 incendiary speech — was finally shown the door by the party's coordination committee, better known as the Bahadurabad group, on Friday.

A brief statement issued from the MQM-P's temporary headquarters in Bahadurabad said that the coordination committee in its meeting on Friday “decided to revoke basic membership of Dr Farooq Sattar on charges of violating party discipline and constitution, internal grouping and other serious organisational issues”.

It said the decision was “unanimously” taken by the participants of the meeting, chaired by convener and federal minister Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui.

The committee directed all workers not to contact Dr Sattar; otherwise strict action would be taken against them.

The move, however, drew mixed reaction from within the MQM-P ranks as party's former MNA Ali Raza Abidi tweeted: “Wrong move! Now many leaders and workers who are standing in support with @DFSMQM will start submitting their resignations.”

In another tweet, he stated: “Now it appears that Farooq bhai made the biggest mistake of saving the party on 23rd August 2016. He should have just let the natural course take place and let every worker and leader on ground be taken into custody.”

In a late-night press conference at his PIB Colony residence, Dr Sattar rejected what he called the so-called decision of the coordination committee and said his only crime was to demand for workers' democratic right.

“The decision of the coordination committee is illegal and unconstitutional,” he said, adding that such an extreme action could not be taken without hearing his viewpoint.

Last month, Dr Sattar had announced the formation of a 22-member ‘organisation restoration committee’. He called upon the Bahadurabad group to hold an intra-party election. He had recently visited Hyderabad where a large number of workers welcomed him. Differences between the two factions of the MQM-P had emerged on Feb 5 when Dr Sattar left a coordination committee meeting after the latter refused to give party ticket to contest Senate elections to his close aide Kamran Tessori.

Later, the MQM-P split into the PIB and Bahadurabad groups and resultantly lost three Senate seats.

Before the July 25 general elections, the two groups reconciled, but failed to retain majority of their national and provincial assembly seats.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

PPP

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Election results controversial, still PPP supports govt, says

Khursheed

Correspondent

SUKKUR: Senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Syed Khursheed Shah has said that his party still has reservations over results of the recent general elections in the country but it will continue to extend its cooperation to the elected government in the greater interest of the country and nation.

“We want to see that issues of the general public are resolved, no matter who resolves them,” he said.

He said PPP believed that the ruling party should be allowed to fulfil the commitments it had made to the masses during its election campaign.

Mr Shah was speaking at a ceremony organised by the Hindu community in Kandhra town near Sukkur on Friday to celebrate Diwali.

“We stand by our stance that the [recent] general elections are controversial and so we have reservations over the results. However, we also realise that the dispensation emerging from the results is better than dictatorship.

As such, we extend our cooperation to the government in the interest of the general public and hope that people’s issues will be resolved,” said Mr Shah.

The senior PPP leader said that all that the masses expected from the government was peace and prosperity. “If an entity succeeds in achieving the goal by ending poverty, unemployment and crime in the country, we will not have any objection even if it [the entity] is our enemy,” he added.

He said PPP did not want to rule over the country but it was eager to see the country becoming a developed one and the nation getting prosperous.

Khursheed Shah took exception to the use of offending language and remarks by rival political parties against one another, saying that the PPP did not believe in such dirty politics. He said no good could be earned by abusing others.

Commenting on the government’s success in getting foreign and IMF loans, Mr Shah said this had only further indebted the country. “Every child [of Pakistan] has now become debtor of Rs150,000 as against the previously Rs60,000 to Rs70,000.

He said the PPP under the chairmanship of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari was following the politics of its founder chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and assassinated chairperson Benazir Bhutto.

“Z.A. Bhutto laid the foundation of democracy and his daughter Benazir Bhutto revived it after dictatorship undermined it ... PPP rendered great sacrifices to protect the democratic system and see it flourishing.”

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Dawn

November 10, 2018

PPP to support PML-N nominees for Senate seats

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The PPP has decided to vote for the PML-N candidates in the by-polls for two Senate seats in Punjab.

Syed Hassan Murtaza, who is PPP Punjab chapter's information secretary as well as parliamentary party leader in the Punjab Assembly, said on Friday that after internal consultations party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari had decided that the PPP MPAs would vote for the N League candidates in the Senate by-polls.

The Upper House seats went vacant when the apex court disqualified PML-N senators Haroon Akhtar Khan (elected against a general seat) and Saadia Abbasi (elected against a seat reserved for women). They had been elected for a six-year term in March this year.

Polling for the two seats will be held in the Punjab Assembly, the electorate for Senate seats from Punjab quota, on Nov 15. The PPP has seven legislators in the provincial house.

The PML-N has awarded tickets to ex-senator Saud Majeed and ex-federal minister Saira Afzal Tarar and the ruling PTI has fielded Waleed Iqbal and Seemi Ezdi.

In an earlier contest for a Senate seat last month, PTI (180 votes) nominee Dr Shahzad Waseem had won by securing 181 out of 351 votes. He enjoyed support of the PML-Q (10 votes), Rah-e-Haq Party (one vote) and independents (four votes).

PML-N's Khwaja Ahmed Hassaan bagged 169 votes with the help of the PPP.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

TLP

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Absurd claims

Editorial

THERE is political inanity and there is dangerous propaganda — and what the Senate witnessed on Friday was the latter.

Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi has told the Senate that not only have the leaders of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan denied that the violent protesters of last week belonged to the group but that the PTI government believes they were actually activists of mainstream political opposition parties. The minister of state presented no evidence in support of his astonishing accusation against the parliamentary opposition.

Indeed, it is not even clear why TLP leaders are being consulted on who among the violent protesters belong to the party. Surely, the political or militant affiliation of violent protesters ought to be determined by law-enforcement authorities and state investigators rather than TLP leaders who have a clear incentive in disowning the protesters to avoid shouldering blame for the unacceptable events of last week.

Mr Afridi's absurd claims before the Senate suggest that the government has completely reversed course from Prime Minister Imran Khan's televised address of Oct 31. If true, that would be a very unfortunate turn of events.

While it remains unclear what the PTI's strategy to deal with the unacceptable threat posed by the TLP and its leadership is, it is quite evident what ought to be done.

The TLP as currently constituted has no right to exist within the constitutional and democratic framework of the country.

Beginning with revoking its status as a registered political party, the senior leadership of the group should be charged and tried for a range of offences — from instigating violence to damaging property to fomenting insurrection.

The lawful instruments to charge and punish the TLP leadership already exist and failure to use them will surely embolden the organisation.

The mobs that took to the streets last week did not do so spontaneously and of their own accord. Not only were the protests encouraged by the TLP leadership, arguably the violence itself was instigated by them.

In all circumstances, the violent protesters and mob participants should also be prosecuted by the state — there is no justification whatsoever for damaging property and threatening citizens. But to deny the role of the TLP leadership in the violent protests is dangerously misguided policy. What is also troubling about Mr Afridi's claims in the Senate on Thursday is the implications for the government's counter-extremism agenda.

While the government has claimed it intends to reinvigorate the National Action Plan, the latter's counter-extremism component will require the national leadership drawn from mainstream politics to work together.

But Mr Afridi's gratuitous and incendiary remarks suggest that the PTI is confused about who the enemy is. The enemies of peace, prosperity and the rule of law were on a rampage in the streets of the country last week.

The PTI must urgently reconsider the dangerous political brinkmanship it is engaging in.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Dawn

November 10, 2018

A shift in power

Irfan Husain

HAS the power hierarchy in Pakistan changed while we weren't looking? Blink, and you've missed it.

According to conventional wisdom, power flowed from the barrel of the gun, with the army masters of all they surveyed. Then came the judiciary, which, over the last decade, became hyper-active with its massive overuse of suo motu powers. The political class came a distant third. Sundry law-enforcement agencies figure in there somewhere, but are distinctly subservient to the institutions higher up the pecking order.

While the military still calls the shots, it seems to have run into a brick wall in the form of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), the ultra-extremist outfit that recently brought the country to a standstill for three days without let or hindrance from the state. For anybody to openly preach mutiny against the army chief without prompt action from Pakistan's most powerful and respected institution is unprecedented. It is also a sign of weakness, and signals a shift in the country's power dynamics.

And what about the judiciary? After all, it was the Supreme Court's honourable decision to free the unfortunate Asia Bibi from an absurd blasphemy accusation which has ruined her life that brought thousands of TLP supporters out on the streets. But when the leaders of the TLP announced that the three judges who had declared her innocent should be murdered, there wasn't much noise from the Supreme Court. And mind you, this is the same institution that has repeatedly come down very hard on politicians for contempt of court.

As for politicians, we have the odd — but predictable — spectacle of Prime Minister Imran Khan promising to confront the rioters with the might of the state, only to beat a swift retreat and sign an 'agreement' that was more of an article of surrender by a subservient authority. This should surprise nobody who has followed the trajectory of Khan's rise to power. He has never

made a secret of his sympathy for religious extremists: not for nothing is his nickname Taliban Khan.

The MQM learned a quarter of a century ago that the power to shut down Karachi at will gave it immunity from reprisals from the state. With its hands on the country's jugular, it could run riot with impunity, collect protection money and generally hold Pakistan's richest city to ransom. From a student organisation to a political party with a hardened militant wing, the MQM ruled Karachi unchallenged for decades. The operation in Karachi during Benazir Bhutto's second government in the mid '90s did little to stop them.

Imran Khan then discovered that by laying siege to Islamabad, he could command the state to do his bidding. Thus his repeated dharnas and threats of sit-ins were highly effective in sending basically political issues to the Supreme Court. We all know the outcome of our judiciary's decision to intervene.

The TLP tested this model by weaponising the blasphemy law at its damaging sit-in at Faizabad, severely disrupting traffic between Islamabad and Rawalpindi for a fortnight. Instead of being thrown in jail, the participants were given cash awards by a serving general. In addition, their demand for the resignation of Zahid Hamid, the law minister in the PML-N government, was accepted. So much, then, for the writ of the state.

And if the dharna formula worked in Islamabad, how much more effective would it be when applied across the country? We found out the hard way recently when hordes of TLP supporters blocked roads across the country, bringing factories, schools and offices to a grinding halt. Cars, buses and trucks were torched, and billions lost in three days of anarchy. But who's counting the cost when it comes to religious fervour?

Apart from the losses to the economy and to innocent people caught up in the madness, state institutions have suffered a massive hit to their reputations. The army is no longer unassailable. The judiciary's power to punish contempt is now seen as highly selective. And Imran Khan has been exposed as a paper tiger, who growls a mean growl but, when push comes to shove, caves in to extremists.

While we discuss the fallout from the TLP riots, spare a thought for poor Aasia Bibi, the innocent target of Khadim Hussain Rizvi's demand for execution for a crime she didn't commit. Although the government in its craven surrender document agreed to place her on the Exit Control List, the fact is that she cannot legally be prevented from leaving the country as she has not been found guilty of any crime.

And if Salman Taseer, a Punjab governor, could be assassinated by a member of his police security team, who can guarantee that a similar fate does not await her at whatever "safe place in Pakistan" she is being kept? The fanaticism infecting the country is not limited to just a handful of zealots.

irfan.husain@gmail.com

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Nation

November 10, 2018

Don't Politicise the Protests

Some issues in this country are so sensitive that they should not be used for political clout either by the opposition or the government. The three day protest against the Supreme Court verdict in the Aasia Bibi case, and the subsequent vandalism that it caused, is one of them. Unfortunately,

it appears that this issue has not brought people together as politicians, and especially the government, use it to sling mud at each other.

The recent statement by Minister of State Shehryar Afridi illustrates this. During a speech in the Senate, the Minister of State said that activists of some political parties, including PML-N were behind the incidents of violence across the country during the three-day protest. While emphasising that investigations were under way and that those who had taken the law into their own hands and were involved in violence would not be spared, Afridi also said that TLP were not responsible for the lawless behaviour and that the state would engage them in dialogue. While there may be differences of opinion in how the government handled the protests and the subsequent agreement with the TLP, PTI's arresting of protesters who broke the law has been appreciated throughout. Even TLP apologised for the disturbance it caused, showing the consensus throughout the country against the lawless tactics adopted by the protesters. Allowing those who broke laws, caused disruption and distress on the road and invoked violence is indefensible by all parties, even the TLP itself. It is thus bizarre why the Minister of State is insisting on choosing to politicise the utterly indefensible violence that occurred and deflecting blame on the opposition, while trying to excuse the real culprits.

The sort of un-publishable and volatile statements released by TLP leaders against judges and the Army Chief definitely show that TLP at least incited violence, if not outright caused it. In this backdrop where PML-N leaders are arrested for contempt of court on the slightest statements, it does not make sense for Afridi to chide criticism of TLP's derogatory comments. Nobody is demanding bloodshed or ousting but that does not mean the state should start indulging in apologist statements for a party which caused the country to shut down for three days. Investigations are still underway- thus it is not fair to throw around unsubstantiated allegations against PML-N, especially when large parts of the evidence points to other culprits. While government is in its rights to opt for a peaceful process of negotiation, the worst step it could take is to politicise this process and try to target the blame on opposition parties.

Pakistan Today

November 10, 2018

Shahryar Afridi defending the indefensible

By Editorial

Appeasing non-state actors

The PTI has long practiced the politics of accusations without proof for short-term political gains. Their policy is to dodge the court hearings whenever summoned to present the evidence. The practice continues even after the party has gained power. This was visible from Shahryar Afridi's speech in Senate on Thursday.

Afridi has given a clean chit to the TLP leadership and its lawless followers. The PTI minister conveniently forgets that the TLP had given the call for protests against the Supreme Court's verdict in Aasia Bibi case after sit-ins spread over several days where followers were charged up through provocative speeches. It is funny that Afridi should instead put the blame for damaging the public and private property on the workers of the opposition parties which had condemned the acts and assured the government of full support. This was acknowledged even by PTI's information minister who had thanked the PML-N, PPP and other opposition parties for their maturity and cooperation with the government on the issue of TLP's violence.

Interestingly Afridi has accepted the TLP's claim on its face value that those shown in pictures dragging people out of vehicles and putting buses, cars, and motorbikes on fire were not their

sympathisers. He went a step ahead by exonerating their treasonous pronouncements and promising not to use stick against them but embrace and engage them in dialogue. This amounts to placating the extremists.

In his October 31 speech Imran Khan had strongly condemned the language used by the TLP leadership in reaction to the verdict against Aasia Bibi. “Which government can function when people say kill the judges, do away with the army?” he had thundered. Afridi is now seeking the friendship of these very elements. Is this yet another about-turn by the party, without any qualm of conscience?

It is a highly shortsighted policy to support those who challenge the writ of the state. A week-kneed government failed to fulfill its duty to stop the mayhem. Then it volunteered to pay billions from the state exchequer to undo the damage done by the TLP’s extremists and is now defending the elements who abused the courts and tried to spread disaffection in the army.

PTI Govt

The Nation

November 10, 2018

The sound and fury about PTI’s “100 days”

Ali Shan Azhar

Ever since the newly-elected Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government assumed charge, its “100 Days” mantra has dominated national discourse. Originally, the 100-day agenda was announced by Imran Khan a couple of months before the general election – a radical step by local political standards. The debate has since meandered between what is achievable and the need (or lack of it) to have such a strict timeline. The PM office has responded by launching an online tracker to trace the 100-day progress of the regime. Some of the tracker indicators though are quite superficial. An example is that of the progress benchmarks under the head titled “initiating civil service reforms”. The tracker informs you that the actions of “Appointments to key positions” and “Address by the PM to civil servants” have already been completed. This is 67% of the work envisaged under the head for the first 100 days! The minimal monitoring of government activities has followed a futile attempt by the PTI leadership to impose a moratorium on holding the government accountable or daring to criticise it during its first 100 days. There are four major premises of why consistent vigilance of the new government is desirable even during the initial “honeymoon” phase.

First, there are unmistakable early signs of who is calling the shots for the government. Is it largely the PM? Has he truly empowered his team? Or is it that the presentations by top bureaucracy are guiding government policy and vision, if any? The answer has a vital bearing in two respects. The responsiveness of the government (identifying and meeting public’s immediate needs) is likely to be low and laboured if critical steps are to be approved at the highest level. The responsiveness may well be absent if the bureaucracy is the prime agency feeding a low capacity political leadership about what needs to be done. This is already happening in Punjab with the PM leading on CM-level meets with the CM widely known to be sparsely knowledgeable about provincial issues. Perhaps more significantly, this mode of decision-making is an indication that PTI continues to believe in a trickle-down reform model: the individual occupying the highest echelon is honest and dedicated so this will spur reforms at the grass root. The paradox, however, is that institution-building is necessary for better service delivery by the institutions themselves. Arguably, better service delivery hence entails overcoming structural compulsions through devolved decision-making rather than a chivalrous

one-man passion to transform. Given the enormity of the challenge, the PM must learn quickly to take the focus away from himself from time to time.

Second, let it not be forgotten that PTI has come into power after vitriolic opposition of the policies of Sharif regimes at the centre and in Punjab. It is, therefore, legitimate to expect that the priority areas for reform already stand spelled out on the basis of the “tabdeele” vision.

However, so far the reform roadmap has been at best arbitrary and shaped by hasty pronouncements. We have a Taskforce on promoting austerity in the public sector but not one exclusively devoted to enhancing revenue generation – the non-romantic actual solution to our economic predicament. We have all the rhetoric about relentlessly chasing “hundreds of billions of dollars” of supposedly black money laundered abroad. But what about proceeding against owners of posh properties and luxury vehicles within the country who are not even registered with the tax authorities? Did anyone in the Federal cabinet question the PM’s whimsical priority to go for a debt portfolio review of Pakistan from 2008-18? Should the meek surrender before the aggressive Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) be construed as the first indication of a hands-off approach towards religious fanaticism? The prioritisation gaps need course correction or time, opportunity and credibility will be the casualties.

Third, the short period is about enough to gauge the political will: does the government follow-up its public declarations with concrete action and dedicated public spending? The government already has had the opportunity of presenting a mini-budget. Does it help that after all the platitudes about broadening the tax base, the restrictions on non-filers to purchase vehicles and real estate were lifted? That they now stand restored is more a tribute to the opposition and civil society’s refusal to listen to the government’s “please be soft on us during the first 100 days” pleas. Does the Atif Mian episode help? Another classic wavering of political intent is embodied in the back-and-forth between various Ministries about the CPEC: “we will review the CPEC”; “we are fully committed to the CPEC”; “we will only review certain projects under the CPEC”. Unfortunately, courtesy the vacillating political will, the government may end up with the infamy of “damaging” the CPEC to secure an IMF loan!

Last but not least, given our sordid history of “good governance” rides, it is worth examining if the 100-day strategies and decisions have traces of elite capture, signifying complex “grand” corruption. The malefic influence of vested lobbies can take several forms. Does being “on the same page” with the military in effect “bequeath” complete policy ownership to the army high command in the security and external relations realms? Can holistic civil service reform be finalized through a Taskforce completely dominated by the Pakistan Administrative Service members (most of them in-service) sans public consultation? If elite capture is indeed happening the PTI government would need serious introspection about its decision-making process so that issue prioritisation and the political will to reform are not compromised. It does not help that the PM has been inside-the-box physically – not seen with the masses and/or at public places. It will be interesting to observe whether and to what extent the recently-launched Pakistan Citizens’ Portal helps the government reshape its policies/priorities through public feedback. So far, there is a strong perception that only the rich and the powerful have the PM’s ear and have been influencing his selection for key offices.

The 100-day tracker needs to be evaluated against the above-listed four criteria. Highlighting the ills of previous rulers, threatening them with reprisals and over-marketing expectations cannot substitute performance. The PTI government hence needs single-minded focus on formulating policies, devising strategies and effectively implementing them to overcome massive structural and institutional challenges. Conversely, the PTI team ought to have little time and motivation to

question (however subtly) the intentions of its constructive critics or to ridicule objective evaluations of its performance. The disadvantage of incumbency is palpable. There are indications that top PTI leadership is increasingly resorting to heightened rhetoric against political adversaries to deflect performance scrutiny. By claiming the monopoly of wisdom, the PM will end up being surrounded by sycophants, many of them from the bureaucracy. The inevitable outcome will be the government's entrapment in a blind alley of under-performance and false notions of indispensability. It has happened before to equally clever, more experienced, if perhaps less well-intentioned "reformers".

The writer is a Political economy analyst and former civil servant
goldenstar2005@hotmail.com

Economy and Cultural and Social Affairs

Bangladesh

Election Commission

The Daily Star, Dhaka, November 10, 2018

How will EC check illegal spending?

No effective mechanism in place to curb election expenditure beyond ceiling

Shakhawat Liton and Mohiuddin Alamgir

A candidate can spend Tk 10 per voter for electioneering in the upcoming parliamentary polls. His/her total spending, however, in no way can exceed Tk 25 lakh, the ceiling of maximum expenditure, even if the number of voters in a constituency is more than 2.5 lakh, according to a notification issued by the Election Commission.

The EC yesterday send copies of the notification to all returning officers, assistant returning officers, chiefs of the law enforcement agencies and other officials concerned across the country to take necessary actions.

It is, however, not clear how they will follow the directive as no mechanism has been developed over the years to monitor the expenditure in an election.

In such a situation, political analysts and electoral experts apprehend that unauthorised spending during electioneering may influence the polls.

Exceeding the limit of expenditure remains an “open secret”. None of the past ECs had been able to take any effective measures to contain the influence of unauthorised money in electioneering.

A Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study on the 2008 parliamentary polls revealed that candidates who contested the ninth parliamentary election spent about Tk 30 lakh each on average in excess of the expenditure limit set by electoral laws.

The study published in April 2009 also said the money was spent for campaigning since the last day for withdrawal of nomination to the polling day. Electoral laws had allowed a candidate to spend maximum Tk 15 lakh. The EC had fixed Tk 5 per voter.

Money spent beyond the limit is considered to be unauthorised money in polls.

Influence of such unauthorised money may appear as a major obstacle to ensuring a level-playing field for all political parties and candidates in polls campaign, political and electoral experts told The Daily Star yesterday.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain says it is very difficult to control the use of illegal money in elections in Bangladesh as well as in neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan.

He said the EC had formed a committee to examine the expenditure of candidates in the 2011 Narayanganj city polls. "The committee used to monitor the expenditure of candidates on a weekly basis. I think it was helpful for lowering the use of black money," he said.

Sakhawat said the committee found anomalies in the accounts of the candidates who had showed the spending for hiring loudspeakers and printing posters less than the actual expenses.

“We have recommended forming a [similar] monitoring committee for each constituency for the parliamentary polls,” said Sakhawat, who was an election commissioner of the ATM Shamsul Huda-led EC.

That EC had sent proposals to the government seeking power to monitor candidates' election expenses during electioneering by devising its method of monitoring. But before the last parliamentary polls in 2014, the government rejected the proposal.

The then EC had drafted the proposal based on the experience it gathered in the Narayanganj polls. "But I don't think the current EC has gone through our proposal," Sakhawat said. He then referred to Indian EC's efforts to monitor the expenditure.

In the last Lok Sabha election, the Indian EC had deployed 659 officers drawn from the central revenue services like the Income Tax and Customs and Excise departments, in all 543 parliamentary constituencies to curb the use of black money and illegal funds in the polls. Officials in the EC Secretariat said the current commission a few months ago once discussed how to contain the influence of unauthorised money in the election. It also discussed formation of committees in each constituency to monitor candidates' spending during campaigning. But the EC did not move forward with the idea, they added.

Contacted, Election Commissioner Kabita Khanam said they would take necessary actions in line with the laws to check the use of unauthorised money in the election. "We have announced the election schedule so we can have discussion on formation of the committee," she told The Daily Star.

Hafizuddin Khan, a former adviser to a caretaker government, thinks illegal money plays significant role in "buying" a nomination and electioneering phase. He claimed that many lawmaker hopefuls have already spent over Tk 25 lakh even before securing party nominations.

"A committee for each constituency should be formed to monitor expenditure during electioneering. It can help reduce use of illegal money," said Hafizuddin, also a former comptroller and auditor general.

The committee may be formed comprising "neutral" individuals who are seen as trustworthy, he said.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said fixing a ceiling for electioneering expenditure is a standard practice in many countries.

According to him, campaign-related expenses that are visible and measurable can be tracked and assessed in some reasonable degree and brought to the public focus as done by a civil society organisation like TIB.

"Investments for nomination business that are perceived to be ten times higher than campaign expenses are only known to leaders and other actors who are involved in transactions," said Iftekharuzzaman.

Things have been worsening as over the years, successive ECs have also not exercised its legal authority to scrutinise the election expenditure statements submitted by the candidates after the polls.

Interestingly, in the statements, all candidates claimed they spent less than the ceiling of maximum expenditure. But the EC has never scrutinised whether those who were elected as MPs and got defeated told the truth.

The Daily Star, Dhaka, November 10, 2018

Remove all campaign materials

EC gives parties, aspirants 7 days' time

Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission yesterday asked all political parties and lawmaker hopefuls to remove their posters, banners and all kinds of campaign materials within next seven days at their own initiative.

The EC also sent letters to all registered political parties to inform it within three days whether they wanted to contest the December 23 parliamentary polls under any political alliance.

Talking to reporters at the Nirbachan Bhaban, Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed said, “Bringing out processions and staging showdowns are prohibited until the candidates are allotted electoral symbols on November 30.”

No political party or candidate can start campaigning before the allocation of electoral symbols, he added.

The EC in a circular yesterday said all aspirant candidates should remove banners, posters, billboards, graffiti, arches and illuminations by midnight on November 14 at their own cost.

“If anyone fails to comply with the directive, the Election Commission will take stern action against him for violating the electoral code of conduct,” Helal Uddin said.

Asked if any leader from a nonregistered political party could contest the election, he said, “The EC cannot bar a candidate from taking part in the election if he is nominated by any registered political party.”

He said they have already cancelled the leave of all EC officials and employees.

On Thursday, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda announced that the 11th Jatiya Sangsad polls would be held on December 23.

According to the polls schedule, the last date for filing nomination papers is November 19. The returning officers will scrutinise the nominations on November 22 while the last date for withdrawal of candidature is November 29.

The Daily Star, Dhaka, November 10, 2018

The EC now has immense power

Must ensure a level playing field for all candidates

The announcement by the Election Commission that the 11th parliamentary election will be held on December 23 has brought to the fore the uphill task ahead of the Election Commission. The EC can exercise the immense power it now wields to make sure that the upcoming election is free, fair and participatory. The announcement, in the backdrop of major contentions from the opposition remaining unresolved, means that the EC has an immense responsibility to ensure a level playing field, meaning equal opportunity for all parties and candidates.

The condition for such a congenial atmosphere now depends on how diligently the EC carries out its role and enforces the electoral code of conduct which comes into place as soon as an election schedule is announced.

The promises that the CEC has made must be kept and the executive must unconditionally honour and support this body. It is the constitutional and collective responsibility of the state to ensure a free and fair election.

The CEC has promised that all parties and candidates will get equal opportunity for electioneering. The law enforcers will be instructed to refrain from harassing or filing cases against political leaders, candidates and agents. In the wake of indiscriminate, random arrests of individuals in recent days, we hope the EC will demonstrate its sincerity through actions and not mere words.

The EC is now both empowered and obligated by the Constitution and electoral laws to play a very important role at this time. It must show its sincerity in making sure a congenial, healthy atmosphere is maintained before, during and after the polls. This will mean holding law enforcers accountable, ensuring that returning officers and polling officials are allowed to do their jobs and voters can cast their vote without influence or intimidation. A free and fair election is the lifeblood of a democracy. The people of this country are hoping for a credible election. The EC must therefore use all the powers it is equipped with to uphold that leap of faith.

Elections

The Daily Star, Dhaka, November 10, 2018

AL on polls trail, BNP on streets

Contrasting pictures in two major political fronts after announcement of polls timetable; ruling party starts selling nomination forms

Rashidul Hasan and Mohammad Al-Masum Molla

With much fanfare and enthusiasm, aspiring candidates yesterday started collecting nomination forms from the Awami League's election steering office in Dhanmondi, setting off on their race to be the party's contestants in the 11th parliamentary polls.

The BNP, on the other hand, is still on the street mobilising public support in favour of its demand for holding the polls under a non-party election-time government after the dissolution of parliament.

Since the morning, nomination seekers from across the country began to swarm Dhanmondi-3 accompanied by supporters who were carrying placards and replicas of AL's election symbol "boat" and chanting slogans in favour of their leaders.

Many arrived by pickups and minibuses or marching in processions as bands led the way playing brass and percussions.

Eight booths for eight divisions were set up in the freshly decorated election steering office, just beside that of AL president, to sell nomination papers to aspiring candidates.

However, some nomination seekers returned empty-handed due to the massive turnout and some mismanagement despite waiting for several hours.

In Nayapaltan, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of BNP, held a press briefing in the morning, almost a regular event on his part.

Some 20 leaders and activists were present with him at the time.

Rizvi alleged that the Election Commission announced the schedule for the parliamentary polls ignoring opinions of all political parties.

"The sudden announcement of the election schedule before resolving the political problems is a clear indication that a one-sided election is going to be held," he said.

"All the opposition parties wanted the election schedule to be announced after a level playing field is ensured. The commission has enough time left for holding the election and it could have deferred the announcement of schedule without flouting the law."

After the briefing, the BNP headquarters wore a deserted look as the party leaders and activists except for Rizvi left.

Rizvi along with a few office bearers were then seen sitting idle inside the office while a good number of law enforcers were positioned outside.

The party yesterday remained busy with activities related to the Rajshahi rally of Jatiya Oikyafront, an alliance of BNP and some other parties.

In Dhanmondi, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader inaugurated the sale of nomination papers around 10:00am by purchasing two forms for AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

Later, he handed over the forms to AL Religious Affairs Secretary Sheikh Abdullah.

One of Hasina's forms was for Gopalganj-3 (Tungipara-Kotalipara). Quader said the name of the constituency for which the other form was collected will be disclosed later.

He bought another form for Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury for Rangpur-6 and handed over it to Deputy Speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah.

AL Joint Secretary Mahbub Ul Alam Hanif bought a form for Quader for Noakhali-5.

In his speech on the occasion, Quader said the sale of nomination forms started with huge enthusiasm of the party supporters and activists.

Responding to a query, he said the last date of selling nomination forms will be fixed after a meeting of AL Parliamentary Board to be held with Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Around 1,700 forms were sold on the first day at Tk 30,000 each.

"I came to the office at noon but failed to buy a form as I could not reach the booth because of the huge crowd," said Hafizur Rahman, who came to buy nomination form for Mymensingh-3. Md Hemayet, who came to collect form for Comilla-2, said he along with his supporters waited for several hours but failed get a form.

Talking to The Daily Star around 6:00pm, he said he would come again tomorrow (today).

Soon after the announcement of the election schedule on Thursday, the ruling Awami League-led alliance started election related activities.

The BNP-led 20-party combine and Jatiya Oikyafront were holding meetings to reach a final decision about contesting the polls.

The BNP is yet to announce publicly whether it would participate in the election. Its leaders joined yesterday's Oikyafront rally in Rajshahi but did not announce any fresh agitation programme.

The Oikyafront announced a plan to march towards the Election Commission but did not come up with a date.

The alliance leaders criticised the EC for announcing the schedule hastily and demanded rescheduling it. They said election schedule cannot be accepted without the release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

The 11th parliamentary election will be held on December 23. According to the schedule, the last date for filing nomination papers is November 19.

The returning officers will scrutinise the nomination papers on November 22 while the last date for withdrawing candidature is November 29.

Women Crime against Women

The Daily Star, Dhaka, November 10, 2018

Indigenous girl 'raped' in Ctg

Staff Correspondent, Ctg

A 13-year-old Tripura girl was allegedly raped by two men in Chittagong's Mirsarai upazila on Thursday.

The accused are Shimul Tripura, 19, and Md Mannan, 40.

Locals said Shimul was a contractor while Mannan a sub-contractor at a local forestry project. Jahedul Kabir, officer-in-charge of Mirsarai Police Station, said the incident took place at Luidda Dhala Pahar near Khaiyachara waterfall around 1:30pm.

The victim's father filed a case with the police station yesterday morning.

According to the case statement, the victim went to the project site where the duo raped her.

Police arrested Shimul around 7:30pm yesterday, but Mannan was on the run.

The girl was sent to One Stop Crisis Centre at Chittagong Medical College Hospital for medical examination.

India

Chhattishgarh Elections

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Cong manifesto promises loan waiver in 10 days, ‘ghar-ghar rozgar’

‘People’s document’ mainly focuses on farmers

Aditi Tandon

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, November 9

The Congress on Friday unveiled its ambitious manifesto in poll-bound Chhattisgarh, promising farm loan waiver, a job per household, special focus to help minorities do business with ease and enhanced pension for the families of policemen killed in Naxal attacks.

Party chief Rahul Gandhi launched the manifesto describing it as a “people’s document” based on interactions with stakeholders across spheres. Congress leaders said they had toured all districts to engage the electorate in the exercise.

The first to be released in the current election cycle for five states, Congress’ Chhattisgarh manifesto twists Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s famous 2014 Lok Sabha election slogan “Ghar ghar Modi, har ghar Modi” to read “Ghar ghar rozgar, har ghar rozgar”. It has 36 focus points but the primary thrust is on farmers.

TS Singh Deo, Congress Legislature Party leader who headed the manifesto committee, said immediate loan waiver for farmers within 10 days of formation of the Congress government was the party’s top promise.

“A major thrust on agricultural sector also includes fixing minimum support price for various crops as per the MS Swaminathan Commission report and provisioning of pension for farmers above 60 years of age to support them,” Deo told The Tribune.

Taking a cue from the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP government in Delhi, Congress has decided to cut power bills by half for domestic consumption in Chhattisgarh if it wins.

Asked how they proposed to create jobs, party leaders pointed to apprenticeship programmes and a proposed Rajiv Gandhi Mitr Yojana for monthly stipend to 10 lakh unemployed youth of Chhattisgarh.

For women’s safety, the manifesto speaks of providing “special conveyance” for late night commuting. On minorities, the document says: “Minority communities and their interests have been given due importance in the manifesto with proposals in place for their security, job opportunities and special help for ease of doing business.”

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Elections in Hindi belt will impact 2019

The BJP campaign in the coming polls in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh will determine if Modi or the CMs will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Rahul Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

Radhika Ramaseshan

Senior Journalist

The national implications of the state elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan cannot be underrated. Of the 65 Lok Sabha seats from the three states, the Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) won 63 and the Congress a mere two in the 2014 polls. While 65 is less than the 80 that Uttar Pradesh — that the BJP also swept — alone brings to the Lower House of Parliament, the Hindi belt that also houses MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, has been regarded as a bellwether of sorts for the General Election that will be held less than six months after these states pronounce their verdict.

Significantly, in the swathe extending from Rajasthan and Haryana in the west to Bihar in the east, the Congress and the BJP have been pitted in straight fights in the states that vote in November-December, with the regional entities occasionally playing the spoiler, as former Congress heavyweight Ajit Jogi's Janta Congress Chhattisgarh threatens to for the parent party. Importantly too, unlike UP and Bihar where the BJP is a relatively recent player-barring 1967 when it was part of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal in a coalition government headed by the Socialists in Lucknow—in its previous avatar as the Jana Sangh and the reincarnation, the party drew sustenance and support from its ideological fountainhead, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS created and established formidable networks in MP and Rajasthan and, therefore, its cadre has buttressed the BJP.

Equally, for the Congress, its roots run deep because MP was home to its illustrious clans, headed by Ravi Shankar Shukla and Dwarka Prasad Mishra since before Independence. Rajasthan's roll call of eminences was graced by Mohan Lal Sukhadia, Hari Dev Joshi, Jagannath Pahadia and Shiv Charan Mathur. For decades after Independence, the Congress's sway over this large terrain of the Hindi belt remained unchallenged, until the late eighties, when the BJP emerged as a formidable challenger and entrenched itself almost invincibly in MP and Chhattisgarh. Rajasthan predictably oscillates between the two parties.

MP's three critical factors

Facts speak for themselves. In MP, that has 230 Assembly seats, the Congress will need an 8.5 per cent swing away from the BJP to dislodge Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the Chief Minister and the BJP, in power since 2013. Attaining that figure would assume three critical factors: there is a huge anti-incumbency sentiment against the Chouhan establishment, the Congress recouped well enough to funnel popular discontent and translate the overriding feeling into votes and finally, the "Narendra Modi" factor will be inconsequential. However, every negative counted so far against the BJP is counteracted by a disadvantage bogging down the Congress.

It has a bevy of leaders who have been around for years, sniping at one another. The old tensions were equally palpable this year in the prelude to serious campaigning. Kamal Nath, who heads the MP Congress, ensured his cheerleaders were around to root for him as the next chief minister, while sharing the optics was young Jyotiraditya Scindia. Digvijay Singh, the former CM, has been marginalised although his peregrination on the banks of the Narmada river, running through the state, recharged the party's grassroots formations and reconnected the Congress with its out-of-work loyalists. Many in the state Congress regarded Digvijay as their only pan-MP face.

Additionally, the Congress' failure to articulate a stand on the Supreme Court's ruling diluting the SC/ST Act (that the Centre nullified) and on reservation for Dalits in promotions caused the upper castes, who tilt the power balance in the Bundelkhand, Mahakaushal and Baghelkhand regions, to look askance on Rahul Gandhi. Gandhi's embrace of "soft" Hindutva, evidenced in the temple stopovers, was intended to please the upper castes, who remained steadfastly with the BJP.

The BJP's main concerns were two: an unenthusiastic cadre that was looped out of the power structures and afflicted with the "what's-in-it-for-me" syndrome and farmers' restiveness.

Chouhan addressed the latter with a series of measures, notably a price deficit financing scheme called the "Bhavantar Bhugtana Yojana" to hedge price risks and compensate farmers forced to make distress sales at less than the minimum support price. Overnight, as it were, the traders retaliated against the farmers by forming cartels and artificially lowering foodgrains' prices. Despite the evidence, the state government would not act against the traders for fear of losing a crucial core base.

Clearer trends in Rajasthan

Rajasthan with 200 seats is projecting clearer trends. The Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, cleaved the government and the BJP organisation into two autonomous parts, divided by a wall. But she has a committed and sizeable following among the legislators which is why BJP president Amit Shah not only junked an incipient demand to replace her but also acceded to her choice of who would helm the state party. Vasundhara's previous stints in power left a trail of caste conflicts involving the Jats, Gujjars and Meenas. This time, the BJP is up against the threat of losing the support of the Rajputs (estimated to be 12 per cent of the electorate) after serial mishaps, from the killing of an alleged criminal Anandpal Singh to forcing veteran Jaswant Singh out in the 2014 elections. The Shree Rajput Sabha coined a slogan, "Kamal ka phool, hamari bhool" (voting the lotus was our mistake).

The Congress has not projected its old hand Ashok Gehlot as its CM candidate and has purposefully confounded the leadership question by according equal space to Sachin Pilot, the Rajasthan Congress president, who is supposedly a part of Rahul's core team. It is useful to recall that in the 2008 elections, when the same circumstances worked against the BJP and Vasundhara (party-government split, caste imbalance, an angry RSS), the Congress barely touched a majority and spirited away six Bahujan Samaj Party legislators to get the numbers while Vasundhara picked up 78 seats against odds.

Populism in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh votes on November 12 in the first phase under the shadow of guns in Maoist strongholds and the glimmer of hope held out by its CM Raman Singh's populist schemes that were subject to their quota of leakages and irregularities.

Tactically, so far, the BJP has not converted these elections into a Modi-centred one or a referendum against the Centre. Its campaign will determine if the Prime Minister or the powerful chief ministers will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

PM Modi on poll trail in Chhattisgarh: Congress shields urban Maoists who live in AC homes

With the Congress holding eight of the twelve seats currently, Jagdalpur in Bastar district is crucial to the BJP's fortunes in the state.

Written by Dipankar Ghose | Dantewada

With three days to go before the crucial first phase of the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections on November 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday launched a scathing attack on the Congress saying they made statements to "protect urban Maoists" and used the word "krantikari" to refer to Maoists.

Modi addressed the rally in Jagdalpur in Bastar district, which is among 12 seats that will vote in the first phase. And with the Congress holding eight of the twelve seats currently, the region is

crucial to the BJP's fortunes in the state with BJP leaders admitting that they need to effect a turnaround here to offset any anti-incumbency that may have set in the plains.

"You must have seen the urban Maoists, they live in air-conditioned homes in cities. They look neat and clean, their children study abroad and roam around in nice cars, but they sit from afar and ruin the lives of adivasi children," Modi said.

He said, "*Aur ek aisi jamaat, is chunaav mein lad rahe Congress ke log jawaab de, ki aap un urban Maovadiyon ke raksha ke liye bayaanbaazi karte ho. Unke khilaaf agar sarkar kanooni karvahi kare toh aap unkon bachaane ke liye maidaan mein aate ho. Aur yaha aakar ke, naxalvaad ke khilaaf dhulmul baate karke vote paroste ho? Kya aise logon ko maaf karenge kya?*"

(The leaders of the Congress should answer, that you make comments to protect these urban Maoists? If the government takes legal action against them, you come out to protect them? And then you come here, and say something wishy-washy against Naxalism to garner votes? Will you forgive such people?)

"Do we have to change Bastar or not? That is why I have come to request you that on Bastar's earth, only the lotus should bloom. And if someone else comes, which is not going to happen in Chhattisgarh, but if they come in some corner of Bastar, they will stain Bastar," he said.

The Congress countered saying Modi's attack was a sign of frustration as his party is staring at defeat in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh – states affected by Maoist violence. "Staring at defeat in Chhattisgarh/MP, a frustrated PM seeks to hide his abject failure and weak-kneed approach to fighting Naxalism, which he claimed to finish post Demonetisation," said Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala.

The Prime Minister also said that Maoists had a "demonic mindset" that puts guns in the hands of children instead of a pen, and said that they burn schools and refuse to let doctors work. He brought up the death of DD cameraperson Achyutnanda Sahu in a Maoist attack in Neelavaya in Dantewada, and said, "You must have seen, a friend from Doordarshan connected to the world of journalism, was capturing the celebration of our democracy on his camera, by meeting people inside the forests, to celebrate democracy sacrificed his life. Achyut Sahu was riddled by bullets by Maoists."

"What was his fault? He had come to talk about your well being. Had come to show your dreams to the rest of the world was carrying a camera on his shoulder. He did not have a gun. He had a camera. And should he be killed? Two days ago, five jawans were killed. These Maoists kill innocents and these Congress leaders call them revolutionaries? Do you agree with this? Should such a Congress have a place in India? What language are they talking? Such a party which lies has no future. Those who have to lie like this, understand that there is no space on the ground for them."

Over the past week, the BJP has attacked the Congress for a comment made by Uttar Pradesh Congress leader Raj Babbar where he referred to Maoists as "misguided revolutionaries" when making the case that the battle against Maoism would also have to be conducted through conversations and not just bullets.

With eleven of the 12 Bastar seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes, Modi attempted to label the Congress a party that makes fun of adivasis. "They make fun of their song, their dance, their attire. They make fun of this. I am shocked. I had once gone to the North East and their my adivasi brothers and sisters with great love and respect made me wear a pagdi... Congress leaders made such fun of the pagdi and in all of the North East and in the rest of our country, people were angry, adivasis were angry," he said.

After the PM's speech, the Congress called the BJP government "spineless" and Surjewala said that 11 soldiers had died in Maoist violence in Chhattisgarh in the "last 14 days...including 5 jawans yesterday" adding that since demonetisation, for which he said one of the stated objectives was to curb Maoist and terrorist violence, "1,030 Naxal incidents till Feb 2018 & 114 jawans martyred".

On Twitter, he said: "Did Modi find time to even remember them today as he indulged in his trademark petty politics?" Referring previous statements by the Prime Minister, Surjewala asked him if he still stood by: "1. Your own statement calling 'Naxals' our 'own people'. 2. Dr. Raman Singh calling Naxals 'sons of the soil' who will be 'welcomed like our own children'."

He also said that Congress has "lost over 25 of its leaders to Naxal Terror under BJP's watch."

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Chhattisgarh polls: Congress promises Rs 2,500 per month to jobless youth

The manifesto also promised prohibition in areas other than the tribal areas of Surguja and Bastar, where the gram panchayat will reserve the right to take the decision, as well as a loan waiver within 10 days of the formation of government.

Written by Dipankar Ghose | Dantewada

The Congress manifesto, announced on Friday, promised a Rs 2,500 monthly stipend for 10 lakh unemployed youth in the state who would be engaged in "community service and social work".

The manifesto also promised prohibition in areas other than the tribal areas of Surguja and Bastar, where the gram panchayat will reserve the right to take the decision, as well as a loan waiver within 10 days of the formation of government.

The manifesto was drawn up by the Congress after a statewide Jan Ghoshna Patra campaign in which, led by chairperson of the manifesto committee T S Singhdeo, Congress leaders met organisations and people across districts over a period of at least three months.

On Friday, the manifesto was released by Congress president Rahul Gandhi with senior Congress leaders Bhupesh Baghel, Singhdeo, Charandas Mahant and Rajnandgaon candidate Karuna Shukla by his side. With a day to go for campaigning for the first phase to end, the BJP is yet to announce a manifesto.

The Congress's 36-point manifesto began with the oft-iterated promise of a loan waiver within 10 days, and Rs 2,500 per quintal of paddy. The issue of the price of paddy is dominating the state, with the state government falling short of its promise of a Rs 2,100 support price and Rs 300 bonus for paddy, promised by the BJP in 2013.

In Rajnandgaon on Friday, Rahul said the Congress would "help out the BJP" by paying farmers two years of bonuses that were not given in the Raman Singh tenure. The Congress also announced rates for maize, soyabean, sugarcane and millets in its manifesto.

The party campaign also spoke of both universal healthcare and universal education, promising free healthcare, medicines and consultancy. It also promised that the right to education will be applied till class 12, and free education for students will be given till the postgraduation level. The manifesto also promised regularisation of government jobs for unregularised government workers and stopping of "outsourcing" of government jobs.

Demonetisation

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Demonetisation move was destructive: Maken

Staff Reporter

Delhi Congress marks two years since Centre's note ban exercise with protests throughout the day

The Delhi Congress, the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) and the National Students' Union of India held protests in Delhi throughout Friday to mark the second anniversary of the "destructive, faulty and hasty implementation of demonetisation, which has wrecked the Indian economy".

In the morning, IYC members were detained by the police from a protest outside the RBI office as they shouted slogans against the BJP-led government.

Later, Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Ajay Maken participated in a candlelight march from Jantar Mantar to the Reserve Bank of India on Parliament Street.

Addressing the crowd, Mr. Maken said: On November 8, 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stunned nearly 132 crore Indians by announcing demonetisation without any prior hint...

Demonetisation was implemented not to end corruption, black money or terrorism, but to help his rich industrialist friends convert their black money into white."

The Delhi Congress said that Mr. Modi had betrayed the people of the country, and ruined the lives of crores of people as even two years after demonetisation corruption has not ended, black money has not been unearthed, and terrorism has not come to an end.

Mr. Maken said that "today, black money is being unearthed in the country while corruption has shot through the roof, defeating the very purpose for which Mr. Modi had implemented demonetisation".

The senior Congress leader said that lakhs of people had fled Delhi following unemployment as a result of demonetisation, which "has severely affected the development of the Capital". Mr. Maken said that the nearly four-and-a-half-year rule of the Modi-led government has only driven the country to ruin without fulfilling "even a single promise" made to the people.

He said that the BJP had promised to bring back the black money stashed away in foreign accounts and deposit Rs. 15 lakh each in each account holder's name, "but it has remained a hollow promise".

The Kashmir Times, Jammu, November 10, 2018

Demonetisation is crippling informal economy, job market

By Nitya Chakraborty

Arun Jaitley is still resorting to white lies after two years

It was two years ago, on that fateful night of November 8, 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his "historic" decision of demonetization promising that it would act as a game changer in the Indian economy by driving out black money, weed out fake notes and check terror funds but the Reserve Bank of India's figures show nothing has been achieved in the last 24 months, whereas the informal economy still remains shattered leading to high joblessness and under employment.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has been continuously changing the thrust of the initial objectives announced by the PM during announcement year after year and on this second anniversary of demonetisation, he claimed in his blog that confiscation of currency was not an objective of demonetisation. Getting it into formal economy and making the holders pay tax was the broader objective. The system required to be shaken in order to make India move from cash to digital transactions, he said. Nothing is far from truth. RBI figures again show that cash is back and there has not been substantial change in digital transactions.

On the other hand, the disruption which the demonetization created, led to deaths of about 120 persons, mostly poor many of whom died while waiting in the queue before the banks and

crippled the informal economy which is still to recover. Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are not talking of terror funds or black money. Jaitley is now talking in more general terms trying to explain how the tax collections have improved leading to more resources, better infrastructure and a better quality of life.

The opposition parties have decided to observe this demonetization day as black day. The Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari has demanded an apology for running and wrecking the economy. Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has correctly said that in the case of demonetization, time has not acted as a healer, the scars and wounds to the economy are only becoming more visible with the passage of time. The Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was more direct when he said that 'though the lists of financial scams of the Modi government is endless, demonetization was a self inflicted deep wound on the economy which even two years after remains a mystery'.

In the recent weeks, much of this mystery is being unraveled as reports are appearing how some businessmen including bullion merchants took advantage of the demonetization in making huge money through foul means. Further many of the people had some inkling of the measure coming. The impact in the job market was immediate. Studies made about first four months of 2017 show that 1.5 million jobs were lost during January-April 2017 due to demonetisation. The estimated total employment during the period was 405 million compared to 406.5 million during the preceding four months of September-December 2016. A CMIE study showed that the lasting effect of demonetization in labour participation rate is apparent in the months of 2017 and in 2018 also, the jobless growth is continuing and it is most visible in the informal sector.

The situation in the informal sector of the economy is still pathetic. According to the economic census, there are 56 million non-agricultural enterprises and if 72 million farmers are added to this, 120 million economic entities exist in the informal sector. This sector has the largest number of employment in the country and it is in distress. There is really no reliable data about the real impact of the demonetisation on the rural jobs, but the rise in distress among the farmers, is an indication of the nature of woes that have hurt the informal economy. The CMIE report for the first four months of 2018 also indicate that the number of new jobs is going down. A report by the International Labour Organisation has projected that the number of unemployed has risen in India in 2017 and the trend will continue in 2018. CMIE has also recently reported that the employment situation is getting worse. The unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent in September 2018 up from 6.3 per cent in August. This is when the labour participation rate has fallen to 43.2 per cent in September 2018 from 46 per cent in September 2016.

What better quality of life is the Finance Minister talking? If there are no jobs and the prospects in the next six months are dim, how can the quality of life of the people improve? Finance Minister has talked of positive impact of demonetization on collection of taxes. What is the actual position? Against the budgeted growth of 19.15 per cent of net tax revenue, the growth rate between April and September 2018 was only 7.45 per cent over the collections in the corresponding period of 2017. To reach the target, the net tax revenue has to grow by 28.21 per cent in the remaining six months of this fiscal. Is it possible?

The Indian economy is in a real mess and it is not possible to revive it before the coming Lok Sabha elections in April/May 2019. The BJP government and its frontmen including the PM and the Finance Minister will be deploying all methods to project a picture of a buoyant economy to the electorate. But that is not going to click. The Karnataka by elections results have shown that the Modi magic is not working. Arun Jaitley's bid to project demonetization in a positive manner, has also failed. Time has come for frank admission that the PM made a historic blunder on

November 8, 2016 night.

—(IPA Service)

Hindustan Times, Delhi, November 10, 2018

PM Modi should accept demonetisation was wrong, writes Rajdeep Sardesai

Whatever spin the government may now give, there is no escaping the original self-proclaimed agenda behind the sudden withdrawal of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 rupee notes from the system. Two years later, there is growing evidence to indicate that ‘note-bandi’ is no longer seen as an electoral asset on the campaign trail

Rajdeep Sardesai

Hindustan Times

For a government which has mastered the art of event marketing and management, there has been a markedly muted response to the second anniversary of its dramatic demonetisation announcement, almost as if the crackdown on crackers has also silenced the government’s propaganda machine. ‘Note-bandi’, after all, was hailed at the time by the government’s cheerleaders as the biggest and bravest step taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi: a modern day, revolutionary ‘war’ against corruption and black money is how the November 8, 2016, decision was pitched. Yet today, a decision that was central to the government’s anti-corruption political rhetoric is slowly being consigned to the edges of collective memory, almost as if there is little left to celebrate any longer.

Contrast this with the exuberance with which the Modi government celebrated the second anniversary of the surgical strikes across the Line of Control in end September this year. The Parakram Parv or Surgical Strike day was marked with a series of public events in a conscious attempt to hype the moment as the Modi government’s very own ‘Vijay Diwas’. This was muscular military nationalism being paraded by a government keen to contrast its macho image with that of its allegedly enfeebled predecessor.

That gung-ho machismo has now gone missing in the context of the government’s ‘war’ on black money with a strident opposition, including the otherwise cautious former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, describing demonetisation as a classic case of ‘economic mis-adventurism’ that had caused ‘havoc’ in the economy. Finance minister Arun Jaitley has been almost the lone warrior for the Modi government while now claiming that the aim of demonetisation was never confiscating cash but helping to formalise the economy. Clearly, the narrative has shifted from black money to a cashless economy to claims of widening the tax base.

And yet, whatever spin the government may now give, there is no escaping the original self-proclaimed agenda behind the sudden withdrawal of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 rupee notes from the system. At the time, Mr Modi pitched his decision as a ‘moral cleansing’ of society, a puritanical zeal that saw the prime minister make an emotional appeal to the nation to give him just 50 days to set the black economy right or publicly hang him. It was just the kind of passion that the prime minister has made his successful calling card.

Even as millions queued up for days to exchange their old notes, there was a sense of hope that co-existed with anxiety. A ‘we shall overcome’ spirit seemed to suffuse the citizenry, a belief that Prime Minister Modi was a Robin Hood-like hero who would serve the poor by teaching the corrupted billionaire elites a lesson. Most national opinion polls at the time showed the prime minister’s popularity at an all-time high: just months later, the BJP swept to power in the crucial

UP elections of March 2017 with an unprecedented three-fourth majority. ‘Note-bandi’ was hailed as a magic bullet that annihilated the opposition.

And yet, two years later, there is growing evidence to indicate that ‘note-bandi’ is no longer seen as an electoral asset on the campaign trail. Where once the government claimed that demonetisation had broken the back of Naxalism, it can hardly suggest that in poll-bound Chattisgarh against the backdrop of another bout of bloody Naxal violence. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, two states with large small farmer and trader populations, the BJP again has to tread warily: it is, after all, the ‘small’ individual who seems to have suffered the most as a result of the abrupt severing of traditional cash transactions in the informal economy. The wounds of the police firing that resulted in the death of five farmers in MP’s Mandsaur are still raw: demonetisation was seen as a trigger for the farmer protests, disrupting every aspect of the rural economy, from land markets to credit networks to procurement prices.

The prime minister’s Diwali bumper offer to the country’s micro and small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) of super-fast loans up to Rs one crore is perhaps a belated recognition of a reality that has been staring at this government for two years now: demonetisation and then the Goods and Services Tax (GST) were a ‘double whammy’ that almost knocked out those who could least afford to suffer the disruption. Which is why the prime minister may wish to seriously consider taking a step that he has assiduously avoided right through his public career for fear that it will somehow undermine his larger than life image: publicly accept he got his mission demonetisation wrong!

Post-script: Off record conversations with netas on the campaign trail are often a useful barometer to know ground realities. When I asked one of them in Madhya Pradesh what was going to be a key factor in a potentially tight election, he showed me a crisp 2000 rupee note, “Candidate aur leader toh matter karte hai lekin cash ke bagair engine nahi chalegi!” Cash, it seems, is well and truly back.

Rajdeep Sardesai is senior journalist and author

The views expressed are personal

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Congress plans statewide protests against note ban, ‘corruption’

The party has planned statewide protests against demonetisation, in which a section of senior party leaders will stage protests outside the office of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in Lucknow and Kanpur.

By: Express News Service | Lucknow

The Congress is planning to stage protests at the grassroot level, starting from November 12, against the BJP governments at the Centre and in the state on issues such as demonetisation and “corruption”.

The party has planned statewide protests against demonetisation, in which a section of senior party leaders will stage protests outside the office of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in Lucknow and Kanpur. All district units have also been asked to stage protests in their respective areas on the same day.

“It is not us, the RBI governor himself had said that the country had to see a loss due to demonetisation. So we want to ask Modi ji as well as his government who actually benefited from the move. It is the biggest scam of the country, which is unfolding one after another,” said state Congress president Raj Babbar.

Babbar said the Congress is also planning to bring up issues such as law and order, price rise, “corruption” and so on.

“We will raise questions on each of these issues,” said the state Congress president.

“Since we are planning protests and programs across the state, it would not be possible without connecting with the workers. Thus, through Shakti events, our leaders will connect with workers at the nyaya panchayat and booth level,” added Babbar.

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Demonetisation, a cautionary tale

The heavily flawed policy decision continues to adversely affect us

Written by Randeep Singh Surjewala

It is remarkable how Prime Minister Narendra Modi doesn't talk about demonetisation anymore. For a leader who is not shy about promoting even the most modest of his achievements, it speaks volumes about the degree to which demonetisation failed. Especially on the second anniversary of what his supporters once called a game-changing policy initiative. For a man who asked the nation to “hang him” if demonetisation did not succeed in 50 days, such silence even after 730 days speaks volumes to the nation.

We now know that PM Modi failed on every single yardstick that he and his team set. Black money has not been eradicated. With 99.9 per cent of all cash coming back into the banking system, Modi's promise to the nation (and before the Supreme Court) that over Rs 3 lakh crore would be recovered by the government has proved to be false.

On curbing terrorism, we are witnessing a period of unprecedented unrest both in areas affected by Naxal violence (with 114 officials martyred) and at our borders (with 127 security officials being martyred and 99 civilians having lost their lives) in the days after demonetisation. On eliminating fake notes, it turns out that the problem was greatly exaggerated. The fake currency found is a mere 0.0034 per cent of all the notes in circulation. In sum, we spent over Rs 30,000 crore of tax payer money to recover a little over Rs 7,000 crore. There is no democracy in the world that would tolerate such a monumental failure, born out of arrogance and recklessness.

We are still assessing the damage caused to the economy. The Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy recently published its survey, which presented three grim findings: One, “at least” 3.5 million jobs were lost. Two, the labour force itself shrank by 15 million. Three, women, an already vulnerable part of the workforce, were worse hit than men.

The government's silence is punctuated only by the sound of the finance minister's Diwali blog, which desperately seeks to reset a narrative that has gone out of their control. [Arun Jaitley](#) now says the objective was formalisation or reducing the dependency of citizens on cash.

Unfortunately for Jaitley, this claim has been proven incorrect by the RBI in its annual report, published in August (where much of the data mentioned in the first paragraph also comes from).

The report states that “India's currency to GDP ratio moved up to 10.9 per cent in 2017-18, returning to being amongst the highest levels of currency usage in peer emerging market economies (EMEs) and advanced economies (AEs) as well. In consonance, the use of digital payments, which had surged to a peak in December 2016 in the aftermath of demonetisation, fell back to the elevated post-demonetisation trend before rising in recent months.”

The individuals, who lost their lives in the aftermath of Modi's grand announcement and due to lack of institutional preparedness, are not even acknowledged by the man who promised “sabka saath, sabka vikas”.

However, in addition to the above, there are other, more sinister inferences, that have emerged in the two years since its passage.

First, it was, as Rahul Gandhi aptly put it, a “fair-and-lovely” scheme, to whitewash the unaccounted wealth held by key cronies in politics and industry. We are yet to find the example of a single wealthy industrialist who was prosecuted or even inconvenienced as a result of this exercise. In fact, high net worth defaulters have never had it this good. The count of those leaving India with taxpayer money increases every day and the government does nothing. Second, prima facie, it appears that the government used its insider knowledge to benefit the ruling party. A cooperative bank in Ahmedabad, which enjoys the distinction of having Amit Shah as a director (and former chairman), ended up being the only district bank to have received the largest majority of old currency notes in the entire country. This is too remarkable a coincidence to be ignored. Multiple other instances of suspicious transactions implying collusion between the government and participants having ties with the ruling party are in the public domain, but none of them have been investigated.

The cascading impact of this policy decision continues to adversely affect all of us. To shore up its losses caused by demonetisation and other acts of economic mismanagement, the government has chosen to plunder the RBI’s reserves of over Rs 3.6 lakh crore, a step never before taken by any government in the past except once, at a time of war.

Demonetisation is now taught as a cautionary tale by academics across the world. It seems that Modi is likely to meet with the same fate.

The writer is an MLA in the Haryana Legislative Assembly and AICC In Charge of Communications

Election Commission

The Sentinel, Guwahati, November 10, 2018

Election Commission says no Exit Polls between November 12 and December 7 in the Five Poll-bound States

Guwahati: A near about month-long ban has been imposed by the Election Commission on holding exit polls beginning 12 November in the five poll-bound states. A notification issued by the EC have mentioned it very clear that any sort of poll publishing or publicising between 7 am of 12 November and 5.30 pm of 7 December is strictly prohibited.

The notification states, “conducting any exit poll and publishing or publicising the result of exit poll by means of the print or electronic media or in any other manner shall be prohibited.”

Of the five poll-bound states, Chhattisgarh is going to polls in two phases on 12 and 20 November and Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram to have elections on 28 November. Rajasthan and Telangana will go to polls on 7 December.

The Sentinel, Guwahati, November 10, 2018

Election Commission bans all exit polls for poll bound states

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission has banned all exit polls for the five poll-bound states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram and Telangana from November 12 till December 7. While polling in Chhattisgarh is scheduled in two phases on November 12 and November 20, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram would vote on November 28. Rajasthan and Telangana will go to vote on December 7. (IANS)

Environment

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Haryana failed to curb pollution, says AAP

Special Correspondent

‘No Delhi-like measures rolled out’

The local unit of Aam Aadmi Party on Friday accused the Haryana government of failing to curb air pollution in the Millennium City, despite the city contributing the maximum to the State exchequer.

Residents chocking

Addressing a press conference, AAP spokesperson Sudhir Yadav said the city’s people, despite paying huge taxes, were forced to breath toxic air.

“In the city with a population of more than 20 lakh, there are only two machines to measure pollution levels and no mechanism in place to measure PM10 particles”.

He said the situation had worsened since the government had failed to put in place the adequate infrastructure.

“The roads are broken. Bad engineering leads to frequent traffic jams. There are not enough parking spaces. All this has led to increased air pollution. Though the Haryana Environment and Forest Ministers are from Faridabad and Gurugram respectively, the two cities figure among the top most polluted cities of the world,” said Mr. Yadav.

He demanded to know from Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar as to why CNG cost higher in the State compared to neighbouring Delhi, no air purifiers were installed, no metro train connectivity increased, no electric public transport introduced and National Green Tribunal and Supreme Court guidelines not implemented.

He also demanded that CNG prices should be decreased, more public transport provided and use of diesel generators banned till the time the pollutions were not controlled.

The roads are broken. Bad engineering leads to frequent traffic jams. There are not enough parking spaces. All this has led to increased air pollution. Though the Haryana Environment and Forest Ministers are from Faridabad and Gurugram respectively, the two cities figure among the top most polluted cities of the world

Sudhir Yadav

AAP spokesperson

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Delhiites battle pollution by buying air purifiers

Pratyush Deep Kotoky

High demand for the device, say shopkeepers; many present it as wedding gift

Rising levels of pollution in the Capital is pushing up the sales of air purifiers, say shopkeepers dealing in the device.

Many residents have decided to buy air purifiers following constant exposure to harmful particulate matter several times the safe limit caused due to stubble burning in neighbouring States and local sources of pollution, as well as the recent bursting of crackers on Diwali.

“When people read about the rising pollution, the sale of air purifiers automatically rises. Since October 20, its sale has increased tremendously. We have been selling two to three air purifies daily for the past few days. Now that Diwali is over, we are expecting a 50% jump in sales. The scenario was the same last year,” said Vijay Kant, sales manager at Croma in north Delhi.

An air purifier costs around Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 25,000. “Air purifiers are still not common in middle class families, but owing to increasing pollution levels, many are buying it for health and medical reasons,” he added.

‘New heights in Diwali’

Usha Singh, a government officer, purchased an air purifier before the festival of lights as “during Diwali, pollution reaches new heights”.

On many families still considering an air purifier a luxury item, she said: “It is no longer a luxury item. It has become a necessity for the people of Delhi.”

Pallavi Ballavya, who bought an air purifier after Diwali, said: “We have a two-year-old child, who is suffering the brunt of bad air quality. The doctor has advised us to instal an air purifier in the house.”

With the wedding season around the corner, many people are buying air purifiers as a wedding gift. “My friend is getting married after two days and he lives in Ghaziabad. This gift [an air purifier] will be of good use to them,” said Amit Bansal.

My friend is getting married after two days and he lives in Ghaziabad. This gift [an air purifier] will be of good use to them

Amit Bansal

Resident

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Unlike West, we lack ethic of public participation

The truth is that we have failed as a nation to inculcate a sense of pride in one's city. On almost every index of human development, we are at the bottom where health, sanitation, education and human rights are concerned. We may have built the tallest statue in the world but we still have no clean air to breathe or safe water flowing out of a tap.

Ira Pande

Writer, Columnist

As I sit at my desk to write, I have no doubt at all in my mind about the subject I will choose.

The haze outside my window, the visible pollutants in the air that colour it a sickly yellow are a constant reminder of what Delhi has been like this past fortnight and more. Sadly, what we thought was a particular curse of the capital around this time of the year is now a reality over much of north India. The burning fields of Punjab and Haryana, the dust flowing in from the desert areas on the west and our own traffic have created a death-inducing situation. Air pollution and its hazards are now no longer possible to ignore and yet, come Diwali, people still let off poisonous crackers and add more muck to the already overloaded atmosphere.

To be fair, the Supreme Court has stepped in and some difference was visible — this year there were fewer crackers and some private colonies issued appeals to their residents to restrain their enthusiasm when celebrating Diwali. Schools, the media and choking, coughing residents realised that the time had come to act responsibly. However, our political leaders were more concerned with blaming each other to excuse themselves of any wrongdoing and both the state and central governments failed the citizens.

True, it is not the job of the government alone to take care of the problem of air pollution, but they had ample warning about the rising levels of air pollution to take some pre-emptive steps. After all, the fields of the neighbouring states have always burnt the stubble at this time of the year, so why did they not ensure that farmers were adequately educated and encouraged to opt for mechanised alternatives? Instead, they used this as an opportunity to seek greater funds and subsidies from the Centre.

Rampant and irresponsible construction, sweeping roads and raising clouds of dust each morning, rubble left on roadsides — all these were possible to contain if there was a will.

Typically, all such solutions were tried out but only in the fancy enclaves of government houses

while the truly polluted areas of outer Delhi and the slums along the river remained untouched. Planting green borders or spraying water before sweeping happened largely in the tony colonies near the Lutyens' area and other such pampered enclaves.

What about the residents themselves, those who are most affected by the degraded environment? Apart from a few do-gooders who have planted saplings and taken over degraded public spaces to turn them into green parks, most of us remain sullen and indifferent to our neighbourhood. Our own co-residents here, ever ready to write irate letters to the property manager about an unswept corridor or leaky taps, have shown no interest in cleaning up the area just outside our colony's gates.

Is this a Hindu habit, where we look at individual salvation but are supremely unconcerned about our neighbour? Compare this with the ethic of public participation in western countries where community bonds are strong and people actively engage in works of public good. I remember spending some time with an Austrian friend years ago and each morning he would go to the nearby Viennese woods to work on a bench he was putting up in memory of his parents. We met others there who came to weed or pick up carelessly left remnants of a picnic to ensure that these magnificent woods remained pristine.

The same friend proudly told us that Vienna's drinking water is supplied from the local springs and needs no treatment before it is pumped into the city's taps.

The truth is that we have failed as a nation to inculcate a sense of pride in one's city. All this jingoistic chest-thumping about how great our country is or how India's economic growth is the envy of the world means nothing if we cannot ensure a clean environment and safe drinking water to its citizens. On almost every index of human development, we are at the bottom where health, sanitation, education and human rights are concerned. Even our immediate neighbours, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the tiny Bhutan shame us here.

So what does it profit a man (or woman) if his nation has failed to provide safety from disease and environmental degradation? We may have built the tallest statue in the world but we still have no clean air to breathe or safe water flowing out of a tap.

Ironically, Delhi has a superb green cover, the legacy of its past rulers who built parks and gardens along the river. Lodhi Gardens and the Nehru Park are only two of its green lungs. Additionally, the Ridge that cuts across the city has traditionally saved its residents from the harmful effects of air pollution. There are forgotten or hidden gems (Sundar Nursery comes readily to mind) that are like oases of peace surrounded by the noise and pollution around them.

We have only to build on that legacy and preserve it for the future to become different. From looking at environmental concerns as the area of a few loonies we have to take control of our own neighbourhoods and ensure that everyone has a spot of green to breathe or walk in.

Instead of buying air purifiers and facial masks, perhaps we should clean up our own act first.

The Sentinel, Guwahati, November 10, 2018

Delhi Breathes Sigh of Relief as Air Quality Improves to “Very Poor”

Guwahati: There is finally some slightly good news for the people of Delhi fighting with the serious condition of Air pollution.

According to reports, Delhi's air quality on Saturday improved to the 'very poor' category after local pollutants "reduced significantly" and the contribution from stubble burning remained "marginal" due to wind speed,

According to the data by the **Central Pollution Control Board**, the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 394 which falls in the ‘very poor’ category, Fifteen areas in Delhi recorded ‘severe’ air quality while 19 areas recorded ‘very poor’ pollution levels, it said. On Saturday, the PM2.5 (particles in the air with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometers) level was recorded at 226, while the PM10 (particles in the air with a diameter of less than 10 micrometers) was recorded at 331 in Delhi.

It may be mentioned that an AQI between 0 and 50 is considered ‘good’, 51 and 100 ‘satisfactory’, 101 and 200 ‘moderate’, 201 and 300 ‘poor’, 301 and 400 ‘very poor’, and 401 and 500 ‘severe’.

Talking about the improvement in the overall air quality index. authorities in the Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) said. “The overall air quality index of Delhi has improved and is likely to go back to ‘very poor’ range against all odds and adverse weather conditions,”

They further said, “The unfavourable weather was to make dispersion very slow and could have aggravated pollution levels due to locally generated pollutants, but as the influx of fresh local emission significantly dropped and allowed already accumulated pollution to disperse slowly, the air quality improved,”

Authorities also said control measures also helped in improving the air quality of the national capital.

According to reports from a government-run agency on Friday revealed that Stubble burning in neighbouring states on Thursday was the “largest-ever recorded” this year which might lead to a further deterioration in the already “severe” air quality of the national capital, a government According to the **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM)**, 2,100 fire counts were observed on Thursday over northwestern region of India. “It was the largest-ever recorded for this year. It was around four times higher than Wednesday,” IITM said.

“The PM2.5 concentration is likely to increase again from Friday afternoon and may remain ‘severe’ or ‘severe-plus’ in Delhi-NCR till Sunday,” it added.

But inspite of the adverse condition of air pollution in the state, there is some relief as due to slow winds from the direction of stubble burning areas, the contribution of stubble fire emissions remained marginal.

The air quality in Delhi has been ‘severe’ for the past two days with the highest pollution level of the year recorded a day after Diwali on Thursday at an AQI of 642.

Exports

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Plastics exports rise 31.6% in April-Sept.

Special Correspondent

Higher shipments to China, Mexico

India’s plastics exports grew 31.6% to \$4.59 billion during April to September 2018 (H1 2018-19) as against \$3.48 billion in the same period last year. This is a faster pace of growth than the overall merchandise export growth from India, according to the Plastics Export Promotion Council (Plexconcil).

During H1 2018-19, India reported merchandise exports worth \$164.04 billion, an increase of 12.5% from \$145.75 billion in H1 2017-18.

Plastics formed 2.80% of India’s overall merchandise exports in H1 2018-19. “The growth in India’s plastics export has been primarily boosted by higher shipment of plastic raw materials,

plastic sheet, film, plates, and packaging materials. During H1 2018-19, 23 out of the top 25 destination countries recorded year-on-year growth in plastics export from India,” Plexconcil said.

Exports to China, Vietnam and Mexico witnessed high growth rates ranging between 70% and 140% during the H1 2018-19 period.

Sribash Dasmohapatra, executive director, Plexconcil, said, “India’s plastics exports in H1 2018-19 were boosted by higher exports, especially to North-East Asia, Africa, European Union, ASEAN, South Asia, and North America.”

Health

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Three women die of swine flu

Madurai Bureau

18 cases under treatment at Madurai GRH

Two women who were under treatment at the isolation ward of Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai with symptoms of swine flu died on Thursday night, sources at the hospital said.

One of them, Lakshmi, 51, was from Tiruvedagam near Madurai, and the other, Subbulakshmi, 61, was from Pandian Nagar in Tirumangalam.

A senior hospital official said at least 18 patients from Madurai and nearby districts, including four children, who had been tested positive for swine flu, were being treated at the GRH as on Friday. Meanwhile, K. Kolandaisamy, Director of Public Health, inspected the hospital and reviewed the treatment and preventive measures being taken for swine flu.

He said a mass fumigation and cleanup drive of public utility vehicles, including government and private buses, and places like bus stands had been initiated across the State from Wednesday in a bid to control spread of swine flu. “We are in discussion with various stakeholders to ensure that the drive has the maximum reach,” he said.

Meanwhile, Mallika, 61, wife of Kanagaraj of Andipatti, died of swine flu at Theni Government Medical College Hospital on Friday.

The family members of Mallika said she was down with fever and was referred from a hospital to the Andipatti hospital. After tests were done, she was admitted to the isolation ward.

However, she died on Friday morning.

Following the death, health officials visited her village and intensified anti-dengue measures.

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Cause to remain alert

Nathan Grubaugh

Zika-associated birth defects could be a serious public health crisis in India

Despite the recent announcement suggesting that the Jaipur Zika virus strains cannot cause foetal microcephaly, all possible measures to control transmission and monitor pregnancies should be taken. To the best of our knowledge, there is not a specific Zika virus strain — or mutation — linked to microcephaly. All Zika virus strains could possibly cause birth defects.

Over the last few years, the international community has banded together to quickly address a growing international public health crisis — the Zika virus epidemic. After its detection in Brazil during 2015, observant clinicians began to notice a striking increase in the rates of babies born with microcephaly, a rare neurological condition characterised by underdeveloped brains and undersized heads. Epidemiological, clinical, and experimental data has indicated that

microcephaly, and a range of other birth defects (such as miscarriages and ocular disease) could be caused by the Zika virus passing from a pregnant women to her foetus.

Many unknowns

While the science on the Zika virus has rapidly progressed, there is still much that we do not know about how it causes birth defects. We do not know the long-term effects of children who were infected with the Zika virus in the womb. We do not know why some lead to stillbirths and miscarriages, some lead to neurological complications, and others seem perfectly healthy. We do not understand why we only noticed microcephaly and other severe forms of disease during the epidemic in the Americas, and not before. There could be biological answers to these: certain Zika virus strains are more likely to cause birth defects than others. But at this point, we do not know.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recently announced that the Zika virus strains causing the outbreak in Jaipur, Rajasthan, cannot cause microcephaly. This conclusion was based on a genetic sequencing of viruses isolated from the outbreak. In these sequences, the ICMR did not find a Zika virus mutation linked to microcephaly that was suggested in a *Science* magazine study, in 2017. The problem with this conclusion is that the research was based on infection in mouse brains — not humans — and contains no epidemiological or clinical support. Numerous other studies suggest that all Zika virus strains may have the capacity to infect fetuses and cause neurological disease. Much more research is needed to determine if some strains are associated with a higher risk.

It is also difficult to determine how extensive Zika virus outbreaks will be in India. If the Zika virus has been silently spreading in the country, as it did throughout most of Asia for the last 50 years, then enough people may be immune to the virus to prevent large outbreaks. According to the most recent updates, 159 people in Jaipur had confirmed Zika virus infections. Considering that most infections do not cause noticeable disease, and thus most infected individuals do not seek medical attention, the true number of cases may be more than 10,000. At least 50 of the infected individuals are pregnant women, but again, the true number is likely to be much higher. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S., only 5-10% of Zika virus infections during pregnancies lead to Zika-associated birth defects, and the rates of microcephaly are much lower. So, while the chances for the Zika virus to cause harm to an individual baby are low, there is still a chance, regardless of the Zika virus strain in circulation.

Take precautions

Pregnant women and their families, including those planning to get pregnant, should take great caution to avoid mosquitoes — wear long sleeves and trousers, stay indoors when possible, use DEET/insect repellent, and remove standing water that mosquitoes use for breeding. Zika virus infection is not guaranteed upon mosquito bite, but the chances for infection rise with each new bite. Zika-associated birth defects could be a serious public health crisis in India, and, without a vaccine, all possible measures to control transmission and monitor pregnancies should be taken. Please, stay alert.

Nathan Grubaugh is Assistant Professor, Epidemiology of Microbial Diseases, Yale School of Public Health, U.S. Twitter @NathanGrubaugh

Illegal Immigrants

The Sentinel, Guwahati, November 10, 2018

Headmaster Caught Red-Handed for Alleged Forgery in NRC at Kharupetia

Guwahati: At a time when the entire state of Assam is heated up with the issue of **NRC**, another sensational incident has come to light at Kharupetia

In a sensational incident in **Kharupetia** under Darrang district in Assam, a school headmaster was caught red-handed while taking bribe on Friday in lieu of providing certificates for enrolling names in the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

According to reports the headmaster has been identified as Abdul Hamid of Baharbari Girls' Lower Primary (LP) School and was caught red-handed while taking bribe in exchange for providing educational certificates. He is alleged to have taken Rs 500 to Rs1,000 in exchange for providing those certificates to enroll names in the ongoing NRC updating process in Assam. Hamid was later handed over to the police by the local people. The local people have also demanded stringent action against the headmaster.

Confirming about the incident Police sources stated that "investigations are on".

Reports of corruption have surfaced earlier too in the entire NRC exercise going on in the State. In April this year, the police in Western Assam's Dhubri town detained two special verification officers who were assigned the job of updating the NRC for demanding 'service charge' from people summoned to submit documents establishing their citizenship.

There have been several reports of people offering bribes, submitting forged documents or borrowing legacy data of genuine citizens to be included in the citizen's register. Earlier this year, in Darrang district's Sipajhar too, police arrested two people of suspected nationality – San Khan and Nayan Khan – for offering to bribe Rs 20,000 to the NRC officials for including their names in the second draft.

Officials said at least half a dozen such cases have been reported from Central Assam's **Nagaon** and **Morigaon** districts with some offering up to Rs 2 lakh to get their names included in the NRC.

The updating process of NRC started in Assam the year 2013 under the strict monitoring of the Supreme Court of India to include the names of those persons (or their descendants) who appear in the NRC, 1951, or in any of the [Electoral Rolls](#) up to the midnight of 24 March 1971 or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to midnight of 24 March 1971, which would prove their presence in Assam or in any part of India on or before 24 March 1971.

On the midnight of 31 December 2017, Part Draft NRC was released and subsequently on 30 July 2018, the Complete Draft NRC was release

Judiciary

The Sentinel, Guwahati, November 10, 2018

Only 9 Percent Women in the Indian Judiciary System!

Guwahati: At a time when Indian women are taking charge of almost all fields of occupation right from flying in the sky as a pilot to successful completion of critical surgeries, it seems that the Indian judiciary system is the only field that has so few women domination in it. As per a recent report, barely 9% of the current working strength in High Courts of the country are woman.

In a historic moment that happens once in a blue moon, four women judges were appointed in four most important high courts of **Bombay**, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. But whether such a historic moment would be repeated again or not that is under doubt.

The first woman in the history of Indian judiciary was Anna Chandy (Kerala) who joined on February 9, 1959, but lasted for less than two weeks only. Immediately after her, four other female judges, namely, Justices Manjula Chellur, G Rohini, Nishita Nirmala Mhatre and Indira

Banerjee were appointed as the heads of the Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras high courts, respectively.

But later, the female justices broke their team of magical four as they had to take their retirement calls as per the norms. Justice G Rohini took retirement on April 13, 2017, Justice Nishita Nirmala Mhatre on September 19 and Justice Manjula Chellur on December 4. However, Justice Indira Banerjee had continued as Madras HC chief justice and has recently been appointed as a judge to the Supreme Court.

Kashmir Uprising

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Kishtwar killings: 4 key suspects held

Accused arrested from Kulgam district, police say close to solving the case

Amit Khajuria

Tribune News Service

Jammu, November 9

In a major breakthrough in the killings of BJP leader Anil Parihar and his brother Ajeet Parihar in Kishtwar last week, the police have arrested four key suspects who allegedly plotted the assassination and chose the killers.

Police sources told The Tribune that the arrest of the suspects from Kulgam would help solve the case, including the conspiracy angle. The Parihar brothers were gunned down in Kishtwar on November 1 night.

“We cannot divulge all details at the moment due to the sensitive nature of the case,” a senior police officer associated with the investigation told The Tribune on the condition of anonymity. He also confirmed that there were links between the conspirators and terrorists based in the Kashmir valley and the Kishtwar-Doda belt of the Jammu region.

The senior police officer said the arrested persons, including a government employee who was part of the plot, were being subjected to sustained interrogation.

The interrogation is being conducted by the special investigation team (SIT), which was constituted on November 2 to probe the killings. The SIT is headed by Assistant Superintendent of Police Parbheet Parihar.

Highly placed sources said over 12 suspects were earlier picked up by the police for questioning from different areas of Kishtwar. “After intense questioning of the suspects, the police arrested four persons from Kulgam,” a source said, adding that the case would be hopefully cracked soon. Following the killings, an indefinite curfew was imposed in parts of Kishtwar and Doda districts on November 1. Governor Satya Pal Malik had on November 5 confirmed that it was a terror attack and the killers had been identified.

Main conspirators

BJP leader Anil Parihar and his brother Ajeet were gunned down in Kishtwar on November 1 night

As many as 12 suspects were earlier picked up by the police for questioning from different areas of Kishtwar

After questioning of the suspects, the police arrested four persons from Kulgam. They allegedly plotted the assassination and chose the killers

The Kashmir Times, Jammu, November 10, 2018

Pak militant killed in Tral gunfight

ESS AHMAD

Mobile internet services snapped in Awantipora

ANANTNAG, Nov 9: A top Jaish-i-Mohammad commander was killed in a gun battle with government forces in Tral area of southern Pulwama district today.

Following the gunfight, the authorities snapped mobile internet services in police district Awantipora.

Officials said that huge contingents of army, Special Operations Group (SOG) of police and CRPF in the morning, threw a cordon around Dar-Ganaigund village of Tral following specific inputs about the presence of militants in the area.

Forces, during the search operation established contact with the hiding militants who opened fire on the search party leading to a gunfight.

Official sources said that the hiding militant gave tough fight to the forces thus pro-longing the operation till evening.

"Despite the forces using mortars and other ammunition on the house, the militant hiding there continued to fire heavily. It was only after the house caught fire, the hiding militant jumped out of the window, took position behind the huge rocks and fought the forces for hours. The militant seemed to be well trained," an official said.

It was around 5 pm, the official said, they were successful in killing him.

Officials identified the slain militant as Anwar, a militant hailing from Pakistan.

Though some reports suggested that a policeman also suffered injuries in the gunfight but the reports could not be officially confirmed.

However, local sources said, the house where the militant was holed up was completely damaged after being set on fire.

Following the gunfight, the authorities snapped mobile internet services across police district Awantipora which include Tral, Awantipora and Pampore.

Police in a statement asked the people not to venture inside the encounter zone.

"Since such an area can prove dangerous due to stray explosive materials. People are requested to cooperate with police till the area is completely sanitised," Police spokesman said.

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

J&K: Pakistani JeM militant killed in Tral encounter

Friday's encounter came over a week after Usman Haider, the nephew of JeM chief Masood Azhar, was killed in a gun battle in Tral.

Written by Adil Akhzer | Srinagar

A Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) militant, who according to the police was a Pakistan national, was killed in an encounter with security forces in Kashmir's Tral on Friday. One policeman was also injured in the gunfight.

A police spokesperson said the J&K Police and security forces launched a cordon and search operation in the Dar-Ganiegund area of Tral in Awantipora based on "credible inputs" about the presence of militants in the area.

"As the search operation was going on, the hiding terrorists fired on the search party. The fire was retaliated, leading to an encounter," the spokesperson said. Soon after the encounter broke out, authorities suspended mobile internet in the area. Police said that in the ensuing encounter, one militant was killed. According to the J&K Police, the slain militant is a Pakistani with the codename "Anwar".

"(He) was affiliated with proscribed terror outfit JeM. He was involved in attacks on security establishments and other civilian atrocities in the area," the spokesperson said.

During the gunfight, one policeman was injured, and he was evacuated to hospital. Police said his condition is stated to be stable.

The police again asked citizens “not to venture inside the encounter zone, since such an area can prove dangerous due to stray explosive materials”.

“People are requested to cooperate with police till the area is completely sanitized and cleared of all the explosives materials, if any,” the police spokesperson said.

Friday’s encounter came over a week after Usman Haider, the nephew of JeM chief Masood Azhar, was killed in a gun battle in Tral.

Madhya Pradesh Elections

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Elections in Hindi belt will impact 2019

The BJP campaign in the coming polls in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh will determine if Modi or the CMs will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Rahul Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

Radhika Ramaseshan

Senior Journalist

The national implications of the state elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan cannot be underrated. Of the 65 Lok Sabha seats from the three states, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 63 and the Congress a mere two in the 2014 polls. While 65 is less than the 80 that Uttar Pradesh — that the BJP also swept — alone brings to the Lower House of Parliament, the Hindi belt that also houses MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, has been regarded as a bellwether of sorts for the General Election that will be held less than six months after these states pronounce their verdict.

Significantly, in the swathe extending from Rajasthan and Haryana in the west to Bihar in the east, the Congress and the BJP have been pitted in straight fights in the states that vote in November-December, with the regional entities occasionally playing the spoiler, as former Congress heavyweight Ajit Jogi's Janta Congress Chhattisgarh threatens to for the parent party. Importantly too, unlike UP and Bihar where the BJP is a relatively recent player-barring 1967 when it was part of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal in a coalition government headed by the Socialists in Lucknow—in its previous avatar as the Jana Sangh and the reincarnation, the party drew sustenance and support from its ideological fountainhead, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS created and established formidable networks in MP and Rajasthan and, therefore, its cadre has buttressed the BJP.

Equally, for the Congress, its roots run deep because MP was home to its illustrious clans, headed by Ravi Shankar Shukla and Dwarka Prasad Mishra since before Independence.

Rajasthan's roll call of eminences was graced by Mohan Lal Sukhadia, Hari Dev Joshi, Jagannath Pahadia and Shiv Charan Mathur. For decades after Independence, the Congress's sway over this large terrain of the Hindi belt remained unchallenged, until the late eighties, when the BJP emerged as a formidable challenger and entrenched itself almost invincibly in MP and Chhattisgarh. Rajasthan predictably oscillates between the two parties.

MP’s three critical factors

Facts speak for themselves. In MP, that has 230 Assembly seats, the Congress will need an 8.5 per cent swing away from the BJP to dislodge Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the Chief Minister and the BJP, in power since 2013. Attaining that figure would assume three critical factors: there is a

huge anti-incumbency sentiment against the Chouhan establishment, the Congress recouped well enough to funnel popular discontent and translate the overriding feeling into votes and finally, the "Narendra Modi" factor will be inconsequential. However, every negative counted so far against the BJP is counteracted by a disadvantage bogging down the Congress.

It has a bevy of leaders who have been around for years, sniping at one another. The old tensions were equally palpable this year in the prelude to serious campaigning. Kamal Nath, who heads the MP Congress, ensured his cheerleaders were around to root for him as the next chief minister, while sharing the optics was young Jyotiraditya Scindia. Digvijay Singh, the former CM, has been marginalised although his peregrination on the banks of the Narmada river, running through the state, recharged the party's grassroots formations and reconnected the Congress with its out-of-work loyalists. Many in the state Congress regarded Digvijay as their only pan-MP face.

Additionally, the Congress' failure to articulate a stand on the Supreme Court's ruling diluting the SC/ST Act (that the Centre nullified) and on reservation for Dalits in promotions caused the upper castes, who tilt the power balance in the Bundelkhand, Mahakaushal and Baghelkhand regions, to look askance on Rahul Gandhi. Gandhi's embrace of "soft" Hindutva, evidenced in the temple stopovers, was intended to please the upper castes, who remained steadfastly with the BJP.

The BJP's main concerns were two: an unenthusiastic cadre that was looped out of the power structures and afflicted with the "what's-in-it-for-me" syndrome and farmers' restiveness. Chouhan addressed the latter with a series of measures, notably a price deficit financing scheme called the "Bhavantar Bhugtana Yojana" to hedge price risks and compensate farmers forced to make distress sales at less than the minimum support price. Overnight, as it were, the traders retaliated against the farmers by forming cartels and artificially lowering foodgrains' prices. Despite the evidence, the state government would not act against the traders for fear of losing a crucial core base.

Clearer trends in Rajasthan

Rajasthan with 200 seats is projecting clearer trends. The Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, cleaved the government and the BJP organisation into two autonomous parts, divided by a wall. But she has a committed and sizeable following among the legislators which is why BJP president Amit Shah not only junked an incipient demand to replace her but also acceded to her choice of who would helm the state party. Vasundhara's previous stints in power left a trail of caste conflicts involving the Jats, Gujjars and Meenas. This time, the BJP is up against the threat of losing the support of the Rajputs (estimated to be 12 per cent of the electorate) after serial mishaps, from the killing of an alleged criminal Anandpal Singh to forcing veteran Jaswant Singh out in the 2014 elections. The Shree Rajput Sabha coined a slogan, "Kamal ka phool, hamari bhool" (voting the lotus was our mistake).

The Congress has not projected its old hand Ashok Gehlot as its CM candidate and has purposefully confounded the leadership question by according equal space to Sachin Pilot, the Rajasthan Congress president, who is supposedly a part of Rahul's core team. It is useful to recall that in the 2008 elections, when the same circumstances worked against the BJP and Vasundhara (party-government split, caste imbalance, an angry RSS), the Congress barely touched a majority and spirited away six Bahujan Samaj Party legislators to get the numbers while Vasundhara picked up 78 seats against odds.

Populism in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh votes on November 12 in the first phase under the shadow of guns in Maoist strongholds and the glimmer of hope held out by its CM Raman Singh's populist schemes that were subject to their quota of leakages and irregularities.

Tactically, so far, the BJP has not converted these elections into a Modi-centred one or a referendum against the Centre. Its campaign will determine if the Prime Minister or the powerful chief ministers will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

MP polls: Keeping in mind alliance for 2019, Congress keeps one seat for Sharad Yadav party

The Congress chose to keep Jatara (SC) seat in Tikamgarh district — which the party won in 2013 — open for its alliance partner.

Written by Milind Ghatwai | Bhopal

Alliance talks by the Congress with parties like Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Gondwana Gantantra Party (GGP) fell through in Madhya Pradesh. Just when it seemed the party would go solo in the Assembly elections, it sprang a surprise on the eve of the last day of filing nominations by leaving one seat vacant for Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJD) of former Union minister and former NDA convenor Sharad Yadav.

The Congress chose to keep Jatara (SC) seat in Tikamgarh district — which the party won in 2013 — open for its alliance partner, keeping a window open for a possible alliance in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The talks were finalised between Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Sharad Yadav.

Dr Vikram Chaudhary, the alliance candidate, filed his nomination on Friday, the last day of filing nominations. Chaudhary was accompanied by Congress workers but not Congress MLA from Jatara Dinesh Kumar Ahirwar.

Ahirwar filed his nomination as an independent. He won Jatara in 2013, defeating former minister Harishankar Khatik by a slender margin of 233 votes. This time, however, the Congress did not want to trust Ahirwar because he was hobnobbing with the BJP for a ticket.

Admitting that he was also in touch with the BJP, Ahirwar said that neither national party had kept its word, forcing him to contest as an independent.

He said he had defeated a former BJP minister even during the Narendra Modi wave in 2013. Congress leader Pankaj Chaturvedi said the tie-up with LJD was an attempt to stitch a national alliance beginning from MP. “Sharad Yadav is an important national player with influence in many states. He stood with the Congress while highlighting the plight of farmers in Mandsaur,” he said.

Yadav had participated in the Congress protests at Mandsaur with Rahul.

“It is a symbolic alliance stitched as part of a national strategy,” Govind Yadav, convenor of Lok Kranti Abhiyan and aide of Yadav, told *The Indian Express*.

He said there was an effort to involve Left parties in the alliance, but it did not work out for the seat. Alliance talks with the BSP and GGP fell through because both the parties had sought a bigger share of seats. The Congress co-opted Hiralal Alawa by fielding him as its official nominee from Manawar rather than entering in alliance with the Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti (JAYS), a fledgling tribal outfit of which he was the national convenor.

Rajasthan Elections

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Raj polls: BSP releases fresh list of candidates

Jaipur, November 9

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Friday announced a fresh list of six candidates for the December 7 Rajasthan Assembly elections.

Party president Sitaram Meghwal released the list on directions of BSP chief Mayawati.

According to the new list, Kishan Chand Sharma would contest from Dholpur, Ramhet Kushwah from Badi seat of Dholpur district, Lakshman Singh Chaudhary from Ramgarh seat of Alwar district, Vijay Shankar Bohra from Mahua of Dausa district, Sunil Kumar Jatav from Bayana seat of Bharatpur district.

Gyara Ahmad Khan would contest election on a BSP ticket against Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje from Jhalrapatan Assembly constituency of Jhalawar district, a release said.

Last week, the party had released the first list of 11 candidates. **PTI**

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Survey gives thumping majority to Cong in Rajasthan, simple majority in MP

New Delhi, November 9

With election campaign in full swing in five poll-bound states, an opinion poll by C-Voter has projected a thumping majority for the Congress with 145 seats in Rajasthan and a simple majority in Madhya Pradesh.

The Center For Voting Opinions and Trends in Election Research (C-Voter), in its November (week 2) poll has also projected a clear majority of 64 seats to the Congress-TDP combine in Telangana and a very close fight in Chhattisgarh with a slender edge for the BJP.

Polls in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Telangana will be held between November 12 and December 7. Counting of votes will be taken up together in all the five states on December 11.

The survey in Rajasthan gave the ruling BJP only 45 seats with 39.7 per cent vote share, against 47.9 per cent of the opposition Congress.

In Madhya Pradesh, the C-Voter poll projections gave the BJP 107 seats with a vote share of 41.5 per cent, against Congress' vote share of 42.3 per cent and a simple majority of 116 seats.

The opinion poll did not give a clear majority to any party in Mizoram, with the Mizo National Front projected to lead with 17 seats, followed by the Congress with 12 seats and Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) with nine seats.

Predicting a close fight in Chhattisgarh, C-Voter poll survey gave 41 seats to the Congress with a 42.2 per cent vote share, with six seats to others and 16.2 per cent vote share. The BJP is projected to get a slightly lower 41.6 per cent vote share and 43 seats.

The poll survey of November week-2 done for ABP News and Republic TV has a total sample size of 67,848 for five states, with 13,377 in Rajasthan, 25,745 in Madhya Pradesh and 13,911 in Chhattisgarh, 13,624 in Telangana and 1191 in Mizoram.

In contrast, C-Voter has claimed that the CNX poll survey for Times Now and India TV in Rajasthan has projected 115 seats for Congress against 75 to BJP, while CSDS survey for ABP has projected 110 to Congress and 84 to BJP and Cfore poll survey for Asianet giving 130 to Congress and 65 to BJP.

For Madhya Pradesh, the agency has claimed the CNX poll survey projected 122 seats for the BJP and 95 for the Congress, with CSDS giving 116 to the saffron party and 105 to the Congress.

In Chhattisgarh, the CNX poll survey has projected that the BJP could get 50 and Congress 30 seats, with others getting 10 seats, while the CSDS poll gave 56 to the BJP, 25 to the Congress and nine to others.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said while the C-Voter survey is heartening and interesting, the situation on the ground is that the party is winning in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and also in Telangana in a resounding manner.

“We hope to cross the two-third mark in Rajasthan and hope to get close to 140 seats in Madhya Pradesh and over 50-mark in Chhattisgarh. The coalition of Congress will romp home confidently, trouncing the BJP stooge TRS in Telangana. Congress will also retain Mizoram,” he told PTI.

BJP spokesperson Bizay Sonkar Shastri rejecting the opinion polls, which gave Congress an edge in some poll-bound states, asserted that his party will not only form governments in the three states ruled by it, but also be a part of the ruling dispensation in Telangana and Mizoram. He said the BJP is heading for a “big victory” in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and that the campaign by “our magic man”, a reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will give further boost to the party’s prospects. PTI

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Elections in Hindi belt will impact 2019

The BJP campaign in the coming polls in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh will determine if Modi or the CMs will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Rahul Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

Radhika Ramaseshan

Senior Journalist

The national implications of the state elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan cannot be underrated. Of the 65 Lok Sabha seats from the three states, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 63 and the Congress a mere two in the 2014 polls. While 65 is less than the 80 that Uttar Pradesh — that the BJP also swept — alone brings to the Lower House of Parliament, the Hindi belt that also houses MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, has been regarded as a bellwether of sorts for the General Election that will be held less than six months after these states pronounce their verdict.

Significantly, in the swathe extending from Rajasthan and Haryana in the west to Bihar in the east, the Congress and the BJP have been pitted in straight fights in the states that vote in November-December, with the regional entities occasionally playing the spoiler, as former Congress heavyweight Ajit Jogi's Janta Congress Chhattisgarh threatens to for the parent party. Importantly too, unlike UP and Bihar where the BJP is a relatively recent player-barring 1967 when it was part of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal in a coalition government headed by the Socialists in Lucknow-in its previous avatar as the Jana Sangh and the reincarnation, the party drew sustenance and support from its ideological fountainhead, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS created and established formidable networks in MP and Rajasthan and, therefore, its cadre has buttressed the BJP.

Equally, for the Congress, its roots run deep because MP was home to its illustrious clans, headed by Ravi Shankar Shukla and Dwarka Prasad Mishra since before Independence. Rajasthan's roll call of eminences was graced by Mohan Lal Sukhadia, Hari Dev Joshi, Jagannath Pahadia and Shiv Charan Mathur. For decades after Independence, the Congress's sway over this large terrain of the Hindi belt remained unchallenged, until the late eighties, when the BJP emerged as a formidable challenger and entrenched itself almost invincibly in MP and Chhattisgarh. Rajasthan predictably oscillates between the two parties.

MP's three critical factors

Facts speak for themselves. In MP, that has 230 Assembly seats, the Congress will need an 8.5 per cent swing away from the BJP to dislodge Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the Chief Minister and the BJP, in power since 2013. Attaining that figure would assume three critical factors: there is a huge anti-incumbency sentiment against the Chouhan establishment, the Congress recouped well enough to funnel popular discontent and translate the overriding feeling into votes and finally, the "Narendra Modi" factor will be inconsequential. However, every negative counted so far against the BJP is counteracted by a disadvantage bogging down the Congress.

It has a bevy of leaders who have been around for years, sniping at one another. The old tensions were equally palpable this year in the prelude to serious campaigning. Kamal Nath, who heads the MP Congress, ensured his cheerleaders were around to root for him as the next chief minister, while sharing the optics was young Jyotiraditya Scindia. Digvijay Singh, the former CM, has been marginalised although his peregrination on the banks of the Narmada river, running through the state, recharged the party's grassroots formations and reconnected the Congress with its out-of-work loyalists. Many in the state Congress regarded Digvijay as their only pan-MP face.

Additionally, the Congress' failure to articulate a stand on the Supreme Court's ruling diluting the SC/ST Act (that the Centre nullified) and on reservation for Dalits in promotions caused the upper castes, who tilt the power balance in the Bundelkhand, Mahakaushal and Baghelkhand regions, to look askance on Rahul Gandhi. Gandhi's embrace of "soft" Hindutva, evidenced in the temple stopovers, was intended to please the upper castes, who remained steadfastly with the BJP.

The BJP's main concerns were two: an unenthusiastic cadre that was looped out of the power structures and afflicted with the "what's-in-it-for-me" syndrome and farmers' restiveness. Chouhan addressed the latter with a series of measures, notably a price deficit financing scheme called the "Bhavantar Bhugtana Yojana" to hedge price risks and compensate farmers forced to make distress sales at less than the minimum support price. Overnight, as it were, the traders retaliated against the farmers by forming cartels and artificially lowering foodgrains' prices. Despite the evidence, the state government would not act against the traders for fear of losing a crucial core base.

Clearer trends in Rajasthan

Rajasthan with 200 seats is projecting clearer trends. The Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, cleaved the government and the BJP organisation into two autonomous parts, divided by a wall. But she has a committed and sizeable following among the legislators which is why BJP president Amit Shah not only junked an incipient demand to replace her but also acceded to her choice of who would helm the state party. Vasundhara's previous stints in power left a trail of caste conflicts involving the Jats, Gujjars and Meenas. This time, the BJP is up against the threat of losing the support of the Rajputs (estimated to be 12 per cent of the electorate) after serial mishaps, from the killing of an alleged criminal Anandpal Singh to forcing veteran Jaswant

Singh out in the 2014 elections. The Shree Rajput Sabha coined a slogan, "Kamal ka phool, hamari bhoor" (voting the lotus was our mistake).

The Congress has not projected its old hand Ashok Gehlot as its CM candidate and has purposefully confounded the leadership question by according equal space to Sachin Pilot, the Rajasthan Congress president, who is supposedly a part of Rahul's core team. It is useful to recall that in the 2008 elections, when the same circumstances worked against the BJP and Vasundhara (party-government split, caste imbalance, an angry RSS), the Congress barely touched a majority and spirited away six Bahujan Samaj Party legislators to get the numbers while Vasundhara picked up 78 seats against odds.

Populism in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh votes on November 12 in the first phase under the shadow of guns in Maoist strongholds and the glimmer of hope held out by its CM Raman Singh's populist schemes that were subject to their quota of leakages and irregularities.

Tactically, so far, the BJP has not converted these elections into a Modi-centred one or a referendum against the Centre. Its campaign will determine if the Prime Minister or the powerful chief ministers will be the centrepiece. And, thereby hangs a tale: if the Congress, by design or default, wrests two of the three states, will Gandhi walk away with the plaudits and enhance his place on the national canvas before 2019?

Telangana Elections

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

Telangana polls: EC asks candidates to publicise details of their criminal records

Naveen S Garewal

Tribune News Service

Hyderabad, November 9

Candidates with criminal records will have to declare their criminal charges in newspapers, the Election Commission of India has said.

the Election Commission of India has asked candidates to declare details of their criminal charges and status of these cases in three widely-read newspapers, Telangana Chief Electoral Officer Rajat Kumar announced at a press conference on Friday evening.

Newspapers must then submit such declarations to the election office within 30 days of completion of the election process.

Failure to make such declarations could lead to cancellation of election results.

The measure, primarily aimed at helping voters make informed choices, is not limited to candidates alone—political parties also have to declare in newspapers and to the election commission names of candidates with a criminal record, details of the alleged crimes and the current status of the cases.

Besides having such details submitted to three print publications, candidates must also to give advertisements in local television channels anytime between the last day of filing of their nomination and two days before actual polling.

The declaration should be made “in a specified format has to be given in a widely printed newspaper and should not be smaller than 12 point size”, Kumar said.

Expenses for such declarations would be counted as election expenditure.

‘Alarming speeches’

Kumar said tone of election speeches were becoming increasingly alarming, with several politicians being accused of using “vulgar language” or threatening opponents. The election office issued a notice to Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao’s nephew Harish Rao on Friday for allegedly threatening a political opponent. Meanwhile, seizure of cash and liquor has gone up as elections draw close. Police and excise department has so far seized Rs 64.36 crore in cash and about 2.18 lakh bottles of liquor estimated around Rs 5.16 crore.

“Although seizure of cash and liquor in Telangana is alarming, the incidents are now under control,” he said, adding that the Director General of Telangana Police will be asked to evaluate the situation booth-wise after assembly elections are notified on November 12.

There are some 32,575 booths in the state, and another 217 are likely to be added. Of these, some 10,000 booths have been marked “critical” because they are sensitive for various reasons, including political tension and being in Maoist areas.

Telangana is scheduled to vote for Assembly elections on December 7.

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Telangana polls: CPM-Led BLF, BSP signal aspirations, Dalits fighting for bigger political space

BLF comprises Dalit organisations like Mahajana Socialist Party, Bahujan Rajyam Party and Dalit Praja Front. BSP and BLF are hoping to attract not only the SC vote, which accounts for 18 per cent of the state's population, but are also targeting the 10 per cent ST vote.

Written by Sreenivas Janyala | Hyderabad

An important factor in the run-up to Telangana elections is the efforts by Dalits to assert themselves in the political space. The emergence of Bahujan Left Front (BLF) — an organisation comprising 28 political, social and minority organisations led by the CPM — and the rise of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Telangana signal the aspirations of Dalits.

BSP and BLF have not joined any alliance and are fielding many Dalit candidates. In this scenario, BSP’s announcement that popular Dalit activist and university associate professor Dr Sujatha Surepally will contest from Chennur (SC) Assembly constituency in Mancherial district has come as a big boost to Dalit organisations. Sources in BSP said Sujatha’s name was cleared by BSP chief Mayawati.

In the 2014 elections, despite a wave in favour of Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), BSP won two seats in the erstwhile Adilabad district. A Indrakaran Reddy and Koneru Konappa won from Nirmal and Sirpur, respectively, but later joined the ruling TRS. “Besides fielding Dalits in reserved constituencies, we will give tickets to Dalits to contest from unreserved seats too, because we have emerged as a strong alternative. Dalits are fighting for a bigger space in the political sphere. They want more people to represent them in politics and government so BSP has gained a lot of supporters,” Manthapuram Balaiah, president of the Telangana unit of BSP, said. CPM state secretary Tammineni Veerabhadram said the BLF will give priority to Dalits. “The idea is to encourage Dalits to contest from unreserved seats too, where we think they have a good chance of winning. Due to the divisive politics of BJP, Dalits have been at the receiving end and they want better representation. In Telangana, at least 23 caste-based killings have occurred since 2014. There is an anti-Brahminical wave too. There is more awareness among Dalits in 2018 than in 2014 and as BLF’s platform is social justice, we are getting a lot of support. We have good leaders to contest from the reserved seats too,” Veerabhadram said.

BLF comprises Dalit organisations like Mahajana Socialist Party, Bahujan Rajyam Party and Dalit Praja Front. BSP and BLF are hoping to attract not only the SC vote, which accounts for 18 per cent of the state's population, but are also targeting the 10 per cent ST vote. However, to the dismay of many Dalit leaders, BLF and BSP could not forge an alliance to prevent splitting of votes. BSP leaders say that as a national party, it is better organised and equipped to fight on its symbol rather than forming an alliance. "BSP's USP in Telangana is its identity which cannot be lost by tying up with other parties. We will contest on all 119 seats," Balaiah said.

On introducing Surepally into politics, Balaiah said, "She is a well-known activist, well-educated and capable of representing many issues apart from women's matters. We received many representations from people to nominate her."

Surepally is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Satavahana University, Karimnagar. The 46-year-old is an icon among Dalit youths and community circles due to her outspokenness and bold statements on caste discrimination and oppression of Dalits.

Hailing from Suryapet in Nalgonda district, her family moved to Hyderabad after she lost her father at a very young age. She studied Sociology at Osmania University and completed her BEd, and later PhD in 1992. Her doctoral subject was Dalit Women Empowerment and how government programmes affected Dalit women. She started teaching at Satavahana University in 2009 during which time she also started participating in the separate statehood movement. Prior to bifurcation of the state, she took up the cause of people affected by the Polavaram project, displacement of tribals in Araku and those displaced by SEZs in undivided Andhra Pradesh. For organising protests and dharnas against caste discrimination, two cases of obstruction of duty have been filed against her by police.

"Although I was active in taking up social and women's issues, it was during the separate state agitation that I also got attracted to Dalit oppression, caste and gender discrimination. I am the founder member of Women's Joint Action Committee," she told *The Indian Express*.

Surepally said she is entering politics because after the creation of Telangana, the government has failed to protect marginalised communities. "We did not fight for this kind of Telangana. After the state was formed, it has become feudal. The government is feudal and belongs to the landlords. There is rampant caste discrimination, Dalit oppression and gender bias. Telangana people fought together for the state but now none of the other castes even ask one question when Dalits or other marginalised communities are attacked or discriminated against...", she said. "I don't have funds to finance my election but I am getting a lot of support from my friends and followers here and from abroad. Volunteers have already launched my campaign on social media," she added.

Surepally is pitted against Balka Suman of the TRS. Suman was elected MP from Peddapalle parliamentary constituency in 2014 and will be contesting from the Chennur Assembly seat this time.

Women Crime against Women

The Tribune, Chandigarh, November 10, 2018

UP: Four-year-old strangled after rape, body found in cattle shed Lucknow, November 9

A four-year-old girl was raped and then strangled to death in Etah district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Friday after her body was recovered from a cattle shed.

The victim went missing from her bed on Thursday night, her uncle complained to the police.

A search in the morning led to the discovery in the cattle shed when villagers went to get fodder.

An autopsy has confirmed rape and the cause of death as strangulation, a doctor told IANS. IANS

Women Harassment

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Harassment case against Attur RDO

Special Correspondent

Police on Friday registered sexual harassment case against M. Selvan, Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO), Attur, and two others on the direction of the local court.

Police sources said that a 35-year-old woman of Ammanpalayam village near Attur approached the RDO seeking patta transfer for her land last year.

The officer allegedly harassed the woman sexually in his office room in October last. She preferred a complaint against Selvan, daffedar Kaliyaperumal and driver Soundararajan with Attur police and also submitted petitions to the higher officials.

As no action was taken in this regard, she moved the Judicial Magistrate Court No. 1, Attur. Judicial Magistrate N. Sivakumar recently directed Attur police to register case against Selvan and others.

Police registered case under Section 354 A (i) (ii) IPC against all the three, sources said.

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Former Miss India shares #MeToo story

Press Trust of India

Former Miss India and actor Niharika Singh shared her #MeToo story on Friday in which she accused the husband of a female flight attendant, who allegedly died by suicide in July, of being a “sociopath” and “physically violent” when they were briefly engaged in 2011.

The flight attendant, who worked with a German airline, had allegedly died by suicide in July this year. Her husband was arrested on the charge of dowry death. Her in-laws were arrested earlier this month.

Ms. Singh said the flight attendant had contacted her and they had formed “a kind of sisterhood”.

Ms. Singh’s #MeToo story was shared on Twitter. In the post, Ms. Singh said “Within two months of meeting me, he tattooed my name and told me that he was in love with me.” She said she found out later that he was a “sociopath”, and broke off the engagement in 2011.

Pakistan

Accountability

The News

November 10, 2018

Flagship reference: NAB allowed to present new documents against Nawaz

Obaid Abrar Khan

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Friday was allowed to present new documents against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the Flagship reference.

An accountability court Judge Arshad Malik who earlier reserved his decision on the NAB plea after hearing the Nawaz counsel Khawaja Haris arguments, accepted the NAB plea to present new documents against Nawaz Sharif in the Flagship reference.

When the hearing started, Nawaz's counsel Khawaja Harris submitted a request in the court that his client former PM Nawaz Sharif couldn't appear before the court due to security issues and sought a one-day exemption from appearing before the court in the Flagship Investments reference.

During the hearing, Khawaja Haris opposed NAB's plea and said why these documents were not presented before. He said NAB's Zahir Shah had corresponded with the UK Central Authority and he had appeared before the court as a witness. "Why were these documents not presented when Shah appeared?"

To this, NAB Deputy Prosecutor Sardar Muzaffar Abbasi said that it was mentioned in the supplementary reference that NAB will provide documents after receiving answers. Nawaz's counsel Khawaja Haris then said NAB should also present related witnesses if it was presenting new documents in the Flagship reference.

Accountability court judge Arshad Malik remarked, "NAB has not mentioned the relation between the documents and Flagship investigation. The court cannot assume on its own the relation between the documents and the investigation officer." Nawaz and his sons, Hussain and Hasan, are accused in all the three references whereas Maryam and Safdar are accused in the Avenfield reference only.

The News

November 10, 2018

DG NAB's degree: HEC changes stance thrice

Waseem Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission has changed its stance three times on the degree of Director General NAB Lahore Major (retd) Saleem Shahzad.

While on Friday HEC and NAB Lahore started circulating a letter dated June 19, 2018 among media persons about the attestation of DG's degree, the Assistant Attorney General-Advocate Mansoor Tariq has exposed the reality of the degree.

Talking to The News on Friday, Advocate Masnoor said the degree of DG NAB has no legal value as it was obtained through an illegal campus of the Alkhair University. The assistant attorney general said the HEC's response submitted in April 2018 before the Peshawar High

Court (PHC) stands valid in which it was admitted that the degree was verified by the body inadvertently.

He said at the time of issuing degree in 2003, the Alkhair University was not competent to issue degree in any part of Pakistan apart from the Bhimber Campus. The dubious degree of the senior NAB official from un-recognized and illegal Islamabad campus of Al-Khair Alkhair University, Islamabad, was attested by the HEC on 20th October 2015.

However, in April 2018, the HEC changed its stance and said the degree from an illegal campus was attested inadvertently as the campus of university was not mentioned in degree and the HEC official considered it from a legal campus of the university, which is in the AJK.

“The degree of Mr Shahzad Saleem was verified by HEC Regional Centre, Peshawar, inadvertently and in disguise of the same as the university issued degree/transcript from its principal seat Viz Bhimber, which resulted in verification of the said degree,” says the response submitted by the HEC through the assistant attorney general.

The DG claimed he obtained the degree of Masters in Computer Sciences from Alkhair University of 2002. But the degree is awarded on the basis of two years physical attendance of school and credit hours for which the DG never took a leave from the office, rather he remained on duty on daily basis in that period.

However, when contacted by The News on Friday, HEC Spokesperson Ayesha Ikram said the commission had attested the degree of DG NAB Shahzad Saleem. She shared a response by the HEC dated June 19 2018 to one Engineer Ghani Mehmood, who was the original petitioner in the Saleem Shahzad case.

According to the response, MSC (Computer Science) degree issued by the Al-Khair University was attested by HEC Regional Centre, Peshawar, on the basis of verification letter issued by Deputy Controller of Examinations, Al-Khair University.

Ayesha said the HEC stands by its attestation. When asked why the HEC changed its stance thrice within months on the issue of the DG’s degree, Ayesha said the latest letter should be considered HEC’s stance on the issue.

However, Advocate Mansoor Tariq said the Peshawar High Court and Islamabad High Court in separate judgments have declared all the campuses of all Al-Khair University other than the main AJK campus as illegal, so the degrees issued by those campuses are just pieces of paper with no legal entity.

This is not the first time, the HEC has acted this way. In June 2017, the commission had granted degree equivalence to three NAB officers in gross irregularity and deviation from its own policy and standard operating procedure (SOP) despite the advice from the officers of the department concerned. Interestingly, according to documents available with The News, the HEC had initially declined to declare these officials eligible for the job telling them it was up to their employer to determine their eligibility as per the job requirement.

As per HEC Act’s clause 10 (o), the commission’s mandate is confined to merely equivalence and recognition of degrees, diplomas, certificates and not to determine suitability of the candidates’ eligibility for other organisations. It was a violation of even the HEC mandate and misuse of authority.

However, in this case all the three candidates were facilitated out of the way in violation of HEC’s own policy letter which categorically states that the commission has no role in determining eligibility against any post.

On June 8, 2017, in contradiction to earlier unanimous decision and in a big shift, a meeting was held at the HEC chairman’s office and it was decided that all three candidates could be

considered eligible for advertised job. The next day through a letter No. (61)/A&A/2017/HEC/4744, the HEC communicated its decision to NAB that all three candidates may be considered eligible for the advertised post.

According to HEC documents, the decision was also even contrary to earlier communicated written decision through individual equivalence letters issued on April 3, 2017.

In his version, the then HEC Chairman Dr Mukhtar Ahmed had denied any wrongdoing and defended his decision as legal. The chairman said he did not take decisions under any pressure. In his version, the Director General NAB Saleem Shahzad has told The News that his degree is valid and duly attested by HEC. He maintained that he had been studying in the Islamabad campus of Al-Khair University taking evening classes during the course duration.

The News

November 10, 2018

NAB CIT grills Hamza for over two hours

Our Correspondent

LAHORE: The Combined Investigation Team (CIT) of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Friday questioned Hamza Shahbaz in inquiries related to the Ramzan Sugar Mills and assets beyond means.

The NAB had also summoned Salman Shahbaz in the case, but he is in London. It has been learnt that the NAB CIT comprising officers of intelligence and NAB prosecution and investigation wings questioned Hamza for more than two and a half hours.

The NAB sources claim that Hamza was unable to satisfy the investigation officers. It is pertinent to mention here that Hamza had skipped the previous hearings due to fear that the NAB could arrest him. Later, he secured a protective bail from the Lahore High Court.

Earlier, in a notice to Salman Shahbaz, the NAB had stated: "During interrogations, Shahbaz Sharif has stated that all of his matters related to assets, income and expenditures are being looked after by you. You are requested to appear before the CIT along with documents of all assets and properties." A notice of the same nature was sent to Hamza Shahbaz as well.

The bureau had also summoned both brothers in an inquiry regarding the construction of a bridge in Chiniot, which allegedly facilitated the Ramzan Sugar Mills owned by the Shahbaz family. The NAB claimed that Rs200 million were paid from the national kitty to construct the bridge on Shahbaz's orders. Salman appeared only once before the bureau and later went out of the country.

The News

November 10, 2018

Reference against Shahbaz by month-end: DG NAB Lahore

Monitoring Desk

KARACHI: The director general (DG) of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore Thursday said that a corruption reference would be filed against opposition leader in National Assembly, Shahbaz Sharif, by the end of this month (November).

DG NAB Lahore Shahzad Saleem said this during his appearance on Geo News show, Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath. "We have found such evidence on the basis of which we are filing a reference against Shahbaz Sharif," he said.

Shahbaz, who is also the president of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), was arrested by NAB in Ashiana-e-Iqbal housing scheme case on Oct 6. The opposition leader was taken into

custody as he appeared before the anti-graft body to record statement in Punjab Saaf Pani Company case.

Speaking of a case against Shahbaz's son-in-law Ali Imran, the DG NAB accused him of depositing official cheques in his personal account. The case against Imran pertains to withdrawal of official funds and where those funds were spent, he added.

Saleem lamented that whoever is summoned by NAB flees the country. "Ali Imran has left the country some 2, 3 months ago," he said, adding that Imran would be answering to the anti-graft body's questions upon his return to country.

The DG NAB further stated that suspects say one thing while being under custody, but change their statements once they get out of custody. He said investigation of Ashiana-e-Iqbal housing scheme case, in which Shahbaz was arrested last month, has been completed and it will be in the court by the end of this month.

"Every day a fire erupts at public buildings, this is how record is destroyed," Saleem added. He also lamented that Salman Shahbaz was summoned by NAB, but he went abroad instead of appearing before the anti-corruption watchdog.

The DG NAB further said that a case registered against Punjab minister Aleem Khan was also being investigated. Some documents are required from abroad in the case relating to Aleem and a verdict would be announced in it once those documents were received, he said.

Saleem further said that if needed in any case, then Chaudhry brothers and Moonis Elahi would be taken into custody. When asked about the arrest of Punjab University teachers and his apology in the court, the NAB DG said: "Neither I wept in the court nor I begged the court's pardon in the way you are portraying. I told the court neither it (handcuffing of teachers) was my fault nor my department's. However, showing nobility, I told the court that I say sorry to them. "And by the way, you tell me, whether putting the handcuffs on some accused under the law is a crime," asked the NAB Lahore DG. When the anchorperson told the official that if he believed so, he shouldn't have sought pardon and instead must have told the chief justice of Pakistan that he committed no mistake, Saleem said: "He's a person of high stature. Allah has given him respect. When he questioned me about the incident, I didn't find it appropriate to argue with him."

When Shahzeb mentioned the allegations of DG NAB's fake Masters' degree, Major (retd) Saleem Shahzad strongly argued that his degree was valid. "(Who can object) if my degree is recognised by the HEC?" he asked.

Shahzeb mentioned a story by The News correspondent Waseem Abbasi about his alleged fake degree. To which the DG said he met Waseem Abbasi twice and the reporter had apologised to him over his story. However, when the reporter was taken on line, he categorically rejected the claim that he ever apologised to the NAB official over his story. Waseem Abbasi said "I stand by his story", and he had never apologised to DG NAB, as his story was factually correct. Waseem said the HEC had retracted the verification of DG NAB's degree from Al-Khair University in a statement before the Peshawar High Court. Waseem said he has documents to prove that the degree was fake.

Major Shahzad Saleem was serving in NAB Rawalpindi when he claims to have obtained the said degree from a university, which is not recognised by the HEC. The DG NAB Lahore also denied a report about an article alleging transfer of \$4.9 billion to India by PML-N supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif through money-laundering, which increased the Indian foreign reserves and lessened Pakistan's. He said NAB chairman had only asked for verifying the facts, and later on rubbished the article claims.

Shahzad Saleem said the NAB chairman didn't believe in those allegations at all, and the press release issued by the Bureau in this regard was only for initial verification purposes. However, he failed to give a satisfactory answer when asked by the programme host as to why a press release was not issued again when the allegation was proven wrong.

The News

November 10, 2018

NAB swings into action against frivolous complaints

Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: On the directions of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Justice (R) Javed Iqbal, the Bureau has proceeded against complainants who lodge frivolous complaints. These people lodged complaints with a motivation beyond law or loaded interests or with intent to cause malice to others. The Bureau proceeded against frivolous complainant under section 18-h of National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), 1999.

A section 18-h of National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), 1999, states: "If a complaint is inquired into and investigated by NAB and it is concluded that the complaint received was prima facie frivolous or has been filed with the intent or malign and defame any person, the NAB chairman, may refer the matter to the court and if the complainant is found guilty he shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine or with both."

However, according to NAB, it would encourage genuine complainants who lodge their complaints on the basis of solid evidence and documents that prima facie suggest commission of offences of corruption and corrupt practice.

According to NAB's operational methodology, after receipt of application, verification of complaint is conducted to ascertain genuineness and veracity of the contents of complaint by calling complainant who submits affidavit to that effect.

Also, complaint verification (CV) is a mechanism provided by NAB's operational methodology to ward off malicious and frivolous complaints by way of preliminary scrutiny so that prior to inquiry, it is ascertained that it would cause no undue harm to the alleged. All the complainants have to submit an undertaking that their complaint is not frivolous and undertaking signed by the complainant.

Subsequent to this, after two months process of Complaint Verification, an inquiry is authorised if complaint is found out to be genuine and worthy of probing it further on the basis of some incriminating evidence.

During the inquiry process, accused and complainant are called for recording of their statements in line with the allegations and available evidence. Moreover, the accused is provided ample opportunity to defend and provide documents in his defence and further confronted with the documentary evidence of his alleged corruption and corrupt practices as per law.

The News

November 10, 2018

NAB chairman directs Pemra to provide media talk record of DG

Lahore

Asim Yasin

ISLAMABAD: Chairman National Accountability Bureau Justice (R) Javed Iqbal on Friday directed the Pemra to provide complete record of the media talk of Director General NAB

Lahore Shahzad Saleem with private television channels so that the action could have taken as per law.

According to NAB announcement on Friday, the chairman NAB said the NAB respects all the members of the Parliament. The NAB stated that the record of media talk would help sifting the facts whether the DG spoke against the facts and it will see whether the privilege of any Parliamentarian has been breached or otherwise.

It is to be mentioned here that the opposition on Friday slammed the "media trial" conducted by the Director General of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore during his television appearances and submitted a privilege motion in the National Assembly.

DG NAB Lahore Shahzad Saleem appeared on Geo News show 'Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Sath' on Thursday night, where he said that the anti-corruption watchdog would file a reference against Opposition Leader in National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif by the end of this month.

The official also accused Shahbaz Sharif's son-in-law Ali Imran of depositing official cheques in his personal account.

The News

November 10, 2018

NAB recovers Rs 330m from ex-govt employee's house

Our Correspondent

LAHORE: National Accountability Bureau, Lahore, on Friday arrested a former grade 16 government employee and recovered Rs 330 million hidden in his house. The NAB has not disclosed the name of the accused in a bid to get information on more accused.

After recovery of such a large amount from the possession of a former grade 16 employee, the NAB chairman has authorised a direct inquiry into the matter related to the assets beyond means. The NAB, following secrete information, had raided his house located at EME Housing Society. The NAB team recovered Rs 330 million hidden in different parts of the house. The NAB seized Rs 100 million in Pakistani currency, prize bonds of Rs 170 million and currencies of different countries worth Rs 30 million. During the raid, NAB has also found traces of properties of the accused.

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Accountability court agrees to share 50 questions with Nawaz

Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The accountability court of Islamabad on Friday 'partially' agreed to share 50 questions with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif before recording his statement in two references — Al-Azizia and Flagship Investment — filed against him.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) opposed handing over the questionnaire to Mr Sharif prior to the recording of his testimony under Section 342 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) under which the judge can put a question to an accused person at any stage of the trial.

As per this section, "for the purpose of enabling the accused to explain any circumstances appearing in the evidence against him, the Court may at any stage of any inquiry or trial without previously warning the accused, put such questions to him as the Court considers necessary, and shall, for the purpose aforesaid, question him generally on the case after the witness for the prosecution have been examined and before he is called on for his defence."

The head of the prosecution, Sardar Muzaffar Abbasi, argued before the court that handing over the questionnaire to the accused was tantamount to giving a concession to the accused person since every question should be surprising and unexpected for him during the course of trial proceedings.

Lead defence counsel Khawaja Haris Ahmed on the other hand said that the accused was seeking the questionnaire not as a concession but it was to assist the court in order to conclude the reference within the stipulated timeframe as set by the Supreme Court.

He explained that during the cross-examination, when the defence counsel put a question to Wajid Zia, star prosecution witness, he consulted several documents and took 30 to 40 minutes to respond to almost every question.

“Don’t you think that the accused has any right to consult the relevant record before every question that may be posed to him by the court during recording of his statement under Section 342 of the CrPC,” the counsel asked.

Mr Haris drew the attention of the court to media reports which claimed that the questionnaire meant for Mr Sharif had been handed over to the special prosecutor of NAB for vetting.

Wasiq Malik, a special prosecutor in this case, told the court that NAB was not vetting any questionnaire since this was a matter between the accused person and the court.

Meanwhile, the accountability judge, Mohammad Arshad Malik, also allowed the application filed by the prosecution to place on record the response to the requests seeking Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) from the British Virgin Island (BVI).

Judge Malik asked the prosecution whether these were the direct evidence, the prosecutor replied that these were not the direct evidence but were circumstantial record.

The court recorded the statement of the last prosecution witness, Mohammad Kamran, in the last reference against the former premier.

The counsel for Mr Sharif will start cross-examination of the witness who is the investigation officer of NAB in the Flagship investment reference.

The judge exempted Mr Sharif from personal appearance on Friday due to security issues and put off further proceeding till Monday (Nov 12).

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Raid on grade-16 official’s house yields Rs330m

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Lahore, recovered cash and prize bonds worth Rs330 million from the house of a former grade-16 official in EME Housing Society here on Friday.

According to NAB, it raided the residence of the former official whose name was being withheld for further investigation, and recovered Rs330 million. It included Rs100 million Pakistani currency, Rs30 million foreign currency and prize bonds worth Rs170 million.

NAB said it had also detected several properties in the name of the suspect who was still at large. The bureau has initiated an inquiry against him for possessing assets beyond his known sources of income.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Nation

November 10, 2018

NAB chief summons record of director's TV interviews

NOKHAIZ SAHI

ISLAMABAD - National Accountability Bureau Chairman Justice Javed Iqbal Friday directed the Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority to provide a complete record of the media talk of NAB Lahore Director General so that action could be taken against him as per law.

In a statement issued by NAB headquarters Friday, the chairman said that NAB respects all honourable parliamentarians. The record of media talks would help sifting the facts whether the DG spoke against the facts. NAB will see whether the privilege of any parliamentarian has been breached or otherwise, he said.

On Thursday evening, NAB Lahore DG Major (retd) Shahzad Saleem appeared on different private TV channels' talk shows and commented on ongoing investigations of politicians and bureaucrats in alleged corruption cases.

Well-placed sources in the NAB told The Nation that Lahore DG appeared in talk shows without permission of the competent authority and the NAB chairmen had conveyed him several times to avoid passing comment on the status of ongoing inquiries and investigation of high profile cases. They mentioned that the removal of Saleem from the post of NAB Lahore DG is also under consideration and the chairman is likely to take action next week in this regard. NAB Lahore DG Saleem is also facing fake degree case in the Supreme Court.

During his interview with one TV channel, the NAB DG said that a corruption reference will be filed against Opposition Leader in National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif by the end of this month.

"We have found evidence on the basis of which we are filing a reference against Shehbaz Sharif," he said.

Shehbaz, who is also the president of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), was arrested by the NAB in Ashiana Iqbal housing scheme case on October 6. The opposition leader was taken into custody as he appeared before the anti-graft body to record statement in Punjab Saaf Pani Company case.

Speaking of a case against Shehbaz's son-in-law Ali Imran, the NAB DG accused Imran of depositing official cheques in his personal account.

The case against Imran pertains to withdrawn official funds and where were they spent, he said. Saleem lamented that whoever is summoned by NAB flees the country. "Ali Imran left the country some two-three months ago," he said, adding that Imran will be answering the anti-graft body's questions upon his return to country.

The DG further stated that suspects say one thing while they are under custody, but change their statements once they get out of custody. He said investigation of Ashiana Iqbal housing scheme case, in which Shehbaz was arrested last month, has been completed and it will be in the court by the end of this month.

"Every day a fire erupts at public buildings, this is how records are destroyed," Saleem claimed. He also lamented that Salman Shehbaz was summoned by NAB, but he went abroad instead of appearing before the anti-corruption watchdog.

The DG further said that a case registered against Punjab minister Aleem Khan was being investigated. Some documents are required from abroad in the case relating to Khan and a verdict would be announced on it once those documents were received, he said.

Saleem further said that if needed in any case, then Chaudhry brothers and Moonis Elahi would be taken into custody.

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

NAB Lahore DG's remarks trigger a new controversy

- * Opp submits privilege motion in NA against Shahzad's interview to TV channel
- * Govt terms motion 'an attempt to influence' NAB investigations
- * PML-N calls NAB official's remarks 'a form of political revenge'
- * Fawad says Shehbaz himself responsible for initiating 'media trial'
- * NAB chief seeks complete record of interview from PEMRA

news desk/staff report

ISLAMABAD: A new controversy erupted in the country on Friday as the opposition slammed what it called media trial conducted by director general of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore during his recent television appearances and submitted a privilege motion in the National Assembly.

NAB Chairman Justice (r) Javed Iqbal also took notice of the matter and sought a complete record of Saleem Shahzad's interviews from the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) "so that action could be taken in the light of the law".

"Mr Saleem Shehzad, DG NAB Lahore, with the consent of Chairman NAB has appeared on TV programs of which the documentary evidence is available," reads the privilege motion submitted by the opposition, listing a number of TV programs wherein the NAB official appeared. Citing a breach of the privilege of the members of the opposition in the National Assembly, the motion objected to the 'media trial' of the opposition members and called for 'immediate intervention' of the House. "He has conducted a media trial of opposition members, attempted to influence the so-called cases against the members of the National Assembly, provided details of the matters that are sub-judice, revealed details of confidential and secret NAB documents and maligned the reputation of the members of the parliament," the motion states. "The matter requires immediate intervention of the National Assembly," it added.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) also supported the motion submitted by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). "If we allow media trials now, then the process will continue. Today, it is PML-N leaders and tomorrow it will be someone else," PPP leader Naveed Qamar said. According to PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb, the PPP joined the privilege motion in writing. She added that the rest of the opposition parties also supported the motion, signed by Leader of Opposition in National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif.

However, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry criticised the privilege motion, calling it 'an attempt to influence' the ongoing investigation by the NAB. "It is not appropriate to move a privilege motion against an ongoing investigation," he maintained. Stating that it will have to be seen where the matter started from, he said, "Opposition leader in NA [Shehbaz Sharif] gave a speech on NAB cases on the floor of the House. MNAs cannot be treated differently than the common people." "Shehbaz Sharif is himself responsible for initiating the media trial," he added. Later at a press conference, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and other senior PML-N leaders termed Lahore DG NAB's interview to media a form of 'political revenge'. "It has become clear what NAB is doing. It's pretty simple what's happening but if I say it, then a NAB case will be formed," the PML-N leader said. "A NAB official is conducting media trial of MNAs on the directions of the accountability watchdog's chairman," he claimed.

Stating that a privilege motion has been submitted in the National Assembly, Abbasi said, “We don’t want those who are on government payroll to hold people accountable. NAB is being used to control politics.” “NAB officials are saying the same things that ministers are,” he said.

“Today, people are being defamed which is an attempt to take political revenge. Only one party is being targeted and its name is PML-N,” he lamented.

Upholding that they want accountability, not revenge, Abbasi said, “We are not scared of accountability and want the process of accountability to start from PML-N. The NAB chairman should contact me and I will give him two cases to look into.”

“The leader of opposition in National Assembly is under arrest and DG NAB has shared details of his case on television. Though, there is no truth in the details he shared,” he continued. “If NAB wants to conduct a media trial, they should make us sit with them and conduct it,” he added.

“Allegations are levelled without any evidence by NAB officials and this is truly strange. We hope a suo motu notice will be taken of the issue,” the former prime minister said. “Actions that were not taken by dictators are being taken by the current government,” he asserted.

Regarding reports that DG NAB Lahore holds a fake degree, Abbasi said, “If he does, then he should also be held accountable.”

Speaker Asad Qaiser, however, said the privilege motion submitted by the opposition was in accordance with the rules, adding that he would seek legal opinion on the motion.

Following criticism by lawmakers during the NA session, NAB Chairman Justice (r) Javed Iqbal took notice of the matter and sought a complete record of Shahzad’s interview from PEMRA.

The anti-corruption body, in a press release, made it clear that it ‘respects all the honourable members of the parliament.’ “This has to be seen whether anything contrary to the facts was said, and that if the pride of any MPs was hurt, then how did it happen,” it noted.

DG NAB Lahore Saleem Shehzad in a private TV show Thursday night had said the anti-corruption watchdog would file a reference against Opposition Leader in National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif by the end of the current month. He had also accused Shehbaz’s son-in-law Ali Imran of depositing official cheques in his personal account.

He had told the TV channel that a case registered against Punjab minister Aleem Khan was being investigated. Some documents were required from abroad in the case relating to him and a verdict would be announced once those documents were received, he had added. Shehzad had further said that if needed in any case, Chaudhry brothers and Moonis Ilahi would also be taken into custody.

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Aid to Pakistan IMF

The News

November 10, 2018

IMF package: Opposition senators ask govt to take parliament on board

Mumtaz Alvi

ISLAMABAD: Opposition in the Senate Friday called on the government to bring transparency in loans being obtained from foreign lenders and also apprise Parliament of the proposed International Monetary (IMF) package.

Finance Minister Asad Umer was castigated for sparing time to appear in talk shows but overlooking the legislature and not prepared to be answerable to Parliament while it had almost

completed 90 days in power. Senators from across the aisle, paid glowing tributes to the great national poet and philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal and called for giving more space to his poetry and lectures in syllabi and translating his thoughts into actions.

Again, the government faced embarrassment on non-availability of minister concerned, when the opposition was to move a calling attention notice, pertaining to the Aviation Division.

Senator Azam Musakhail, one of the movers, declined to move the notice, saying if it is of any use to do so in the absence of the minister and officials concerned in the gallery. He alleged the ministers were not serious about the House business. To this, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani asked the Senate staff to send a notice to the aviation secretary and a copy of the same be sent to the prime minister too.

PPP Vice-President Senator Sherry Rehman, speaking on a point of public importance, demanded transparency on the terms of loans being obtained from international lenders, including the IMF and details of plans for buffering the poor and vulnerable from the escalation in gas and other prices that the government had effected.

She alleged, “The government is refusing to explain the terms of loans it is seeking from several international lenders and is providing no plan for buffering the poor and vulnerable from the aftershocks of their policies that is hitting them now”.

“The most pressing issue at the moment is the economic deficit the country is facing. There are many people whose stoves are not burning due to the alarming inflation in the country, which is nearing double digits. The working class continues to suffer as they try to make both ends meet. There appears to be no subsidy or relief package for them,” she regretted.

This government, she pointed out, came in on the back of big promises, but it was clear they had no intention of doing anything but talking about media optics of austerity like leaving big government houses while quietly living in them. She referred to Prime Minister House and the President House and Governor Houses.

“They are willing to make appearances on television shows but do not want to be answerable to Parliament. They need to shake off this nonchalant approach to governance. Why is no relevant minister ever bothered with parliamentary answers but has so much time for television shows, she asserted.

She wondered what this government had done apart from its continued witch hunt of opposition. All the tall claims of security savings and breaking begging bowls were not manifested in the decisions made by this government since it came into power.

Former interior minister PPP Senator Abdul Rehman Malik while speaking on a matter of public importance, said that he had urged the House to discuss the letter Prime Minister Imran Khan had written to India Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He added that he was astonished how the letter, which circulated across the world and published in every paper, could not be discussed in this august house. Malik expressed grave concerns over unannounced hike in price and sought reply from the government as to how or if the prices were being controlled.

He said that the entire country was in a dire need of setting up mechanism and a specific system to control the prices and added unfortunately manufacturers, vendors and distributors fix the prices according to own will after every hike in petroleum price and fall of Pakistani rupee. Malik said there was no check and balance on the increase of the price and this failure on the part of the provincial and federal government needs to be rectified. He asked the government to bring a law to make a national price regulator to ensure price control.

He insisted, “Unfortunately we could not draw any mechanism or formula for price control when currency value declines and petrol price increases. The government must inform the House whether any such mechanism is followed to fix the price of petrol as far as I know before the 18th Amendment, magistrates used to set the criteria for evaluating the prices. When the government increases the petrol price it leads to increase in inflation across the country. Senator Malik strongly condemned the unprovoked fire across the Line of Control (LoC) by Indian forces and asked the government of Pakistan to go to the United Nations against Indian brutalities against poor Kashmiris and unprovoked fire across the Line of Control (LoC). Earlier, Minister for Communications Murad Saeed brushed aside the impression created by opposition senators that the government had started saying it never talked of creation of 10 million jobs after coming into power and said that the government was making progress as per the promise made to the nation.

PTI had in its election manifesto mentioned and repeatedly announced that its government would provide jobs to 10 million Pakistanis and 5 million houses be built in five years. However, the opposition has targeted the PTI-led government and claimed it was now looking for excuses. Senator Usman Kakar of PkMAP raised the issue of alleged kidnapping of a 13-year-old girl in Sargodha 20 days ago but the police was refusing even to register the case. The chair referred the matter to the committee concerned with a direction to take it up early.

Senate chairman also called on the government to submit a report on the alleged forcible entry of the police and unidentified persons into Karachi Press Club and harassing media persons there and searched it too. It was raised in the House by the National Party Senator Hasil Khan Bizenjo.

The News

November 10, 2018

Saudi Arabia to provide \$1 bn next week, govt tells IMF

Mehtab Haider

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has informed the visiting IMF mission that Saudi Arabia is going to provide first installment of over \$1 billion for building up dwindling foreign currency reserves next week out of total commitment of \$3 billion as total amount will be provided in two to three installments.

The non-availability of dollar inflows has put pressure on exchange rate and rupee continued to slide against dollar in gradual manner. With the expected over \$1 billion inflows for building up reserves next week, then the exchange rate stability will be ensured in coming weeks. However, gradual adjustment of exchange rate may continue but the SBP will be in position to avoid sharp decline in the currency market.

The critical part of discussion in ongoing parleys with the IMF is on front of projection of FBR’s tax collection target as the initial assessment of the Fund mission estimated that the FBR is going to face tax shortfall of over Rs200 billion so the government will have to take additional measures to bridge this gap on revenue front or the budget deficit is bound to exceed its desired target.

Pakistan’s economic managers are continuously briefing the visiting IMF team on third consecutive day in which they informed the Fund that the financing gap narrowed down in the wake of Saudi facility, expected economic package from China, increasing remittances in double digit and narrowing down the trade and current account deficit. “We may seek \$6 to \$8 billion package from the IMF with the possibility of keeping size of the programme on lower side,” said one top official of economic team while talking to The News here on Friday.

Pakistani team briefed the IMF on privatization plan envisaged by the PTI led government under which the loss making giant entities excluded from the privatization list. The government team told the IMF that the wealth fund would be established with the mandate to manage the loss making entities in the range of four to five only at initial stage. "It will be a management company and no funding will be required to run its affairs at initial stage," said the official sources.

The IMF is suggesting to the government to privatise one of the giant entity of oil, gas or other sector and then utilise its funding for running the affairs of loss making entities till at time of their revivals. The government team was of the view that when the funding would be required at latter stages then all these options could be explored. ks

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Govt shares 'wealth fund' plan with IMF mission

Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) team was informed on Friday that the government intended to create a 'wealth fund' to turn loss-making public sector enterprises into profit-making entities before their sell-off.

The plan was shared with the IMF delegation by officials of the finance ministry, State Bank and Federal Board of Revenue during a fresh round of technical level talks focusing on privatisation programme of the government, which is striving to receive around \$12 billion loan from the international lender.

The technical discussions, which are likely to focus on taxation regime and revenue generations on Saturday, will continue up to the middle of next week while policy level talks will be held in the last days of the week to ascertain Pakistan's requirement for bridging a funding gap and averting a balance of payments crisis.

The officials briefed the IMF delegation on the recent government decision to offer profit-making public sector enterprises to private investors. The visiting team was informed that the government had decided not to offer Pakistan Steel Mills, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Pakistan Railways, Utility Stores Corporation, National Highway Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) for sell-off. The government officials observed that all other entities were commercial units except for the CAA which was also a regulatory body in the aviation sector.

The IMF team was informed about the policy statement of federal Finance Minister Asad Umar on various occasions that loss-making public sector enterprises would be made "financially healthy before their privatisation".

The officials told the team that the government would shortly create a 'wealth fund' with an aim to make the loss-making public sector enterprises operational and profitable through funding from the fund. The team was informed that after the turnaround, these entities would fetch a higher price compared to their current status.

However, the officials were asked about the source of financing in the said 'wealth fund'. The IMF delegation were informed that government plans to invest in each entity in phases, and the loss-making public sector entities would be selected based on certain merits step by step.

Officials said the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation had directed the industries ministry to bring up a viable action plan by the middle of December for Steel Mills turnaround. The IMF

team was informed that similar plans were being prepared by relevant ministries for other entities under consideration for privatisation.

The government had already held technical talks with the IMF on the power sector of Pakistan while further round of discussion would focus on monetary policy, and total requirements of the country during the three-year financial gap arrangement.

While the finance minister had announced that Pakistan needed around \$12 billion to bridge the financing gap during the current fiscal year, a senior official of the ministry said that actual details would be clear only after a complete review.

However, he added, “There are other benefits of entering the IMF programmes as it will enhance the financial standing of the country at international level and the credit rating will also improve.”

The official highlighted that the programme loans, which were provided by international donors and currently suspended, would be revived after Pakistan entered the IMF programme besides other avenues such as floating bonds and papers in international stock markets would be opened.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Money for nothing

S. Akbar Zaidi

FORGET about what the IMF is about to demand from Pakistan, now even the Chinese have said that aid and assistance to Pakistan needs ‘further negotiations’. Conditionality? God forbid. Just ‘detailed discussions’.

With the prime minister of Pakistan having admitted to the world that the country is in desperate straits and in need of loans and aid from wherever and however they come, it is not at all clear what position it will be in to negotiate. This, especially after having been told by the Chinese that Pakistan needs to fix its own problems and not rely on the largesse of its ‘all-weather’ friend all the time. The best advice anyone could have given Pakistan, and perhaps just what the IMF is about to repeat.

The hope that by bending low, by confessing that Pakistan is in desperate straits and in need of friends will bail it out has received a particularly pertinent reality check. The many tall claims made by a minister of this government before he left for China, that the prime minister’s visit will bring in large sums of money and that he expects a ‘good economic package’ and not just the rescheduling of the \$2.7 billion owed to China to be repaid this year has been put on hold. On the day that the IMF team arrived to negotiate — and for once the term really matters — with the Pakistan government over a sizable loan, there was no bailout from China. Some promises, some MoUs, but so far nothing to make the country’s position anywhere near comfortable or confident as it begins to beg in front of the IMF.

The finance minister in his press conference after the China trip suggested that the Chinese would help Pakistan and perhaps make loans of around \$6bn, saying that the balance-of-payments crisis was ‘over’. There are reports that China might deposit as much as another \$2bn supporting Pakistan’s reserves. However, already Pakistan needs to return loans of \$12.4bn in the remaining fiscal year of which \$5.6bn are short-term loans, with more than half of this amount having to be returned to China. These include the \$2.5bn already deposited earlier by China with the State Bank to support foreign exchange reserves.

Having celebrated the announcement of a loan from Saudi Arabia of around \$6bn, split between some cash lent for just a year and a deferred payment facility for oil, which is also to be reviewed after three years, free money coming to Pakistan seems to be drying up.

The demands of the opposition in parliament to know the terms and conditions of the financial support from the Saudis were never addressed. And, while the foreign minister stated that there were ‘no conditions’ for the Saudi loan, what is significant is that the largesse from the Saudis came after the prime minister’s second official visit to the kingdom. The first bore no fruit, and it was only following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at a time when Saudi Arabia was being snubbed by many other friendly countries that Pakistan received this money for standing with the Saudis.

After his return from Saudi Arabia, the prime minister announced that two other friendly countries — and that could only have been the UAE and China, since Pakistan doesn’t really have too many friends — would provide enough assistance which would allow Pakistan to avoid a large loan from the IMF. In his words after his supposedly triumphant return from Saudi Arabia, “now the government won’t need much from the IMF”, a claim which has just been endorsed by his finance minister.

With China having made its let’s-wait-and-see policy public, and so far, not much news on the other friendly country supporting Pakistan, the math just doesn’t quite add up. It seems that a sizable loan is still required from the IMF to help the economy in what really is an exaggerated and artificial economic crisis. Going back to the IMF implies that here the negotiations which will be undertaken will be on the terms of the IMF, and not the government of Pakistan. While the three friendly countries might give Pakistan a longer leash in their detailed discussions or negotiations, the IMF, no friend of any country, will at best offer a short whipping leash which will have to be accepted by Pakistan’s so-called negotiating team. After 12 IMF programmes since the 1980s, all talk of ‘home-grown’ solutions are a mere eyewash. The solutions and conditions attached to the loan are always the IMF’s.

The expected tough conditionality will have a serious impact on the populist promises of the PTI government. Already with inflation at 8.2 per cent, the highest in four years, with a trade imbalance and a deteriorating exchange rate, Pakistan’s stabilisation programme, if the IMF agrees to one, will have consequences slowing down GDP growth.

From a 13-year high of 5.8pc GDP growth last year, the early estimates for this year are a mere 4pc at best. The prime minister’s dreams of creating a new Madina-like state in 21st-century Pakistan must await IMF terms and conditions being fulfilled.

On his return from Saudi Arabia, the prime minister in his address to the Pakistani nation stated that “the time will come when we will lend loans to others”. While he is still a new prime minister and has much to learn about the running of a large, formidable, troublesome country, ranging from diplomatic skills to dealing with the maze of governance, with Pakistan’s foreign debt about to cross the \$100bn mark, someone also needs to give him a few lessons in simple arithmetic.

The writer is a Karachi-based political economist.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Blasphemy

The News

November 10, 2018

Nemesis and karma

Hussain H Zaidi

Since the dawn of civilisation, nemesis and karma have been two of the most powerful doctrines of retribution. In Greek mythology, Nemesis was a goddess who handed down happiness and misfortune on the strength of the actions that mortals performed. The retribution done by Nemesis was inexorable yet deserving.

The doctrine of karma, which formed an important part of ancient Indian philosophy, states that a person's past actions shape their future. Like nemesis, karma rests on the principles of necessity and justice. Central to both nemesis and karma is the view that human beings are destined to reap the harvest of their actions.

Until he was sworn-in as prime minister, Imran Khan's politics was underpinned by a singular narrative that had many components. First, borrowing is a cardinal curse for a country, which it must avoid even in the event that the economy hangs by a thread. By the same token, a government that looks to foreign assistance is shorn of all sense of honour. In particular, Imran Khan would turn up his nose at the governments of the PPP (2008-2013) and the PML-N (2013-2018) that, as he put it, went on a borrowing spree.

Second, protests, dharnas, rallies and lockdowns are the inalienable political rights of citizens in a democratic polity, which they must exercise even if doing so casts a shadow over the economy or puts a large segment of society through the hoop. A government that places curbs on these rights, for whatever reasons, is despotic to the bone.

Third, civil servants owe allegiance to the state, the law and the constitution, not to the government of the day or the ruling party. The politicisation of the bureaucracy has thrown the institution into a tailspin. It is obligatory upon civil servants to cast aside unlawful commands from the top while the government must depoliticise the institution and ensure security of tenure for high-ranking officials.

Fourth, corruption lies at the bottom of most of Pakistan's socioeconomic problems. For example, an increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs is undergirded by corruption at the top, as the price differential ends up in the pockets of rulers.

True to his narrative, Imran Khan perfected the art of agitation politics. In the second half of 2014, he staged a four-month-long sit-in in the capital's busiest district to protest alleged rigging in the 2013 general elections. The dharna put the economy under tremendous strain, caused immense inconvenience to the people, and forced the Chinese president to put off his visit to Islamabad. From time to time, he threatened to lock down all the major cities if his demands were not met. During the Islamabad dharna, he famously burnt his electricity bill and asked people not to pay taxes, as their hard-earned money wasn't safe with a 'corrupt' government. A year ago when the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) staged a sit-in on a highly sensitive issue, which brought life in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad to a standstill for more than two weeks, Khan's party rubbed shoulders with the agitators. During Election 2018, the PTI made great play with the blasphemy issue.

By a freak of fate, after assuming office Imran Khan has found himself in a situation similar to that faced by his predecessors. The foremost question that his nascent government was confronted with was how to pull the economy out of the hole. It was expected that as a man of his word the new prime minister would rely on national resources and never opt for borrowing abroad. But as the illusion of bringing back billions of dollars that were allegedly siphoned off abroad and having rich Pakistani expatriates invest their wealth in the country exploded, the prime minister had to eat his words and seek foreign credit.

In keeping with its pre-polls pledges, the PTI government set up a commission to retool the bureaucracy. Every government since that of General Muhammad Ayub (1958-69) undertook such an exercise. Notwithstanding such efforts, the civil service has been reduced to a ramshackle organisation. Among the principal reasons for the institution's rot is the political culture of power and patronage, which leaves no room for an independent civil service. Every government appoints men and women of its choice to important positions and wants them to carry out the orders of those in power, from an MPA/MNA right up to the top.

In the government's book, the distinction between lawful and unlawful command doesn't exist. The PTI has been no exception to this rule. In less than three months, the party's governments at the centre and in Punjab have been taken to task at least twice by the apex court for arbitrarily showing the door to senior police officials. The PTI governments have not only punished 'recalcitrant' officials, but have also tried to justify the questionable actions. Civil servants have been publicly warned by the prime minister as well as federal and provincial ministers to fall in line. Good governance is hard to come by in such circumstances.

The PTI government has raised gas and oil prices as well as electricity tariffs. When the government is running a high fiscal deficit, its capacity to subsidise consumers shrinks. While it was in the opposition, the PTI would tear such arguments to shreds. Now that it is in the saddle, the party must have realised that difficult circumstances necessitate taking such unpopular decisions and that if people don't pay utility bills or taxes it will make things worse for both the government and society.

On October 31, 2018, after the Supreme Court had acquitted a Christian woman of blasphemy charges, the TLP, the political face of the TLY, launched countrywide protests that threatened to shut down the country. Mercifully, the agitations terminated in three days.

During this brief period, it must have dawned upon the government that such protests have enormous social and economic costs, that the rights to assembly and expression can't be exercised in an untrammelled fashion, and that democracy – in contrast with mobocracy – is subject to rule of law and constitutionalism. Although the government caved in to the TLP in the end, the prime minister hit the nail on the head when he warned agitators that the state has an obligation to stop those who go over the line.

The fact also is that the PTI has been instrumental in the rise of the TLP. Thanks to the PTI, politics has become largely a squalid affair in which demonising rivals, exhibiting zero tolerance for dissent and the ability to command mindless submission from supporters have come to be prized as the foremost virtues of a leader. The supreme leaders of both parties speak with a sense of no-holds-barred and parade themselves as being morally superior to other political leaders. Both put down the nation's 'dismal' predicament to a singular cause – corruption in one case and departure from religion in the other – claim to be on a messianic mission and promise a heaven on earth.

As the myth goes, one of the mortals whose life was claimed by the goddess Nemesis's curse was Narcissus, an impervious, handsome hunter, who didn't care about other people's feelings. A soothsayer divined that he would have a long life – provided he didn't recognise himself. One day, the goddess led him to a spring. When Narcissus saw his image in the waters, he fell in love with himself and eventually died.

The writer is an Islamabad-based columnist.

Email: hussainhzaidi@gmail.com

Twitter: [@hussainhzaidi](https://twitter.com/hussainhzaidi)

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Bear hug is a lethal weapon

Abbas Nasir

IT does not get any better. Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi has held out a warning to the TLP leaders, threatening to put his arms around them and locking them in a rib-cracking bear hug, for there is no other way to view his remarks that he will embrace and engage them. After Prime Minister Imran Khan's tough warning to the lawbreakers, following Aasia Bibi's acquittal by the Supreme Court, to not take on the might of the state as they will be crushed, Mr Afridi had predictably echoed his leader's sentiments.

With his tall, broad and imposing frame and a daunting stare, he is known to inspire awe in his opponents. This, coupled with a wagging finger, can melt away the resolve of any adversary within a matter of seconds.

Therefore, those critical of the minister's words and saying his Senate statement most definitely marks the complete capitulation of the PTI government to the street power of the TLP must be making him the most misunderstood, misinterpreted man in the country.

All of the above would have been true had Shehryar Afridi not gone on to elaborate what he meant. He says he showed to the TLP the video clips of protesters who were involved in arson, assault, loot and plunder but the party had apparently disavowed any connection with the lawbreakers.

The minister is a keen sleuth too. Perhaps the prime minister was aware of his extraordinary capabilities and allotted him a position best suited to his skills, as he went on to blame workers of the opposition PML-N and PPP for being actually involved in violent street protests.

This statement was a bit unexpected as several senior members of the PTI, including Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who otherwise seems to have been assigned the task of attacking the opposition by his leader, had gone on record to appreciate the opposition's support on the issue. I use the word a 'bit' unexpected for a reason. Try and zoom out of the prime minister's much-lauded address, decrying the protest leaders some of whom were raising very incendiary slogans with the potential to create chasms in state institutions where unity is vital, and what do you see. Well, my mind goes back to similar pre-election protests on the issue of an oath of office of elected officials where it was alleged that there had been an attempt made to appease a minority community and move away from the established position on Khatm-i-Nabuwat.

What fell on deaf ears was the view of many respected legal figures that this was not the factual position and that the spirit and the meaning of the oath remained unchanged. Street agitation erupted. Since, this was in the final days of the PML-N's term, the PTI joined in, almost as if on cue.

At one point Imran Khan said his own party workers were desirous of joining the protesters. As for himself, he did join and address a conference convened to focus on that latest perceived assault on our faith by the government of the day.

Therefore, the dramatic change of heart on coming to power as was initially witnessed had to be a bit of a mirage. Long-held positions are not abandoned at the drop of a hat even when they don't appear to be as expedient as they were earlier.

One really wishes all political parties and state institutions in the country had the vision to support the PML-N on this single-point agenda and had said 'no' to blackmail through street

violence, rather than viewing it as an opportunity to destabilise the government and a party that had fallen out of favour.

Now, dealing with any such situation is going to be demonstrably more difficult even if it is not absolutely impossible. And there are a number of reasons for this. Civilian politicians and uniformed decision-makers are equally to blame for the current state of play in the country. State institutions have taken heart from the strategy deployed to crush the MQM in Karachi. They are seen as using the same means in dealing with opposition politicians and the media, and have not even spared bloggers on social media by targeting them via relentless intimidation and even employing the blatant use of force.

While these tactics are used to silence critics of the excesses of the security state and to overwhelm all dissent, there is a publicly expressed reluctance to apply any similar means to those openly questioning the writ of the state.

Worse still, a free pass appears to have been handed over to those who are trying to foment unrest and causing divisions not only in society but also within sensitive institutions where disunity cannot be countenanced. One must wonder in which direction the Islamic Republic is headed.

For their part, successive civilian governments have done little to upgrade the crowd-control capabilities of the riot police force. And even where there are upright police leaders determined to uphold the rule of law, there is now uncertainty and confusion, a problem of low morale. Arbitrary transfers of respected top police officials on purely political considerations have left some of their finest senior subordinates in leadership roles that are tentative at best.

Communication with a few ASPs, SPs and assistant commissioners in Punjab who were assigned to maintain peace in different towns in the province painted a painful picture.

These highly motivated young officers appeared firm that they would perform their job to the best of their abilities to keep intercity roads open and push back the protesters. At the same time, they were also mindful of what they called ‘U-turns’ and ‘Model Town’ type incidents that have cast a shadow over their careers.

Given these drawbacks and the ambivalence demonstrated at different tiers of what constitutes the state, and despite being feeling angry and let down, I would say that the Minister of State Shehryar Afridi was pragmatic. For now, a crushing bear hug is all he could have deployed.

The writer is a former editor of Dawn.

abbas.nasir@hotmail.com

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Rule of the Mob not the Law

The white in our national flag turned crimson yet again! We cannot even begin to fathom what all Asia Bibi and her family have lost in this ordeal (which is yet not over), but we know what the country has lost - it's very soul!

Shahid Saeed

Woh kaun hein jinhein tauba ki mil gyai fursat (who are those with time to seek repentance)
humein gunah bhi karnay ko zindagi kum hai (for us even to sin life is short)

The date 31 October 2018. A day signaling promise and hope yet for Pakistan. For on this day the Hon'ble Supreme Court announced the much-awaited judgment in the Asia Bibi case. After almost a decade of incarceration including 8 years on death row, Asia Bibi stood acquitted.

And then madness. The white in our national flag turned crimson yet again! We cannot even begin to fathom what all Asia Bibi and her family have lost in this ordeal (which is yet not over), but we know what the country has lost – it’s very soul! In the not so distant past, the Governor of Punjab and a Minister for Minorities Affairs, both champions in their own right (who stand vindicated by the judgment) had lost their lives to this continuing, unattended and (to quite a degree) nurtured madness.

Will this ever stop?

As soon as the judgment was announced – before it had been read and understood – a self-professed religious party, the TLP took it upon itself to express its displeasure through incendiary attacks on state institutions and by holding the entire country hostage through illegal and unlawful use of force. This wasn’t the first time the TLP had resorted to such measures. It’s (unfortunate) success the last time (Faizabad Interchange Sit-In) had emboldened it for an encore – were we surprised, no – were we nevertheless prepared, hell no! The measures (not) taken. Unlike Parliamentarians who are readily and regularly hauled up by the Hon’ble Supreme Court for contempt vide Suo Moto Case(s), it would appear that the leadership of the TLP is a protected class and totally immune from such action. Perhaps Parliamentarians are children of a lesser God.

At the same time, the other institution also called out by the leadership of the TLP decided discretion is the better part of valor and preferred to avoid this tsunami altogether, apart from issuing a few sound bites.

In sum, if the two most powerful institutions in the country are giving the TLP a free pass and thereby reaffirming that the course adopted by the TLP is the only way to get your way without any accountability whatsoever; what message and what future, if any, is in store for Pakistan? As for the incumbent government’s capitulation on the matter, the less said the better. The address by the Prime Minister turned out to be nothing but ‘a tale full of sound and fury – signifying nothing’ and the so-called Agreement reached between the Government and the TLP, if anything, is further proof of it. The moniker ‘NAYA’ Pakistan has never sounded more hollow. Given there were no legal repercussions for the TLP and its foul-mouthed leadership regarding the earlier Faizabad Interchange Sit-In and with what appears to be a repeat let off at present, the message to the public is loud and clear – TLP in essence is untouchable and clearly above the law.

These deeply disturbing concerns aside, the Hon’ble Supreme Court, despite rendering one of the most important decisions of our times which has been penned with great care and meticulousness has, however, not addressed the larger issue of ‘deterrence’ in such-like matters. Merely exonerating the accused is not enough especially when the Hon’ble Court had categorically held the complainant and cohorts responsible for orchestrating the entire matter for ulterior motives. A recommendation, direction or even a mere reference in passing should have been made for criminal proceedings to be initiated against them for the grievous wrong committed against this hapless woman as well as the immense disservice perpetrated upon our religion. Something for posterity.

Lastly, the Hon’ble Court has declared scarcity of water as the biggest issue facing Pakistan with our very survival contingent upon its urgent and immediate redressal. I must respectfully disagree. Religious fanaticism and intolerance are by far the most pressing issues facing us as a nation. We are in freefall and confounded with an existential crisis with no end nor resolution in sight. Is anyone listening?

The author is a citizen of Pakistan

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Pakistan's Christian woman Asia Bibi may flee Pakistan amid Islamist threats after blasphemy acquittal

AP

A Christian woman acquitted after eight years on death row in Pakistan for blasphemy was released but her whereabouts in Islamabad on Thursday remained a closely guarded secret in the wake of demands by radical Islamists that she be publicly executed.

Asia Bibi was with her family and under heavy security after being transferred to the Pakistani capital overnight from her detention facility in southern Punjab, triggering expectations that her departure from the country could be imminent.

The European Parliament has made an offer to protect Bibi and her family but for the moment she was still in Pakistan, according to two people close to her. They spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to endanger Bibi's life.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry confirmed later on Thursday that Bibi was still in Pakistan.

Radical Islamists have been demanding Bibi's death as well as the death of the three Supreme Court judges who acquitted her last week.

Following her acquittal, the hard-line Tehreek-e-Labbaik Party forced a country-wide shut down as their supporters took to the streets for three days to protest Bibi's release.

Scores of protesters were arrested for damaging vehicles and property during the rallies and bank accounts of some of the leaders of the party were reportedly frozen.

The rallies only dispersed after Prime Minister Imran Khan's government promised a court would review a motion to challenge the acquittal and deny Bibi permission to leave Pakistan.

Critics immediately accused Khan, who came to power after elections last summer riding in part on an Islamist agenda, of capitulating to the radicals.

Bibi's release, her high-security transfer to Islamabad and her likely departure raised the prospect that Khan's "promises" to the Islamists could have been an effort to buy time. The government, however, has not openly declared Bibi was free to leave the country.

The radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik, in a widely circulated video message, said it received government assurances following Bibi's relocation to Islamabad that she wouldn't leave the country until the review petition was heard.

Bibi's ordeal began on a blistering hot day in 2009 when the 54-year-old mother of five, a farmworker, went to fetch water. An argument took place after two fellow women farmworkers refused to drink from the same container as a Christian.

Nearly a week later, the two women said Bibi had insulted the Prophet Muhammad and she was charged with blasphemy — a controversial issue in Pakistan, where mere accusations of blasphemy can cause riots. The charge itself carries the death penalty. Bibi was sentenced to death in 2010.

Her case garnered worldwide attention and brought sharp criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy law. In a letter, European Parliament President Antonio Tajani invited Bibi and her family to Europe. In the letter, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press, Tajani tells Bibi's husband Ashiq Masih, that the European Parliament is "extremely concerned for your safety as well as your family's, due to the violence by extremist elements in Pakistan."

The letter added to expectations that Bibi and her family would leave for Europe, though their destination has not been confirmed. Earlier, Spain and France had offered her asylum. Speaking to the AP earlier this week in the Punjab capital of Lahore, Masih said he hasn't slept much since Bibi's acquittal and the subsequent Islamist rage.

Fear consumes him every time his phone rings and the shouts of the radicals, "Hang her!" haunt him constantly, he said.

"Sometimes I pace on the rooftop, sometimes I walk on the road outside our home," he said. "I look at the faces around me and I wonder if anyone is waiting to hurt us."

His initial joy at the acquittal quickly turned to heart-wrenching sadness when he realized his wife and his family's ordeal was still not over.

Even mere suggestions of blasphemy can whip mobs into a lynching frenzy in Pakistan. In 2011, the governor of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, was killed by his own guard after he defended Bibi and criticized the blasphemy law. A year later, the minister for minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, was shot and killed.

For Bibi's husband, leaving Pakistan is a painful decision but still a matter of life and death.

"We have no other choice but to leave," he said. "I love Pakistan but I can't live here."

Even in Bibi's home village of Aitta Wali — a poor farming community where animals and villagers share tiny sunbaked mud houses — villagers are still outraged by her acquittal and warned a visiting AP reporter to "go. Just get out. Go."

"Our entire village swore on the Quran that she insulted the prophet but no one believes us and everyone believes her," said Aman Ali, one of the villagers. "Before this we liked the Christian families. We always got along. But now there is only anger."

The village's remaining three Christian families have fled.

Muhammad Afzal Qadri, a leader in the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Party and religious scholar, said he doesn't regret calling for the deaths of the judges who acquitted Bibi — or for calling on his followers to overthrow Khan's government.

At his sprawling madrassa in the Punjab city of Gujrat, Qadri told the AP this week that he had the religious authority to declare a fatwa, or edict, demanding the judges be killed.

Pakistan is bound by Islamic injunctions, he said, adding that he was qualified to decide such matters. The West only seeks to undermine Pakistan's Islamic traditions and culture, Qadri said. Zahid Hussain, author of two books on militancy in Pakistan, said Islamist rallies over Bibi's acquittal were an attempt to regain positions the extremists had lost in the July elections.

"They are trying to mobilize people on this issue, creating more extremism," said Hussain.

"They have created a sense of fear in society, for anyone who disagrees with their view of Islam."

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Pakistani Christian woman Aasia Bibi 'freed' from jail

Agencies

Pakistani Christian woman Aasia Bibi, who spent eight years on death row on charge of blasphemy, has been freed from jail, her lawyer said.

"She has been freed. I've been told that she is on a plane but nobody knows where she will land," her lawyer Saif-ul-Malook said in a message to AFP news agency on Wednesday.

Bibi, 53, was flown on Wednesday night to a facility in the capital, Islamabad, from an undisclosed location for security reasons, two senior government officials told the AP news agency.

Last week, Pakistan's Supreme Court had overturned Bibi's conviction and ordered her release, but she remained imprisoned as the government agreed to allow a review following right-wing protests over the bitterly divisive case.

A release order arrived on Wednesday at the prison in the central city of Multan, where Bibi was held, a prison official told AFP.

Her husband Ashiq Masih had appealed the United Kingdom or the United States to grant the family asylum, while Malook fled to the Netherlands.

Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman, meanwhile, confirmed that Bibi has not left Pakistan.

"Let me tell you that Asiya Bibi is in Pakistan and is safe," Muhammad Faisal said in a statement on Thursday.

"I cannot comment on the question pertaining to her lawyer. Regarding the question on review petition, I this is a technical and legal matter."

Bibi's acquittal had triggered massive protests by right-wing parties, mainly the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), in the Muslim-majority nation.

Thousands of people poured onto the streets after the court overturned Bibi's conviction last week, causing Prime Minister Imran Khan's government to sign a controversial deal with the TLP.

The blasphemy charge against Bibi stemmed from an incident in 2009, when she was asked to fetch water while out working in the fields.

Female Muslim labourers objected, saying that as a non-Muslim, she should not touch the water bowl, and reportedly a fight erupted.

A local imam then claimed Bibi insulted the Prophet Muhammad, a charge she has consistently denied.

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in Pakistan, where even unsubstantiated allegations of insulting Islam can result in death at the hands of mobs. At least 74 people have been killed in such violence since 1990, according to an Al Jazeera tally.

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Pakistan Today

November 10, 2018

Punjab suffered Rs260m loss during three-day TLP protests

By Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government on Saturday submitted a report regarding the losses suffered during the protests by hard-line Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) following the Supreme Court's decision to acquit Christian woman Aasia Bibi in Pakistan's most high-profile blasphemy last week.

According to the report, public and private property worth Rs260 million was damaged during the three-day protests by TLP activists.

The protests began on Oct 31, when the SC announced the decision to acquit Aasia and lasted till Nov 2 when the government signed an agreement with the protesters.

The protesters blocked multiple roads across the country and set fire to vehicles at certain locations.

The government then initiated a countrywide crackdown against those involved in vandalism and arson during the protests. Approximately 1,800 individuals were arrested and charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA). However, the government later announced that it would not make any further arrests and even exonerated TLP from the violent incidents.

On Nov 6, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar took notice of the vandalism during the protests.

He directed the federal and the provincial governments to submit a report on the destruction of public and private property during the protests.

According to a spokesperson of the top court, CJP Nisar sought a report about the damages in order to compensate those who suffered the loss of valuables and lives.

Blasts

The News

November 10, 2018

Man killed, four injured in North Waziristan blast

Our Correspondent

MIRANSHAH: A man was killed and four others sustained injuries when explosives planted in a bicycle went off in Edak Bazaar in Mir Ali tehsil in North Waziristan tribal district on Friday, sources said. The sources said the blast took place after Friday prayers. The explosives planted in the bicycle went off, killing one person and injuring another four. The injured were taken to a hospital in Bannu district. Soon after the blast, the security forces arrived at the scene. The district administration launched investigations into the incident.

Corruption

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

China's lawfare against corruption and lessons for Pakistan (Part II)

If history is any guide, all previous attempts at uprooting corruption in Pakistan have focused on settling political scores and selective accountability

Hassan Aslam Shad & Dr Ikramul Haq

So how has China's law fare against corruption been successful despite its mammoth geography and population size? In our view, some of the reasons behind China's successful law fare are the following.

First, China has demonstrated the political will and resolve to uproot corruption from within the system. If history is any guide, all previous attempts at uprooting [corruption in Pakistan](#) have focused on settling political scores and selective accountability.

Second, over the years China has embarked on a journey to craft a regime of anticorruption laws which recently manifested in the consolidation of anti-corruption laws governing both the public and the private sectors. In March 2018, two new "super agencies" were created to separately regulate the public and the private sector.

The "super agency" regulating the public sector is the National Supervision Commission (NSC) which replaces the earlier predecessor agency and unifies the anti-corruption functions that were earlier spread among a number of national level agencies. The NSC has increased investigative scope and powers and these now extend to heads of state-owned companies, public health care,

scientific research and educational institutes. NSC's powers include obtaining evidence from individuals and companies, seizure of assets and data and recommending cases for prosecution. The "super agency" "regulating the private sector in China is the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) which includes a consolidation of (i) the predecessor agency, (ii) the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, (iii) the Certification and Accreditation Administration, (iv) the Standardization Administration of China, and (v) the China Food and Drug Administration.

Another example of the China's raging law fare against corruption is amendments (in January 2018) to the Anti-Unfair Competition Law (AUCL) which is the law dealing with commercial bribery by individuals and companies in China. Under the amended AUCL, commercial bribery now includes offering money or goods or any other means in order to seek a transaction opportunity or competitive advantage (art.7, AUCL). Similarly, AUCL enhances the net of bribery recipients by making accountable (i) employees of "transaction counterparties", (ii) entities or individuals entrusted by "transaction counterparties" to handle relevant transaction matters or affairs, and (iii) individuals and companies who use their position or influence to affect a transaction. Another penetrative mechanism introduced in AUCL is employer's vicarious (strict) liability for employees' misconduct relating to the seeking of a transaction opportunity or competitive advantage. AUCL also provides the regulators with further enhanced powers which include the power to seize and hold financial assets relating to financial bribery and the power to access bank accounts of parties suspected of engaging in bribery.

AUCL amendments are emblematic of China's resolve to take law fare against corruption to the grassroots and thus drain the swamp of corruption infested with intermediaries in the economic ecosystem who are typically conduit for unlawful financial transactions. Similarly, making owners and senior management of companies responsible for acts of employees is another additional arsenal being used in China's law fare as it would compel the private sector to conduct audits to avoid suspect commercial transactions and thus do proper house-keeping.

China's law fare is not merely a crystallization of laws on paper. Rather, it has been weaponized in action. According to one source – Visualizing China's [Anti-Corruption](#) Campaign, China File (August 2018)- the anti-corruption campaign has resulted in "sweeping up some 2 million officials of both high rank and low". According to the aforementioned source, just in the first half of this year, some 302,000 investigations are underway in China. The anti-corruption law fare has also netted political heavyweights who were previously considered untouchable. These include General Xu Caihao (former Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission) and Bo Xilai (former Minister of Commerce and a prominent member of the Politburo and Communist Party Secretary).

In the authors' view, the reasons behind the success of China's law fare against corruption are: (i) a clear delineation of laws governing the public and private sectors; (ii) creation of independent regulatory bodies (super agencies) regulating the public and the private sectors to streamline enforcement mechanisms by doing away with inefficiency; (iii) amendments to existing anti-corruption laws to enhance the penetrative reach of those laws; and (iv) above all, a strong and committed political will to uproot corruption from all segments of society through across the board accountability.

Although Pakistan and China are poles apart in terms of the constitutional framework, forms of government and state structure, Pakistan should undertake a detailed study of the Chinese anti-corruption law fare model from all perspectives. Some questions that Pakistan needs to address include (but are not limited to) the following: Does Pakistan require stand-alone superagencies to

separately regulate the public and private sectors? To answer this question, Pakistan may need to take a holistic view of the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999 (NAO) with a new set of legal eyes. Another important question that Pakistan needs to ask is what are the different forms of corruption that are rampant in Pakistan that require laws, and whether the existing anti-corruption laws are adequate to tackle corruption and corrupt practices.

In the authors' view, Pakistan's anti-corruption laws are inadequate and require up gradation and substantial amendments to bring them in line with Pakistan's international obligations under the United Nations Convention against Corruption (the "Convention"). To this effect, Pakistan would need to consider inclusion of all-encompassing provisions in anti-corruption laws to tackle "intermediaries" (the proverbial smaller fishrotting the economic ecosystem). For example, in the NAO 2009, this would include a catch-all clause to supplement the list of public officials [(art. 15 (a) of the Convention)].

In Pakistan, there is also an urgent need to take measures to enhance data-collection systems and forge coordination between various state institutions in order to achieve effectiveness of their enforcement measures and do away with inefficiency.

For the successful implementation of the Convention, serious efforts are also required for training in specialized areas such as forensic accounting, etc., as well as foreign training in reputable organizations with emphasis on relevant anti-corruption case studies and on-site assistance by anti-corruption experts.

Adequate transparency, predictability and proportionality would need to be ensured while entering into plea bargains and out-of-court settlements (art. 30, para. 1 of the Convention). It is painful to note that little attention has been given to the quality and continuous prosecutorial, investigative and other specialized training of NAB and other agencies (art. 36 of the Convention). Only well-trained officials with proper training can meaningfully implement Pakistan's law fare against corruption.

It is further advised in light of the Chinese experience, that Pakistan must implement checks and balances over the watchdog anti-corruption agencies and take them to task in the event of abuse of power or failure to pursue their mandate and responsibilities. In light of the foregoing, it is important that discretionary powers of Chairman NAB and violations of due process of law (especially Article 10A of the Constitution of Pakistan) must end to make the process of accountability transparent and free from public criticism. All anti-corruption laws of Pakistan must shift the burden of proof on the accused. Needless to say, the edges of anti-corruption laws must be sharpened to introduce severe criminal and civil penalties for violations.

No doubt, Pakistan faces an uphill battle against corruption. Pakistan's economy – rather its survival as a nation – now depends on tackling corruption. China's law fare against corruption can offer a useful lesson or two to uproot the scourge of corruption and take meaningful steps towards the creation of the Naya Pakistan envisaged by Prime Minister Khan.

Dr. Ikram Ul Haq is an Advocate of the Supreme Court and Adjunct Faculty at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Email: ikram@huzaimaikram.com

Hassan Aslam Shad is a practicing international lawyer and a graduate of Harvard Law School. Email: veritas@post.harvard.edu

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Education Higher

The News

November 10, 2018

HEC calls for revival of NAHE

Myra Imran

Islamabad: Higher Education Commission (HEC) Chairman Dr. Tariq Banuri on Friday stressed for the revival of National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) to provide trainings for potential university leadership, faculty and administrative staff of universities.

He proposed the revival of NAHE and no-cost extension in the USAID Centre of Advanced Studies (CAS) projects in order to enable effective utilization of resources put in them, while talking to Ambassador Paul W. Jones, US Chargé d' Affaires, to Pakistan, who visited HEC secretariat on Friday.

Welcoming the dignitary, Dr. Banuri appreciated the US Embassy's role and efforts to promote collaboration between the Pakistani and US universities and higher education institutions. "The US and Pakistan have an extensive record of collaboration in the higher education sector," he stated.

He mentioned that the US support has been very critical in establishing and strengthening some of the best Pakistani universities including Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi; Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS); and, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF).

The ambassador said the US extends general support to its friendly countries in various areas, especially education, as it is a very significant sector of long term growth. Appreciating the USAID Centre of Advanced Studies (CAS) programme, Dr. Banuri said that efforts are afoot to ensure sustainability of the centres. He further said that the US Fulbright initiative is the largest programme of its kind in the world and Pakistan is benefiting from it. He maintained that the US-Pakistan research collaboration is another remarkable milestone, as the 7th phase of the US-Pakistan Science and Technology Programme is being completed while the 8th phase of the programme will soon be launched. Collaborative research initiatives need to be encouraged, emphasised by both, Dr. Banuri and Ambassador Jones.

The chairman stressed that HEC looks forwards to expanded bilateral collaboration. He emphasized on no-cost extension in the CAS projects and underlined the need for engagement of US universities in support for capacity building of Pakistani universities and the revival of NAHE.

Dr. Banuri said HEC has recently taken measures to streamline the process of degree verification and equivalence.

The ambassador said that undergraduate Pakistani students also need to apply for admission in the US universities. He said the number of undergraduate students studying in the US institutions could be increased. He hoped that the bilateral collaboration will thrive and the academic relations will further strengthen mutually beneficial relations between Pakistan and the United States.

The ambassador was accompanied by Public Affairs Officer Christopher Fitzgerald, Cultural Affairs Officer Matthew Singer, Director, USAID Office of Education Erica Rounsefell, and Senior Cultural Specialist Nadia Kamran. Acting Executive Director, HEC Lt Gen (r) Muhammad Asghar and Consultant, HEC Dr. Mahmood ul Hassan Butt also attended the meeting.

Education

The News

November 10, 2018

Education apartheid

Shahid Siddiqui

Education is considered to be a potent force that paves the way for development, change and freedom. It is viewed as an important factor that enhances the life chances of an individual. These life chances are of an economic, educational, and social nature. As a result, education is viewed as the passport to a better world.

Another important function of education is to reduce the socioeconomic gaps in society. Such gaps or inequalities lead to unrest and frustration. These inequalities are based on specific divides, such as the rural-urban divide, gender differentials and the gap between the rich and the poor. Opportunities and life chances are asymmetrical based on these divides.

Children living in rural areas are deprived of basic educational and health facilities and are, therefore, handicapped in the open competition for academic and job placements. Similarly, there are clear differentials in the treatment of girls and boys. In most cases, girls aren't encouraged to pursue their higher studies outside Pakistan for social or security reasons.

The divide in terms of the haves and the have-nots also impacts educational opportunities. For example, 22.84 million children in Pakistan don't attend school, which is an alarming figure. The situation appears worse if we consider the fact that 35 percent of schoolchildren drop out before they reach the eighth grade. Pakistan has one of the highest school dropout rates in the world. This is ironic because Pakistan is considered to be quite fortunate as the National Human Development Report indicates that 65 percent of the country's population is below 30 and 29 percent is between the ages of 15 and 29. But we haven't exploited the opportunities that a young population presents.

As a result, of the 68.4 percent of children between the ages of five and 16, 39.6 percent do not attend schools. The challenge of access, coupled with the challenge of the increasing dropout rate among children, has a direct impact on the country's overall literacy rate, which currently stands at 58 percent – one of the lowest in South Asia.

Another factor that is aggravating the literacy problem is the high rate of increase in population growth, which is adding to an already large number of out-of-school children. What happens to these out-of-school children is quite disturbing. Most of them start living on the streets and are seen selling flowers on the roads or washing the windscreens of cars at traffic signals. Some of them opt for the easy option of begging and spend the rest of their lives in this profession. A sizeable number of them fall prey to the torturous practice of child labour.

These children never get the opportunity to experience the joys of childhood. Many out-of-school children get addicted to drugs and develop serious health problems. Some of these children are easily trapped by criminal gangs that exploit them. Therefore, young people who don't go to school have turned into a liability for the country.

Although education is a tool that can bridge socioeconomic gaps in society, it has ironically been used to widen them. Our educational systems are already stratified on different accounts. For instance, there are public-sector schools (popularly referred to as Urdu-medium schools); madressahs that predominantly impart religious education; elite private English-medium schools, private English-medium schools for the middle class; street private English-medium schools, cadet schools/colleges and, more recently, Daanish schools.

These educational institutions vary in terms of their fee structure, curriculum, textbooks, the quality of teachers, assessment systems, and school milieu. A distinguishing feature that gives an extra advantage to students of specific educational institutions, especially in the Pakistani context, is their proficiency in English. In most of the cases, this is considered to be a deciding

factor in the job-placement process. This is one of the major reasons for the popularity of private schools as parents tend to believe that private schools prepare their students in developing better English language skills.

There is a sharp divide between schools for the rich and that of the poor. For instance, schools for the rich have all the necessary facilities, such as clean drinking water, heating and cooling facilities, and proper furniture. Meanwhile, schools for the poor lack these facilities. Many of these schools don't have boundary walls, access to clean drinking water, and proper heating and cooling facilities.

These different school systems are like detached islands that are churning out students with different and competing worldviews, and unequal academic, economic, and social chances. This situation is encouraging socioeconomic inequalities to prevail in society. As a result, frustration and extremism has increased because children suffering from an education apartheid tend to believe that the doors of quality education are closed to them.

Unfortunately, no education policy in Pakistan has focused on alleviating socioeconomic gaps and no action plan has been proposed to reduce these gaps. The first priority of the government should be to provide basic facilities at schools. To achieve this, there is an urgent need to increase funding for education to at least four percent of the country's GDP. However, this increase must be coupled with a comprehensive capacity-building plan for the sector.

The writer is an educationist.

Email: shahidksiddiqui@gmail.com

Extradition

The Nation

November 10, 2018

Return of Dar, Hassan, Hussain formally requested

| Shahzad Akbar says Altaf money laundering case information also shared with UK | Accord for accused handover to be inked by early next year

SARDAR HAMEED

ISLAMABAD - Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Accountability Mirza Shahzad Akbar has said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom have signed a treaty for extradition of criminals, while another treaty for extradition of accused persons will be signed by early next year.

Under the signed treaty, the Pakistani government has formally requested the British government to extradite former finance minister Ishaq Dar, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's sons Hassan and Hussain Nawaz to Pakistan, he revealed.

In an exclusive interview with Daily Nawa-i-Waqt on his return from Britain, he said that during his visit he met with key government figures there and took up important issues with them.

He also informed this scribe that Pakistan has requested the British government for the recovery of Rs2 billion from MQM founder Altaf Hussain in money-laundering case and has shared relevant information with them.

He said the NAB is also continuing its work against all the corrupt in the meanwhile.

Shahzad said that the agreement with the UK on extradition of criminals is a great achievement.

What could not be done in last 15 years has been done by PTI soon after assuming power. Under this agreement, he said, both the countries can now exchange prisoners.

About the proposed treaty for extradition of accused, the PM's aide said that groundwork has been done while progress was also made on cooperation between the two countries on issues like money laundering, corruption and white-collar crime.

Now the law enforcement institutions of the two countries can directly contact with each other for information exchange and other cooperation, he added.

To a query, Barrister Shahzad said the authorities would not wait for the signing of proposed treaty for extradition of accused in the matter of former finance minister Ishaq Dar, who has been declared an absconder.

The adviser said that UK government had raised a few questions on the demand for Dar's extradition and those would be properly answered. His return would not be delayed till the signing of proposed treaty, he added.

Asked about ex-minister's request for asylum, he said: "It does not matter."

Shahzad added: "We made an appeal to the UK authorities that judiciary is independent in Pakistan and they (the accused) are not being victimised politically. Action is being taken against the people who looted taxpayers' money."

He said that Hassan Nawaz managed to get British citizenship through wealth, whereas Hussain Nawaz is not a British citizen. Hussain only has permanent residence visa, he claimed.

Fake Degrees

The Nation

November 10, 2018

SC to hear NAB director's fake degree case on 12th

Syed Sabeehul Hussnain

ISLAMABAD - The Supreme Court has fixed the matter of alleged fake degree of accountability's watchdog's Director General (DG) Lahore Shahzad Saleem for hearing on November 12.

The matter of Saleem's degree was brought up in the apex court last year during the hearing of a suo motu case on alleged illegal appointments within NAB.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar will hear the case while the other members of the bench are Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Sajjad Ali Shah.

The petitioner, Asad Kharal, in his petition has claimed that master's degree of Saleem carrying transcript from 2002 is in the Calibri font, which was not commercially available until five years later. The top court has also issued a notice to the petitioner Asad Kharal.

National Accountability Bureau (NAB), after an internal probe, had deemed Saleem's degree genuine and cleared him.

The case, however, is pending adjudication before the top court which will be heard on Monday. It is pertinent to mention here that DG NAB Lahore Shehzad Saleem also survived another inquiry regarding his promotion.

According to a report of the Committee, a copy of which is available with The Nation, it was recommended that NAB may reconsider the case of Saleem for his promotion.

The Committee, which is headed by Secretary Establishment, was formed by Supreme Court in a suo moto case regarding illegalities, contraventions and violations within NAB. The Committee submitted its compliance report in May 2018 and DG NAB Lahore Shehzad Saleem is now a Grade 21 officer.

According to the report Saleem was issued a show-cause notice stating, "you (Saleem) were required to possess seven (07) years service in BPS-18 for promotion to the post of Additional Director (BPS-19) whereas you got promotion as Additional Director (BPS-19) w.e.f. 31-12-2003 through a Selection Board held on 31-12-2003 without completion of requisite length of NAB's service."

Moreover, the crux of the show-cause notice for Saleem's appointment by promotion as director (BPS-20) further stated that the officer got promotion without requisite length of NAB's service. Saleem responded to the show-cause notice stating that the premise on which these promotions were based, and relying upon which the officers working in Armed Forces and other various departments of the govt had based their decision to opt for rendering their services to the newly formed NAB by way of transferring their services to the same, was that their previous length of service would also be transferred to NAB and would be counted towards their promotions. In replying to the show-cause notice, he further contended that when NAB was in formative years and required to induct competent persons from other services, competent authority approved counting of previous service of all employees who were inducted in NAB from other government department.

On brief reply of Saleem, the Committee also gave its findings. The Committee observed, "Mr. Shehzad Saleem was promoted as Director (BS-20), on regular basis, after rendering 5 years and 1 months service in BS-18 & above in NAB. The PER Grading & Quantification Form placed before Selection Board meeting, held on 15-10-2008 discerns that PERs for the last 11 years were quantified to workout the threshold by taking into account 11 PERs of the officer's previous service other than NAB, which was inconsistent with Sections 2.01 (xiii), 2.01 (xxxv), 3.25 of NAB Employees TCS 2002 and NAB's MAQ 2002, as well as Promotion Policy, under which 12 years regular cadre service of NAB in BS-18 & above was required to be counted for promotion to the post of Director (BS-20) on regular basis."

"The Committee, therefore, recommends that NAB may, in the first place, reconsider the case for promotion of the officer (Saleem) from BS-18 to BS-19, on regular basis, when he actually becomes eligible subject to completion of prescribed length of service and mandatory training in accordance with NAB Rules/ Promotion policy and thereafter, reconsider his further promotion to BS-20, accordingly in the light of decision arrived at in case of his promotion to BS-19."

FATA

The Nation

November 10, 2018

PM for foiling designs of 'forces' against Fata merger

SHAFQAT ALI

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Friday that some hidden powers were against the merger of Fata into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and they were using people to accomplish their malicious plan.

He said this while chairing a review meeting to assess development regarding Fata merger into KP.

The prime minister said: "We will have to defeat these hidden powers by fighting against them jointly."

Imran pledged that the erstwhile Federally Administrated Tribal Areas will definitely get its share from the National Finance Commission award. The prime minister said after the merger of FATA the administrative and other matters should be resolved in such a manner that the people do not face any difficulties.

But PM Khan said the government will play its due role for ensuring provision of share to FATA in the NFC award.

The meeting was briefed that a number of departments of FATA Secretariat had already been transferred to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

These departments included education, Zakat, Ushar, social welfare and population welfare; while process of shifting other departments was under way.

For the development of the areas merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a special committee led by Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been formed to prepare a ten-year plan.

FATA was a semi-autonomous tribal region that existed from 1947 until being merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in 2018.

It consisted of seven tribal agencies (districts) and six frontier regions, and were directly governed by the federal government through a special set of laws called the Frontier Crimes Regulations.

It bordered the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to the east and south, and Afghanistan's provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Khost and Paktika to the west and north. The territory is almost exclusively inhabited by the Pashtun, who also live in the neighbouring provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Northern Balochistan, and straddle across the border into Afghanistan.

The merger of FATA into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is aimed at streamlining the belt and providing equal opportunities to the tribal people.

The prime minister was also informed that a committee has been constituted under the head of KP Chief Minister. The committee will supervise development projects of the newly-merged areas.

The FATA would be allotted three per cent share in the next NFC awards and in this regard consultation is in process. The government has approved Rs1.1 billion budget for the welfare of Fata youth. A notification has been issued regarding exemption of Fata from tax net, the meeting was told. Besides, the annual development fund for Fata has also been approved.

Last month the government had announced that FATA will get three percent share under the NFC award as decided by the federal cabinet.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the share of the provinces will be reduced to facilitate the FATA people.

The Pakistan People's Party warned it will not accept any cut in the NFC award for the provinces.

Senator Sherry Rehman said: "The PPP will not accept unconstitutional cuts by the federal government in the NFC."

She said such cuts were not possible without a constitutional amendment. "Setting up task forces under the supervision of a Governor, who is an arm of the executive is a roadblock on provincial autonomy," she contended.

PM VOWS TO MAKE COUNTRY POLIO-FREE

Prime Minister Imran Khan Friday vowed to make Pakistan a polio-free country.

The premier chaired a meeting of the National Task Force on Polio Eradication here. Minister for Health Amir Mehmood Kiani, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shah Farman, Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar, CM Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, CM Gilgit-Baltistan Hafiz Hafezur Rehman, Chief Secretaries of the provinces, representatives of the Polio Partner Agencies and senior officials attended the meeting.

The meeting was briefed about the current status and the efforts afoot to completely eradicate polio from the country. The Chief Ministers briefed the meeting about the efforts being made by the provincial governments.

The Prime Minister stressed upon the need for greater efforts to sensitise public about the devastating effects of the crippling disease especially for the future of the country - the children of Pakistan.

He reiterated commitment of the federal and provincial governments towards polio eradication. He said all the Chief Ministers would continue to spearhead campaign against polio eradication in their provinces and the federal government would continue to provide every possible support them.

The Prime Minister said polio eradication was a national cause and every effort would be made to make Pakistan polio-free country. He thanked international partners for their support towards this important cause.

Pak Army committed to provide security and enabling environment for the success of the polio eradication campaign.

Meanwhile, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani called on Prime Minister Imran Khan here yesterday. "They discussed various issues of mutual interest," said an official statement.

ASSETS RECOVERY UNIT BRIEFS PM

APP adds: A meeting of Assets Recovery Unit was held here Friday under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Imran Khan. The Assets Recovery Unit briefed the prime minister about its performance and presented details of the traced properties and assets abroad.

According to a statement issued by the prime minister media wing, the unit also updated the prime minister about the steps so far taken for repatriation of the properties and assets.

Health Polio

The News

November 10, 2018

Army to provide security in polio eradication campaign

Muhammad Saleh Zaafir

ISLAMABAD: Army has articulated its commitment to provide security and enabling environment for the success of the polio eradication campaign in the country.

The resolve was expressed in a meeting of the National Task Force on Polio Eradication held at the Prime Minister Office (PMO) on Friday, and it was chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan. He said on the occasion that Polio incidence is a very serious issue for the country as it jeopardizes the future of our children. He urged the provincial governments to enhance efforts for complete polio eradication through spearheading of the campaigns preferably at the level of chief ministers, coordinated community level engagements by involving prominent local elders and religious scholars.

The prime minister emphasised that the Task Force meetings should be held more frequently to effectively oversee the progress and to achieve zero incidence in the shortest possible time frame.

The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Amir Mehmood Kiani, KP Governor Shah Farman, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Gilgit Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafizur Rehman, Pakistan Army Engineer-in Chief Lt Gen Muhammad Afzal, Minister for Health AJ&K Dr Najeeb Naqi Khan, provincial chief secretaries, UNICEF Country Representatives Ms Aida Girma, WHO Country Head Dr Nima Saeed Abid, representatives of partner organisations and senior officials.

Prime Minister's Focal Person on Polio Eradication Babar Bin Atta briefed the Task Force, in detail, about the current situation and the future Polio eradication strategy. It was informed that

Pakistan's efforts for polio eradication have been recognized world over as polio cases have recorded an exponential decline since 1994 onwards. The participants were informed that the main factors contributing towards Polio incidence in Pakistan were cross-border movement from Afghanistan, poverty, poor sanitation, low coverage of routine birth immunisation, access & security threats and most importantly misconceptions that results in refusal of immunisation. Regarding the future course of action, it was briefed that the strategy needs to be implemented at the grass-root levels with targeted awareness campaigns, countering propaganda and high level engagements with decision makers and religious scholars. Chief Ministers of Punjab, Sindh and Gilgit Baltistan apprised the Task Force regarding measures taken at the provincial level for Polio eradication.

Pakistan Army Engineer-in-Chief Lt Gen Muhammad Afzal said that Pakistan Army will continue to provide security and an enabling environment for the success of Polio eradication campaigns in areas with security issues.

Dr Christopher Maher, Manager, Polio Eradication WHO praised the high level presence, efforts and support of the government, provincial governments and security forces regarding polio eradication. He also commended the integration of Polio Eradication Programme (PEP) with education, sanitation and other related sectors.

The Prime Minister reiterated the government's commitment towards a Polio free Pakistan and assured that federal government will provide every possible support in achieving this target. He thanked the international partner agencies for providing technical and financial support to PEP.

Dawn

November 10, 2018

All measures will be taken to make Pakistan polio-free: Imran

APP

ISLAMABAD: Taking note of reports indicating presence of the poliovirus in the country, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday reiterated that the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government was committed to achieving a polio-free Pakistan and would take all measures for its eradication. Chairing a meeting of the National Task Force on polio eradication on Friday at the PM Office, he said the crippling disease could jeopardise the future of children and assured the federal government's full support in its elimination.

The meeting was attended by Minister for National Health Services Amir Mehmood Kiani, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Shah Farman, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafizur Rehman, Pakistan Army Engineer-in-Chief Lt Gen Muhammad Afzal, AJK Minister for Health Dr Najeeb Naqi Khan, provincial chief secretaries, Unicef country representative Aida Girma, WHO country head Dr Nima Saeed Abid, and representatives of partner organisations as well as senior officials.

The chief ministers of Punjab, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan apprised the task force regarding the measures taken at provincial level for polio eradication.

The Prime Minister's focal person on polio eradication, Babar Bin Atta, briefed the task force in detail about the prevailing situation and the future eradication strategy.

He directed that meetings of the task force needed to be held more frequently to effectively oversee the progress and to achieve zero incidence in the shortest possible time frame.

Regarding future course of action the meeting was informed that the strategy needs to be implemented at the grass-root levels with targeted awareness campaigns, countering propaganda and high level engagements with decision makers and religious scholars.

Lt Gen Muhammad Afzal said the army would continue to provide security and an enabling environment for the success of polio eradication campaigns in areas with security issues.

WHO manager Dr Christopher Maher praised the high-level presence, efforts and support of the federal and provincial governments as well as security forces for polio eradication. He also commended the integration of polio eradication programme with education, sanitation and related sectors.

The prime minister thanked the international partner agencies for their technical and financial support to the programme.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Inflations

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Exchange rate movements amplify inflation: WB report

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Upward acceleration of global inflation from record low levels may impair efforts to sustain the low inflation environment achieved over the past several decades in these economies, says the World Bank in its ground-breaking report on inflation in the emerging and developing economies.

The adverse effects of high inflation can fall disproportionately on the poor, who hold most of their assets in cash and rely heavily on wage income, welfare benefits, and pensions, the World Bank said in its report: *Inflation in Emerging and Developing Economies: Evolution, Drivers, and Policies*, published on Wednesday.

High inflation has historically also been associated with slower economic growth, making efforts to maintain low and stable inflation crucial for reducing poverty and inequality, the World Bank said.

To investigate the impact of inflation on emerging and developing economies, the World Bank's Prospects Group has produced the first wide-ranging analysis of inflation and its implications for these economies in a long time. The new study also includes a global inflation data-set that covers more than 175 countries over 1970-2017.

Key findings of the report say the influence of this global inflation cycle has been most prominent in countries that are more developed and more integrated into the global economy.

The global inflation cycle has fluctuated with movements in global demand and abrupt swings in oil prices.

Inflation expectations in such economies are more sensitive to global and domestic developments than inflation expectations in advanced economies.

Struggling economies with lower public debt and greater trade openness tend to experience better-anchored inflation expectations.

Exchange rate movements can amplify the impact of global forces on national inflation in emerging markets and developing economies. Greater central bank credibility and independence have been associated with significantly lower pass-throughs of exchange rate fluctuations to inflationary pressures.

The downward trend of exchange rate pass-through in the last 20 years may in part reflect improved central bank policies and a firmer anchoring of inflation expectations.

The improved inflation performance of low-income countries appears, to a considerable extent, to have reflected external forces. If global inflation rises, low income countries may see rising inflationary pressures as well.

The study documents the confluence of structural and policy factors that have fostered low global inflation over the past five decades. Foremost among these has been unprecedented international trade and financial market integration.

The adoption of more resilient monetary, exchange rate and fiscal policy frameworks among some emerging and developing economies has facilitated better control of inflation. However, external factors that have held inflation at bay over the past decades may lose momentum or be rolled back.

The study also looks into the evolution of inflation and the global and domestic factors that drive it; how inflation expectations affect price stability; and how exchange rate fluctuations can pass through to cause inflation. The study further looks specifically at how monetary policy and food price movements affect inflation in low-income countries.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Money Market

The Express Tribune

November 10, 2018

Rupee weakens against dollar, just shy of record low

By Salman Siddiqui

KARACHI: The Pakistani currency weakened to Rs133.84 to the US dollar, close to the historic low hit in mid-October, in the inter-bank market on Friday after Islamabad started talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout package.

The rupee lost Rs0.82, or 0.61%, from Thursday's close of Rs133.02, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported.

During the day, the rupee hit an intra-day low of Rs134.04 to the greenback as Pakistan's foreign currency reserves dropped to a four-and-a-half-year low at \$7.67 billion on November 2, 2018, which were insufficient for one and a half month of imports.

Besides, "Pakistan has to repay \$9 billion in (external) debt by June 30, 2019," said Pakistan Forex Association (PFA) President Malik Bostan while talking to The Express Tribune.

Last month, Saudi Arabia agreed on an assistance package of \$6 billion for Pakistan, including \$3 billion in cash and another \$3 billion in credit for petroleum oil imports.

Any delay in the receipt of these funds may impact day-to-day currency market movements.

"The rupee may fall further if the IMF imposes stringent conditions for the bailout ...and the expected flow of funds from friendly countries is delayed," said Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan (ECAP) General Secretary Zafar Paracha. "Otherwise, the rupee will recover."

Last week, Prime Minister Imran Khan flew to China for a five-day visit and upon return, he claimed that Beijing had pledged financial assistance but it did not want to disclose the amount. Besides, in case of successful negotiations, first installment of an IMF loan is expected to be received by the middle of December 2018.

Finance Minister Asad Umar has claimed that Pakistan has all the arrangements in place to pay for imports and bear debt servicing cost till February 2019 if the IMF package is delayed.

He declared the other day that if the IMF imposed conditions that were not acceptable to Pakistan, the country would opt out of the bailout.

The chances for this, however, remain low.

On October 16, 2018, the rupee hit a historic low, closing at Rs133.85 to the US dollar, just one paisa above Friday's closing level.

The rupee has lost Rs1.81, or 1.37%, since it recovered to Rs132.03 on October 24, 2018.

The rupee in the unregulated open market closed trading at Rs134 to the greenback on Friday, currency dealers said.

“The open market has continued to trade below the inter-bank rate due to little demand for foreign currency,” Paracha said. “Demand in the inter-bank market comes apparently due to import payment and debt repayment pressure as the country's foreign currency reserves have dropped to critically low levels.”

Bostan added that open market's currency dealers had continued to sell dollars in the inter-bank market as demand for the foreign currency from individuals had remained low for quite a long time.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 10th, 2018.

Narcotics

The Nation

November 10, 2018

10 suspected smugglers arrested, 3.395 tons of narcotics recovered

ANF carries out raids against drug mafia

Israr Ahmad

Rawalpindi-The Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) has carried out raids against the drug mafia across the country while arresting 10 suspected smugglers and recovering 3.395 tons of narcotics from their possession, informed ANF HQ spokesman on Friday.

A foreigner was also among the detained smugglers, he said. According to him, in continuation of its drive for achieving a drug free society, the ANF seized 3394.836 kg narcotics, worth Rs 3.96 billion internationally and arrested 10 culprits including a foreigner involved in drug smuggling and also impounded a vehicle conducting 9 counter-narcotics strikes.

The seized drugs comprised of 1.6 kg Hashish, 3375 kg Opium, 13.175 kg heroin and 5.061 kg Amphetamine, he said. He added ANF Quetta arrested Muhammad Aslam resident of Chagai from general area of Girdi Jungle, Tehsil Dalbandin, District Chagai and recovered 4.25 Kg Heroin from his personal possession. In another operation, ANF Quetta recovered 3375 Kg Opium from Killi Okar near Girdi Jungle, Tehsil Dalbandin, District Chagai. ANF Rawalpindi arrested Hayat Ullah resident of Mardan from Islamabad International Airport on suspicion of ingested Narco filled capsules, he said.

He said culprit was admitted to Benazir Bhutto Hospital where he delivered 55 Heroin filled capsules weighing 350 grams. Detailed search of the luggage of an arrested culprit resulted in the recovery of 2.230 kg Amphetamine soaked in papers and talcum powder bottle placed in his luggage, he said adding that the arrested accused intended to fly to KSA by flight number SV-889.

In another operation, ANF Rawalpindi arrested Junaid Iqbal and Awais Khan both residents of Gilgit from Anti Terrorism Court Gilgit and recovered 1.6 kg Hashish from their personal possession, the spokesman informed.

He said ANF, in the third operation, arrested Ayaz Muhammad, a resident of Swabi and his wife Shazia from Islamabad International Airport while they were about to fly to Jeddah (KSA) and recovered 1.238 Kg Amphetamine from their trolley bag. In the fourth operation, ANF Rawalpindi arrested Adil Khan, a resident of Haripur from Islamabad International Airport while was about to board a flight to Dammam (KSA) by flight number PK-245 and recovered 743 Grams Amphetamine from his trolley bag.

ANF Lahore intercepted a Toyota Hiace near Motorway-M4 Toll Plaza, Gojra-Faisalabad and recovered 8 Kg Heroin concealed in CNG cylinder of the vehicle. A person onboard Muhammad Yasir resident of Charsadda was also arrested during the operation.

In another operation, ANF Lahore arrested Ahmad Shafiq Ibrahim, a Maldivian citizen at Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore on suspicion of ingested narco filled capsules.

The arrested individual admitted in Services Hospital, Lahore where he delivered 61 Heroin filled weighing 575 Gram. In the third operation, ANF Lahore arrested Faraz Ahmed, a resident of Sargodha at Multan International Airport and recovered 850 Gram Amphetamine from his luggage. The arrested culprit intended to fly to Dammam (KSA) via Dubai by flight number FZ-326, he said.

Cases have been registered against the smugglers with respective ANF Police Stations under CNS Act 1997 and further investigations are underway, he said.

Panama Leaks

The News

November 10, 2018

PanamaLeaks issue: Of 444 Pakistanis, 150 untraceable

Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly was informed on Friday that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had not filed any petition in the Supreme Court in the PanamaLeaks; rather in 294 cases, notices under relevant section of the Income Tax Ordinance have been issued to Pakistanis whose names appeared in the Leaks.

Responding to a question from Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) during the Question-Hour, the Minister of State for Revenue Hammad Azhar, however, said that out of 444, notices in 150 cases were not issued because those were not traceable due to incomplete particulars.

He said the FBR was also pursuing those 242 cases which were declared as time-barred during the tenure of the last government. "No law of the land stops us from pursuing cases which were declared as time-barred," he said adding no investigation took place in those 242 cases in the past.

He further informed that the FBR was collecting data of Pakistanis whose names appeared in the PanamaLeaks. Besides, he said so far the FBR had received information of 96,000 undeclared accounts. On the occasion, Mohsin Nawaz Ranjha of the PML-N pointed out benami property of Aleema Khan, sister of Prime Minister Imran Khan, had also been discovered in Dubai.

Hammad Azhar informed the opposition member action would be taken without any discrimination if any name is traced in the process of investigations in any case.

The minister said that so far, demand of Rs10.9 billion has been created in 15 cases, out of which as sum of Rs6.2 billion has been recovered while in remaining cases of the PanamaLeaks, investigation is in progress.

Qaisar Shaikh, a PML-N member, pointed out that the PTI government had claimed that it would raise revenue collection from Rs400 billion to Rs600 billion in the first 100 days of its government but to the contrary, the revenue had gone down by Rs160 billion in 80 days. The minister of state said the PTI faced a shortfall of Rs125 billion due to inherited problems. However, he said the revenue currently was better than the corresponding period of the last fiscal year.

Meanwhile, Minister for Planning and Development Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar in written reply to a question said that the present government attaches great importance to cooperation in agriculture sector with Chinese under CPEC.

A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed during the prime minister's visit to China to further expedite cooperation in this sector, which will include ministerial level visits and expert and technical people level visit.

Under the MoU, both countries would cooperate in conservation of genetic resources for livestock, poultry and aquatic products, conduct joint research on conventional and genetically modified varieties of seed breeding, precision agriculture, biotechnology and biological application for disease and pest control .

Both countries will collaborate in technology of pre and post harvest storage and processing and cooperate in field of water conservation and management through use of water efficient technologies.

Privatisation

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Privatization & CPEC

In Pakistan experience shows that poverty did not reduce nor was there any reduction in income inequality

Razeen Ahmed

Worldwide in the past two decades state owned enterprises have been privatized and transferred to the private sector in 150 countries with a negative impact on rights of the employees and compromise on their job security. Privatization remained a standard panacea prescribed for developing countries by multilateral lending agencies. Examples are replete such as scores of state owned enterprises put to the chopping block in countries including Albania, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Pakistan and Mongolia with no tangible benefits or spurt in the economy. In Pakistan experience shows that poverty did not reduce nor was there any reduction in income inequality. In Pakistan, our Cabinet Committee on Privatization was created in 1991 to oversee privatization related activities. The Privatization Commission website reveals that Pakistan's privatization program is focused on attracting private sector capital and managerial expertise through the divestment of identified public sector entities in a transparent manner. Benefits purportedly include, as listed on its website, improvement in operational efficiency, reduction in financial burden in order to accelerate the pace of industrialization, strengthening capital market retirement of debt, improved power sector efficiency through competition, profit incentives, deregulation and rationalization in prices and subsidies .

From 1991 till 2015 seven banks, 27 capital market transactions, 15 transactions in the energy sector, four in telecommunications, seven industrial units, 17 in cement, 16 in the chemical sector, seven in engineering, 7 in fertilizer, 4 in textile sector beside others. The total transaction amount was Rs 648,972 million including Rs54,273 million from the energy sector, Rs 41,023

million banking, Rs 16,177 cement and Rs 187,024 million from the telecommunications sector. In many transactions the buyers were common creating horizontal ownership. The privatization process has been criticized during all regimes for sale of strategic assets at throwaway prices. The mandate of Privatization Commission was confined to industrial transactions branching out later into strategic areas in power, oil and gas, transport, telecommunications and banking sectors. The anomaly is that sick units and those units surviving on government subsidies like Pakistan Steel Mills, Pakistan International Airlines and Railways staffed by a huge number of employees remain immune from privatisation. Pakistan National Shipping Corporation managing nine ships, although not overstaffed has to be responsive to maritime commerce opportunities. State monopolies have been converted into private cartels and regrettably privatisation has not been accompanied by significantly increased competition with lowering of prices. The banking, cement, sugar and power sector remain virtual monopolies and no regulator bridges the demand and supply gap and despite privatisation the cost of cement escalated manifold.

Critics argue private firms can exploit their monopoly. In the 1980's and 1990's, the UK privatized state owned industries such as British Petroleum, British Telecom, British Airways, electricity, gas companies and British Rail. Greece recently cleared the transaction for share transfer agreement for the entire rolling stock maintenance business to an operating subsidiary of FS Group for Euros 22million with the ostensible purpose to strengthen Greece's role as a transit hub, building on international investment in ports and motorway upgrading projects.

An emerging trend is that foreign investment by government sponsored or sovereign funds is no longer appreciated in strategic sectors on account of an apprehension that political motives may surreptitiously enter. Countries such as US, Canada, Germany, France, Australia, Japan and South Korea are resisting takeover of their strategic sectors by sovereign funds originating from the Middle East, China and Russia. Assets acquired include stakes in Citigroup Inc., Merrill Lynch and Airbus sending alarm bells ringing.

The British Rail infrastructure taught valuable lessons in terms of open access, unnecessary separation of operations and infrastructure to encourage competitive pricing, franchising, conversion from a lean mean structure to a highly encumbered one, listing on stock exchanges without adequate preparation, an annual subsidy of UK Pounds Sterling 4 billion, with passengers paying almost two thirds of the cost of additional rolling stock, fragmentation of British Rail into more than 100 companies which was the worst aspect of privatization and only now is the government looking at ways of patching together operations and infrastructure. Caution will have to be exercised in Pakistan in privatization in strategic areas such as transport, energy and transactions prudently structured in phased manner with due diligence of investors being of utmost importance.

In order to accelerate the plan to make Pakistan an international trading hub in the context of CPEC state owned operations in the energy, power and transport operations (aviation, rail and ports) need to be privatized on priority as Pakistan cannot capitalize upon its geo strategic location and Silk and Belt route from China to Gwadar and Karachi port till it has an inter connected, digital and seamless transport infrastructure and system established. Gaps are to be filled at a breakneck pace to move ahead in the struggle for regional dominance of trade and commerce.

The writer has done Bachelor's from London School of Economics and Political Science. Nadir Mumtaz reviewed the article

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Remittances

The News

November 10, 2018

Remittances rise 15.14 percent

Our Correspondent

KARACHI: The amount of money sent home by overseas Pakistanis increased to 15.14 percent in the first four months of current fiscal year over the same period last year, data released by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) showed on Friday.

Remittances totaled \$7.419 billion in July-October 2018/19, compared with \$6.444 billion during the corresponding period of last fiscal year. In October, the inflows stood at \$2.000 billion, which was 37.7 percent higher than September 2018 and 20.9 percent higher than October 2017. The central bank figures showed the trend in workers' remittances remained the same. Inflows from the United States witnessed the highest growth of 35.13 percent to reach \$1.137 billion in July-October FY19. The US was followed by the United Kingdom, with \$1.058 billion, compared to \$913.54 million in the same period last year.

Remittances from Saudi Arabia somewhat improved during the period under review, increasing 4 percent to \$1.757 billion. Remittances from the UAE rose 13.92 percent to \$1.607 billion. However, inflows from other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries declined 3.11 percent to hit \$724.73 million against \$748.02 million last year.

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Remittances jump 15pc

Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Remittances from overseas Pakistanis grew 15.14 per cent to \$7.42 billion in first four months (July-October) of this fiscal year, from \$6.44bn in the same period last fiscal year. The inflows for October clocked in at \$2bn – surging by 37.7pc month-on-month and 20.9pc year-on-year from \$1.452 and \$1.65bn, respectively.

Saudi Arabia was yet again the biggest source of remittances this month at \$494.53 million, up 7.26pc, from \$461.07m in same period last year. 4MFY19 figures from the kingdom stood at \$1.76bn, higher by 4.05pc from \$1.69bn.

United Arab Emirates came in second with \$412m in October, jumping 23.5pc from \$333.57m in corresponding period last year.

Remittances from USA amounted to \$308m, UK \$298.80m, Gulf Cooperation Council countries \$198.3m and European Union \$57.36m.

Among EU states (other than UK), Spain accounted for the largest inflow in October at \$18.99m – soaring by 101pc – from \$9.45 in corresponding period last year. Germany and Italy followed with \$10.49m and \$9.16m.

Meanwhile, overseas Pakistanis from Malaysia, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Japan and other countries collectively sent back \$230.68m in October versus \$137.83m in same month last year.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Taxation

The News

November 10, 2018

Reforming the tax system

The PTI has taken the first steps towards tax reform. The first step is to separate revenue collection from tax policy formulation. The question is whether this will be significant enough to improve tax collection in the country. The decision is intended to take away policy formation powers from the Federal Board of Revenue, which will now only be responsible for tax administration and collection. The decision seems to mirror the larger shifts in governance advocated by international lenders. Similar moves to separate policy formulation and administration in the electricity and gas sectors has not worked well in terms of improving the actual operation of the sectors. A special committee will be formed to formulate a larger tax reform framework, which could mirror the government's Economic Advisory Committee. Independent tax experts are expected to be put on board.

Would making the FBR an autonomous body be in line with the PTI manifesto improve tax collection? FBR reform is a crucial part of the PTI's 100-day reforms agenda. PM Imran Khan in his first speech promised to start the reform process with the FBR. The change looks good on paper like most other tax reform proposals to have been implemented, but there has been little success apart from the indirect taxation proposals. Tax reform has been on the cards for the last four decades. Previous efforts have included the Qamarul Islam report in the 1980s, the Shahid Husain Task Force in the 1990s, and the decade-long Tax Administration Reform Project.

There has always been a problem in how tax issues in the country are diagnosed. The narrative is that tax reform involves getting rid of decades of failure to adapt on the part of the bureaucracy. The reality is different. The tax bureaucracy is known to have adjusted well to the changing nature and growing scale of the Pakistani economy in terms of its ability to enrich itself through corrupt practices. Governance and service delivery in Pakistan are not connected to taxation. If anything, the feeling exists that tax does not go into providing services to the taxpayer. One can separate tax collection from policymaking, but how does that repair the relationship between the state and the local taxpayer? When service delivery involves informally bribing a state official to get an electricity connection or to get roads repaired, then the money should go directly into the tax coffer. The FBR is showing that it is in action – but the 3,000 notices are nowhere near sufficient to improve tax collection in the country. It will be important to see what the overall idea of tax reform is under the current government. For now, we are seeing a piecemeal, rather than a holistic, approach.

Terrorism

Dawn

November 10, 2018

War on terror left half a million dead in 17 years, says report

Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: War-related violence has killed 65,000 people in Pakistan in the last 17 years, including 23,000 civilians, 9,000 security personnel and 90 American contractors, says a report released on Thursday. The rest of the casualties were anti-government fighters.

The report by the Brown University's Costs of War Project notes that since 2001, when the United States launched its war on terror, about 507,000 people have been killed in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. The report also warns that there has been a 22 per cent increase in war deaths in the past two years.

As many as 370,000 of these people have died due to direct war violence, including armed forces on all sides of the conflicts, contractors, civilians, journalists, and humanitarian workers. Fatalities in Afghanistan, as of October 2018, stood at about 147,000 people, including Afghan security forces, civilians and opposition fighters. A total of 6,334 American soldiers and contractors, as well as more than 1,100 allied troops, have also been killed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2018.

Between 268,000 and 295,000 deaths have occurred in Iraq, where the US-led military intervention began in 2003.

The Ivy League US University, based in Rhode Island, notes that "compelling alternatives to war" were always available but "were scarcely considered in the aftermath of 9/11 or in the discussion about war against Iraq." And "some of those alternatives are still available to the United States," adds that report while underlining the costs of ignoring those options: "It is likely that many times more than 370,000 people have died indirectly in these wars, due to malnutrition, damaged infrastructure, and environmental degradation".

The report notes that 200,000 civilians have been killed in direct violence by all parties to these conflicts, including more than 6,800 US soldiers.

The report mentions that the US government never revealed how many US service members returning from these wars became injured or ill while deployed.

Similarly, many deaths and injuries among US contractors have not been reported as required by law, but it is likely that at least 6,900 have been killed. A contractor is a citizen engaged by a private firm to fight for the US government.

The report shows that the war also caused widespread displacements.

Consequently, 10.1 million Afghan, Iraqi, and Pakistani people are living as war refugees and internally displaced persons, "in grossly inadequate conditions".

The report warns that the US military is conducting counter-terror activities in 76 countries, vastly expanding the counter-terror war across the globe. The wars have been accompanied by erosions in civil liberties and human rights in the US and abroad.

The study argues that the human and economic costs of these wars will continue for decades with some costs, such as the financial costs of US veterans' care, not peaking until mid-century.

US government funding of reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan has totalled over \$170 billion. Most of those funds have gone towards arming security forces in both countries. Much of the money allocated to humanitarian relief and rebuilding civil society has been lost to fraud, waste, and abuse.

The cost of the Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria wars totals about \$5.6 trillion. This does not include future interest costs on borrowing for the wars, which will add an estimated \$8 trillion through 2054.

The ripple effects on the US economy have also been significant, including job loss and interest rate increases.

Both Iraq and Afghanistan continue to rank extremely low in global studies of political freedom. Women in Iraq and Afghanistan are excluded from political power and experience high rates of unemployment and war widowhood.

In the US, an average taxpayer owes \$23,386 for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's equivalent to a year at a public university, a new Honda Accord car and the average down payment on a house.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Express Tribune

November 10, 2018

Deep scars from terror war

By Editorial

It is important to look at the war of terror through the prism of humanitarian costs because that is only when we can truly begin to assess and understand how grave, widespread and destructive the 17-year-long war has been. Up to 500,000 people have been killed and many more maimed in this unending war that has turned the lives of hundreds of civilians in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan upside down. One of the most unfortunate aspects of the conflict: there is little recognition that unarmed civilian populations have been exposed to the horrors of war through the use of drone technology.

The number of fatalities does not include those who have indirectly died as a result of the war, putting the actual toll much higher. Such enormous loss of lives is not only shocking but demands serious soul-searching from the US and its Western allies.

Pakistan is already paying the price as it struggles to mainstream refugees and accommodate hundreds of the displaced, along with the many challenges that it faced after their arrival (terrorism, drug trafficking are to name a few). Iraq too struggles to rehabilitate itself back from the status of a war-torn country, while the likes of Syria and Yemen are still embroiled in this infernal and bloody war.

Today the number of fatalities caused in the War on Terror is ten times higher than those lost in the 9/11 attacks — 2,977. This is not to say that those lives do not matter but the intensity of terror war puts the responsibilities of these on the US. Not only should it be held responsible to pay for the financial cost of it but should also be asked to share what it plans to achieve after 17 years of this brutal and relentless war.

And as much as the perpetrators of the war claim that they tried to limit harm to non-combatants and civilian infrastructure they have done the opposite and much more. There has been little effort to restore public services or repair devastated infrastructure. Affected parts of the world continue to suffer silently and in tears.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 10th, 2018.

Thar

The News

November 10, 2018

The tragedy of Thar

The impoverished, drought hit region or Tharparkar in Sindh has been neglected year after year and decade after decade – leading to an ever-worsening situation. The public representatives elected from the region have a lot to answer for. So too does the PPP government which has ruled Sindh since 2008. The situation in Thar resembles that of nations in Sub Saharan Africa where long years of drought have led to disaster. However even in these nations, more has been done to save lives, safeguard children and call for international help where necessary. In Tharparkar it seems that beyond words and vague promises very little has changed on the

ground. On Wednesday, the Supreme Court set up a commission headed by the district and sessions judge of Tharparkar to ensure provision of food and water to the people of Thar while a two-member SC bench has resumed hearing of a suo-motu case regarding the death of children in Thar.

Similar efforts have been made in the past too but have floundered mainly due to a lack of governmental concern. We have been told once again that at least 70 posts are lying vacant in hospitals in Thar and Mitti for the past four years. A commission set up with participation by the provincial government in 2016 had stated that not only would food water and medicines be provided in Thar but the package offered to doctors posted there would also be raised to between Rs 150,000 and Rs 250,000 in order to persuade them to take up jobs in an area many shy away from. However, it appears little has happened on this count. The court this time round has also directed the State Bank of Pakistan to provide agriculture loans to the residents of Thar, and sought a report from the Sindh law officer on the posting of paramedical staff in the area within a week.

Experts have pointed out that the problems of Thar are rooted also in the failure to develop infrastructure to offer piped water, upgrade hospitals and look into issues concerning malnutrition of mothers, a factor which frequently contributes to the death of infants. It is obvious a comprehensive plan needs to be developed. Certainly there has been no demonstration of any capability or commitment during the many years through which children have continued to die in understaffed and under-equipped hospital wards.

Trade

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Trade deficit shrinks to \$11.8bn

Mubarak Zeb Khan

ISLAMABAD: The country's trade deficit during July-October shrank by 1.97 per cent year-on-year to \$11.786 billion from \$12.02bn, according to latest data released by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Friday.

During the period between July-October, exports jumped up by 3.52pc at \$7.28bn with imports moving up by a meagre 0.06pc reaching \$19.071bn from \$19.06bn same period last year.

Pakistan's economy has been under immense pressure from the declining reserves and dented exports; the PTI government has introduced a range of reforms to curb imports and push up exports but efforts have not brought about the desired results.

Finance Minister Asad Umar has stressed the need to enhance exports to overcome debt or risk more loans from International Monetary Fund.

However, these efforts have not translated into exports, which after peaking in March at \$2.31bn, have been on the declining trend during the last eight months, falling to their lowest in September at \$1.78bn after a slight growth in August.

The lukewarm growth in exports was also visible during October on yearly basis after it clocked in at \$1.9bn up only by a meagre 1.17pc from the same period last year.

The tepid growth in exports comes despite the Rs32bn cash support during the last 18 months to the textile and clothing exporters under a Special Prime Minister Package.

There are also reports that China has agreed to provide deeper market access for Pakistani goods worth \$1bn in the current fiscal year but it was not clear when those measures will be taken to boost exports to China under the free trade agreement.

It is, however, pertinent to mention the declining trend in imports. Imports have flattened during the last four months – including October – with a meagre increment of 0.06pc. Y-o-y imports during the outgoing month saw a reversal of 1pc falling to \$4.84bn from \$4.9bn last year. The decline in imports can be attributed to the dip in machinery related imports which fell to their lowest in two years at \$505m in August. These imports emanated from the ongoing infrastructure and energy related projects under the umbrella of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Exports and remittances are key contributors to country's foreign exchange reserves. State Bank's foreign exchange reserves have already fallen to their four and a half year lows to \$7.67bn. The declining reserves — enough to cover just one month imports — are at the heart of economic challenges troubling the incumbent government.

Pakistan's external sector has staged a recovery during the ongoing fiscal year evident in the 13pc jump in inward remittances coupled with the flattening trade deficit and imports.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Express Tribune

November 10, 2018

Jul-Oct FY19: Trade gap narrows to \$11.8b as imports stay static

By Shahbaz Rana

ISLAMABAD: The trade deficit marginally contracted to \$11.8 billion in first four months of the current fiscal year on the back of almost flat growth in imports for the fourth consecutive month while the pace of increase in exports remained modest despite numerous rounds of currency depreciation.

The \$11.8-billion deficit, recorded in July-October FY19, was nearly 2% or \$237 million lesser than the same period of last fiscal year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

Exports in the July-October period increased 3.52% to \$7.3 billion. In absolute terms, the export receipts rose \$248 million, but the pace of increase was slower than the preceding year.

The value of imported goods stood at \$19.1 billion, which was only 0.6% or \$11 million higher than the import bill in the corresponding period of previous fiscal year.

Exports of goods were 261% less than the value of imports. Imports of the country have started to ease due to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)'s numerous policy and administrative measures. Additionally, the federal government has imposed heavy regulatory duties on imported goods. Over the past 10 months, the SBP has let the rupee depreciate by 26.6% to Rs133.7 against the US dollar in a bid to curtail the current account deficit which is presently Pakistan's biggest challenge.

Owing to the slowdown in imports, the current account deficit narrowed to \$3.7 billion in first quarter (July-September) of the current fiscal year.

However, despite a steep fall in the value of the currency, Pakistani exporters are unable to take full advantage of the situation because of their failure to diversify shipments. The government voices hope that exports will bounce back and register average growth of 18% compared to the last year's level.

China has offered a \$1-billion duty-free facility to Pakistan for enhancing its exports. As compared to over \$15 billion worth of imports, Pakistan exports only \$1.2 billion worth of goods to China, which is not commensurate with the potential. Bilateral trade is regulated under the 2006 Free Trade Agreement.

Pakistan does not have exportable surplus and there is a high probability that the country will avail itself of the \$1-billion facility by exporting additional quantity of rice and some other agriculture produce.

Monthly data

PBS data showed that Pakistan's exports grew only 1.1% to \$1.9 billion in October 2018 over the same month of previous year. Monthly export receipts have been hovering around \$2 billion for the past few years despite getting subsidies and taking benefit of currency depreciation. In absolute terms, the export receipts rose only \$49 million to \$1.9 billion. Imports marginally contracted to \$4.84 billion in October 2018. The import bill was \$49 million less than the same month of last year.

Consequently, the trade deficit contracted 2.4% to nearly \$3 billion in October over the same month of previous year. In absolute terms, the deficit narrowed by \$71 million.

Month-on-month results

On a month-on-month basis, exports in October 2018 increased 10.2% over September mainly because of a lower base effect. In absolute terms, export receipts increased \$175 million.

Imports also grew more than 9% to \$4.84 billion. There was an increase of \$411 million in the import bill in October alone.

Resultantly, the month-on-month trade deficit widened 8.7% or \$236 million in October over September, according to the PBS.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 10th, 2018.

Water Resources

Daily Times

November 10, 2018

Water scarcity in Pakistan — A bigger threat than terrorism

A UNDP report says that Pakistani authorities are negligent about an impending water crisis that is posing a serious threat to the country's stability. Experts say the South Asian country is likely to dry up by 2025.

The major threat that Pakistan faces today is not Islamist terrorism but water scarcity. While the former makes headlines all over the world, the latter is an issue that is hardly discussed in the national and international media or by policymakers. But a recent UNDP draft report on the water crisis in Pakistan sheds light on a serious, albeit much-neglected, conflict the South Asian country is grappling with.

While discussing the UNDP report "Development Advocate Pakistan," Shamsul Mulk, former chairman of the Water and Power Development Authority, said that water policy is simply non-existent in Pakistan. Policymakers act like "absentee landlords" of water, he added.

"Because of this absentee landlordism, water has become the property of the landlords and the poor are deprived of their share," Mulk said.

The draft report on water resources was prepared at the request of the ministry of water and power. Mulk said, however, the cabinet ministers never reviewed it.

Last year, the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) warned that the country may run dry by 2025 if the authorities didn't take immediate action. It said the majority-Muslim country touched the "water stress line" in 1990 and crossed the "water scarcity line" in 2005.

If this situation persists, Pakistan is likely to face an acute water shortage or a drought-like situation in the near future, predicted the PCRWR, which is affiliated with the South Asian country's Ministry of Science and Technology.

Expert Irfan Choudhry says the authorities lack the political will to tackle the problem.

“There are no proper water storage facilities in the country. Pakistan hasn't built new dams since the 1960s. What we see is political bickering over the issue. The authorities need to act now. We can store water for only 30 days, and it is worrisome,” Choudhry told DW.

Climate change and poor management

Pakistan has the world's fourth highest rate of water use. Its water intensity rate – the amount of water, in cubic meters, used per unit of GDP – is the world's highest. This suggests that no country's economy is more water-intensive than Pakistan's.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pakistan is already the third most water-stressed country in the world. Its per capita annual water availability is 1,017 cubic meters – perilously close to the scarcity threshold of 1,000 cubic meters. Back in 2009, Pakistan's water availability was about 1,500 cubic meters.

The bulk of Pakistan's farmland is irrigated through a canal system, but the IMF says in a report canal water is vastly underpriced, recovering only one-quarter of annual operating and maintenance costs. Meanwhile, agriculture, which consumes almost all annual available surface water, is largely untaxed.

Experts say that population growth and urbanization are the main reasons behind the crisis. The issue has also been exacerbated by climate change, poor water management, and a lack of political will to deal with the crisis.

“Pakistan is approaching the scarcity threshold for water. What is even more disturbing is that groundwater supplies – the last resort of water supply – are being rapidly depleted. And worst of all is that the authorities have given no indication that they plan to do anything about any of this,” Michael Kugelman, South Asia expert at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson Center, told DW in an interview.

Blaming India

Yet, Pakistan blames India for its water crisis. The country's authorities say that New Delhi is not fulfilling its responsibilities under the Indus Waters Treaty – brokered by the World Bank in 1960 – as they voice concerns over India's construction of new dams.

Recently, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took up the dams issue with the World Bank. Sharif urged the Bank to play a “lead role” in resolving the water disputes between Pakistan and India by establishing a Court of Arbitration. But the international community, as well as the UNDP, holds Pakistan responsible for the dispute.

Kugelman says that the Pakistani authorities need to step up efforts to overcome the crisis, which is partly man-made. “First of all, Pakistan's leaders and stakeholders need to take ownership of this challenge and declare their intention to tackle it. Simply blaming previous governments, or blaming India, for the crisis won't solve anything. Next, the government needs to institute a major paradigm shift that promotes more judicious use of water,” Kugelman emphasized.

Ashfaq Ahmed Sheikh, director of the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources, told DW that the authorities had already introduced several schemes in the cities of Sheikhpura and Sargodha and saved up to 50 percent of water used in the rice fields, without compromising on production. He called on the government to initiate more such projects all over the country.

Fueling tensions

The scarcity of water is also triggering security conflicts in the country. Experts say the economic impact of the water crisis is immense, and the people are fighting for resources. Three out of four Pakistani provinces blame the most populous and politically empowered province, Punjab, for usurping their water sources.

“The government is ignoring the interests of our province,” Ayaz Lateef Palejo, a nationalist leader from the southern Sindh province, told DW. “There is massive corruption in the water sector, and we are unhappy with the situation,” he added.

Kugelman also believes that the economic implications of the conflict are creating rifts among the population, which are likely to aggravate the security situation in the country.

“The political implications of the crisis have yet to be determined, but we can expect that if nothing is done and the situation gets worse, pressure on the political leadership will intensify. In the years ahead, this could lead to unrest-and, if things get sufficiently out of hand, perhaps even a military takeover. None of this can be ruled out. Such is the seriousness of the situation,” said Kugelman.

“Some may say that loose nukes and Islamist militant takeovers are the big fear for Pakistan. For me, the nightmare is water scarcity, because in Pakistan it is very real and already upon us,” the expert added.

Additional reporting by Sattar Khan, DW’s correspondent in Islamabad.

Published in Daily Times, November 10th 2018.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka Political Development

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Sirisena dissolves Sri Lanka Parliament, polls on Jan. 5

Meera Srinivasan

Move comes hours after UPFA-led front admitted to being short of majority

Evading a resolution to Sri Lanka's political crisis through Parliament, President Maithripala Sirisena late on Friday dissolved the House. The move came just hours after his political front admitted to lacking the majority needed for its controversially-installed Prime Minister to be declared legitimate.

Mr. Sirisena signed an official notification dismissing the 225-member assembly with effect from midnight, clearing the way for a snap election nearly two years ahead of schedule, AFP reported.

Political crisis

The development comes a fortnight after Sri Lanka plunged into a political crisis that many hoped would be addressed through a floor test in Parliament. However, days before the Parliament — earlier suspended — was scheduled to reconvene, Mr. Sirisena announced its dissolution.

Since October 26, Sri Lanka has been facing an unprecedented power struggle with two rival prime ministers claiming legitimacy.

Embroiled in a conflict with his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, with whom he joined hands to form government in 2015, Mr. Sirisena sacked him abruptly, and instead appointed former President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Trust vote sought

The move drew considerable domestic and international criticism for its apparent defiance of the Constitution. Deposed Prime Minister Wickremesinghe refused to accept the decision and sought a vote in the House to test their competing claims to majority.

Shortly after, Mr. Sirisena prorogued Parliament for about a fortnight, possibly to muster strength, but as of Friday, the Sirisena-Rajapaksa group had 104 MPs, nine short of the 113-mark required to prove majority in the 225-member House.

Depending on defectors

Addressing a press conference earlier in the day at the Prime Minister's office, spokesman for the Sirisena-Rajapaksa front, Keheliya Rambukwella, said, "We have about 105 now," eight lawmakers short of the 113-mark needed to prove majority. Mr. Rambukwella's remark, the first public admission of the "new government" of lacking majority, came days after President Sirisena told a party rally "we have the majority". Asked how they hoped to command confidence, when all the members currently in their United People's Freedom Alliance-led front had already been counted, Mr. Rambukwella said they were "relying on cross-overs", which were "very common".

Daily News, Colombo, November 10, 2018

PARLIAMENT DISSOLVED

Dhanushka Godakumbura

President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday night dissolved Eighth Parliament paving the way for a snap general election under the powers vested in him by the Constitution.

The relevant Extraordinary Gazette notification signed by the President was released by the Government Press.

According to the Gazette Notification, the election to elect members to the ninth parliament will be held on January 5, 2019 and the new parliament is scheduled to meet on January 17, 2019.

The nomination period beginning from November 19, 2018 will end at 12 noon of November 26, 2018 as per the Gazette.

The General Election to elect members to the Eighth parliament was held on August 17, 2015 and the first session of the parliament was inaugurated September 1 of the same year.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan Peace Talks

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Taliban attend Moscow meeting, refuse to negotiate with Kabul

Agencies

MOSCOW: A Taliban delegation on Friday attended an international diplomatic conference in Russia for the first time, in a move that underscored Moscow's keenness to play a role in the Afghan peace process, but the Kabul government sent no official representative.

Instead, members of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, a body which oversees peace efforts but does not represent the government, attended the event, where they repeated President Ashraf Ghani's offer of peace talks without preconditions.

Western officials and Mr Ghani's government view the Moscow meeting with some suspicion, seeing it as an attempt by Russia to push its way into a process that they say must be led by Afghanistan.

"We discussed the subject of direct talks with the Taliban and asked them to choose the place and the starting time," said Ehsan Tahiri, High Peace Council spokesman, according to Russia's RIA news agency.

No such agreement has been reached so far, he added.

The Taliban delegation reiterated its demand for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan where they support the Kabul government.

RIA quoted Muhammad Sohail Shaheen, spokesman for the Taliban's political office, as saying that before starting talks with the Kabul government, "the issue of the presence of external forces" needed to be addressed.

The head of the Taliban delegation, Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, said they were not ready for direct talks with the Kabul government and would negotiate with the United States instead, according to the Interfax news agency.

The meeting took place as US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad prepared for a fresh round of talks with Taliban officials in Qatar.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that "we reaffirm our position on the lack of alternative to a political settlement in Afghanistan and the need for active coordinated efforts by Afghanistan's neighbouring countries and regional partners".

As well as the five-member Taliban delegation, Russia brought to the meeting several senior Afghan political figures, including some who have clashed with Mr Ghani in the past.

The Taliban issued a statement this week saying the conference was "not about negotiating with any particular side". It said the meeting was "about holding comprehensive discussions on finding a peaceful solution to the Afghan quandary and ending the American occupation".

Pakistani team

The Pakistani delegation to the conference was led by Additional Secretary (Afghanistan and West Asia) Mohammad Aejaz, said a statement issued by the Foreign Office in Islamabad.

Senior officials from China, Iran and Central Asian Republics also participated in the meeting. It was the first meeting of the Moscow Format, which was initiated in late 2016 and whose membership has increased to 11 countries.

At the meeting, the Pakistani delegation highlighted Pakistan's positive approach and consistent efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan through initiatives acceptable to the entire Afghan nation.

The delegation noted that the phrase "Afghan-owned, Afghan-led" peace process, coined by Pakistan several years ago, had now been adopted as an international guiding principle in charting the way to achieving peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani officials pointed out that the stakeholders had a shared responsibility to help create favourable conditions for a result-oriented peace process as there was no military solution to the Afghan issue. Only a political settlement, fully cognisant of the hard socio-cultural, political and economic realities of Afghanistan, could restore peace in the country.

All the delegations at the talks thanked the Russian government for its initiative and the hospitality extended to them.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

Dawn

November 10, 2018

Khalilzad returns to region to jump-start Afghan peace talks

Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: The United States is once again sending its special representative, Zalmay Khalilzad, to Pakistan and Afghanistan to advance the goal of an intra-Afghan dialogue, the State Department announced on Friday.

Mr Khalilzad, who will also visit the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, is coming with an inter-agency delegation on his third trip to the region in less than two months.

He will stay in the region from Nov 8 to 20 and will meet Afghan government officials and other interested parties to "advance the goal of an intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations that include the Taliban and lead to a sustainable peace," the State Department said.

The statement, issued by the office of the State Department's spokesperson, notes that "a sustainable peace requires that all Afghans have a say in their country's future."

On his last trip to the region in October, Ambassador Khalilzad called on the Afghan government and the Taliban to organise authoritative negotiating teams, and "has been encouraged to see that both parties are taking steps in that direction," the statement added.

The State Department said that the United States "remains committed to a political settlement that results in an end to the war and to the terrorist threat posed to the United States and the world."

The statement reminded other regional actors that "a peaceful Afghanistan can play a catalytic role in regional trade and development."

The United States announced on Wednesday that it's sending an observer to an Afghan peace conference that began in Moscow on Friday but it will send a high-level delegation to another Afghan conference in Geneva later this month.

Washington is sending Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells to Geneva to prepare for this ministerial conference on Afghanistan, on Nov 27 and 28.

The US hopes that 60 nations will attend this conference to express their support for Washington's efforts to jump start the Afghan peace process.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2018

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Not in direct talks with Taliban: MEA

Suhasini Haidar

No compulsion to participate, says Ministry after its turnaround raises queries

Facing a barrage of questions on its sudden shift in policy on attending talks with the Taliban, the Centre on Friday clarified that its delegation at the second 12-nation ‘Moscow format meeting of consultations on Afghanistan’ would not hold direct talks with the insurgent group there.

“We have said we will be taking part in a meeting on Afghanistan which is hosted by Russia; and we decided that our participation in the talks would be at the non-official level,” the MEA’s official spokesperson Raveesh Kumar told reporters. “But we didn’t say anywhere that there will be talks with the Taliban.”

‘Consistent with policy’

The government said its policy on Afghanistan was “consistent”, despite its decision to send two former diplomats, Amar Sinha and TCA Raghavan, to the talks. It would mark the first time an Indian delegation would be at the table with a Taliban delegation from its political office in Doha.

India had refused to recognise the Taliban government in Afghanistan (1996-2001) and had opposed talks with the Taliban at least until a few years ago, insisting thus far on an “Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and controlled” process.

The Congress sought to know why India had sent representatives to the talks when they weren’t being led by the Ghani government.

Asked for the rationale behind the turnaround, the MEA spokesperson denied that the decision had been taken under pressure from either Moscow or Kabul. “There was no compulsion here. Whatever we think will take the process forward, consistent with our policy, we will participate in. And we made it very clear that our participation at the meeting will be at the non-official level,” Mr. Kumar said.

The Indian Express, New Delhi, November 10, 2018

Taliban at talks table, Russia says no games, India representatives only listen

Sources privy to the discussions Friday told *The Indian Express* that the Indian representatives did not make any statement on behalf of New Delhi at the meeting.

Written by Shubhajit Roy | New Delhi

As government-nominated former Indian diplomats shared a table Friday with the Taliban for the first time at a multilateral meeting on Afghanistan, New Delhi said it was not going to talk to Taliban, and its presence at the Moscow format was not out of any “compulsion”. This was the first time since the IC-814 hijack in 1999 that Indian government representatives publicly engaged with the Taliban.

In Moscow, host Russia said no one should play “geopolitical games” in Afghanistan and participation of Taliban and Afghan High Peace Council representatives was aimed at creating conditions for direct talks.

Sources privy to the discussions Friday told *The Indian Express* that the Indian representatives — former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan Amar Sinha and former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan T C A Raghavan — did not make any statement on behalf of New Delhi at the meeting.

“There were no statements by the Indian representatives, nor was there any document signed. It was an ice-breaking meeting,” the source said.

In opening remarks, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, “No one should think in terms of geopolitical games that may result in another transformation of Afghanistan into a field for competition between external players with drastic consequences both for the Afghans and their neighbours.”

He said the issues Afghanistan has been facing can be resolved only through political means. “That said, we welcome the delegations of the Afghan High Peace Council and the Taliban movement,” Lavrov said. “Their participation in today’s event is intended to make an important contribution to efforts to create conditions for direct talks between the government, the Taliban movement, public and political circles.”

“We are determined to make every possible effort to facilitate the opening of a new page in the history of Afghanistan,” Lavrov was quoted saying by the state-run Tass news agency.

Lavrov said the conference was “aimed at building an inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue in order to advance the national reconciliation process.”

“Russia supports the preservation of a united and indivisible Afghanistan in which all ethnic groups populating the country could live peacefully and happily. I have no doubts that the other participants of the Moscow format share this approach and that we all go by basic national interests of the Afghan people,” he said before the talks continued behind closed doors.

In New Delhi, the Ministry of External Affairs’ official spokesperson Raveesh Kumar, in response to suggestions that India was talking to Taliban, said: “Where did we say that there will be talks with Taliban? We did not say that India will talk to Taliban.”

He also rejected suggestions that India had attended out of compulsion. “There was no compulsion for us to attend the meeting. We took a considered decision to attend the meeting at a non-official level,” he said.

He reiterated India’s position that it will support an “Afghan-led” reconciliation process. “India supports all efforts at peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan that will preserve unity and plurality, and bring security, stability and prosperity to the country. India’s consistent policy has been that such efforts should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled, and with the participation of the government of Afghanistan.”

While a five-member Taliban delegation led by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanakzai, head of the Taliban’s political council in Qatar, attended the meeting, Sinha and Raghavan sat at the table. Both Sinha and Raghavan, who are associated with government-funded think tanks, have expertise and experience in dealing with the region. Sinha is a fellow with the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (a think-tank funded by MEA), and Raghavan is the director general of the Indian Council of World Affairs (another MEA-funded think-tank). Raghavan has also served as Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran) in the Ministry of External Affairs in the past.

“Our participation was decided only after consultations with the main actor in the process, the Afghan government. Since the Afghan Foreign Ministry did not attend and instead sent Afghan High Peace Council representatives, we decided to send people outside the Indian government,” a source told The Indian Express.

The Afghan High Peace Council is a government-appointed body tasked to talk to Taliban on the reconciliation process.

Apart from India, the Moscow meeting Friday was attended by representatives from the US, Pakistan, China, Iran and some Central Asian countries.

Outlook, Kabul, November 10, 2018

Multinational Meeting on Afghan Peace Process Begins in Moscow

KABUL - The Moscow meeting on Afghan peace process kicks off on Friday with delegations from High Peace Council (HPC), the Taliban and 12 countries in attendance.

Earlier, the HPC delegation has left Kabul for Russia to participate in the peace summit.

Sayed Ihsanullah Tahiri, the HPC spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News the four-member group of the HPC would participate in peace talks Russia is hosting in Moscow.

He said the HPC delegation has been leading by Haji Din Mohammad accompanied by Habiba Surabi, Abdul Khabir Ochoqon, and Maulvi Attaurahman Saleem.

Sayed Ihsan Tahiri added the HPC delegation would participate on behalf of the Afghan government and people in the summit.

He further added the Moscow summit's agenda would be the Afghan peace process and providing the facility for peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

The Taliban have officially confirmed they would attend the multilateral meeting in Moscow on Friday, but a spokesman for the insurgent group clarified Tuesday its delegates will not engage in any Afghan peace and reconciliation talks at the Moscow gathering.

Zabihullah Mujahid said a high-ranking delegation from the Taliban's Qatar-based office will travel to the Russian capital to "partake" in the Friday meeting.

The Taliban have officially confirmed they would attend the multilateral meeting in Moscow on Friday, but a spokesman for the insurgent group clarified Tuesday its delegates will not engage in any Afghan peace and reconciliation talks at the Moscow gathering.

Zabihullah Mujahid said a high-ranking delegation from the Taliban's Qatar-based office will travel to the Russian capital to "partake" in the Friday meeting.

He said the Taliban delegation included Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, Mualvi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Mualvi Shahbuddin Delawar, Mualvi Zia-ul-Rahman Madani and Mohammad Sohail Shahin.

In addition, representatives from 12 countries including representatives from Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan arrived for the talks, officials said.

The US foreign ministry said that an official from the US Embassy in Russia would take part in the huddle.

The summit was said to be held in September 4th but it was delayed based on the Afghanistan government's request.(Pajhwok)

Outlook, Kabul, November 10, 2018

U.S. Peace Envoy to Visit Afghanistan, Qatar, Pakistan, UAE

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. special envoy for peace in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, will visit Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar from Nov. 8 to 20 to push for peace negotiations with the Afghan Taliban, the State Department said on Thursday.

Khalilzad met Taliban leaders in Qatar last month as part of efforts to find a way to end the 17-year-long war in Afghanistan, according to the Islamist group that was ousted from power by U.S.-led forces in 2001.

"On his last trip to the region in October, Special Representative Khalilzad called on the Afghan Government and the Taliban to organise authoritative negotiating teams, and has been encouraged to see that both parties are taking steps in that direction," the State Department said in a statement.

"The United States remains committed to a political settlement that results in an end to the war and to the terrorist threat posed to the United States and the world."

The Taliban are fighting the U.S.-backed Kabul government to re-impose strict Islamic law and have stepped up attacks in strategic provinces.

A senior Taliban official said after last month's talks that Khalilzad had asked the Taliban leadership, based in the Qatari capital Doha, to declare a ceasefire in Afghanistan for six months. In exchange, the Taliban want the Afghan government to release fighters from jails and the swift removal of foreign forces fighting alongside Afghan troops.

A statement by the U.S. embassy in Kabul about Khalilzad's diplomatic tour in October did not confirm his meeting with the Taliban. (Reuters)

Outlook, Kabul, November 10, 2018

Afghan Peace Process: Gaining Success Gradually

The Moscow meeting on Afghan peace process was kicked off on Friday with delegations from High Peace Council (HPC), the Taliban and 12 countries in attendance. The Moscow summit's agenda is the Afghan peace process and providing the facility for peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Afghanistan conflict has been in stalemate for several decades. And Afghan war on terror is one of the longest US wars too. However, the Taliban has demonstrated a surprising ability to survive and conduct high-profile attacks in cities like Kabul, it is weaker today than most recognize. It is hamstrung by an ideology that is too extreme for most Afghans, a leadership structure that is too closely linked to the Pashtun ethnic group, an over-reliance on brutal tactics that have killed tens of thousands of innocent Afghan civilians and alienated many more, a widespread involvement in corruption, and a dependence on unpopular foreign allies. Most senior Taliban leaders still hope that they will one day be able to re-take Kabul, overthrow the Afghan government, and establish an extreme Islamic emirate in the country. But given the group's weaknesses and the United States' decision to keep troops in Afghanistan that is unlikely.

On the other hand, president Ghani has offered the Taliban a political framework for peace talks. According to the Afghan government's political framework for talks there are no preconditions to negotiations while underscoring that the rights of all citizens, especially Afghan women, must be safeguarded. This framework produces a ceasefire, the Taliban's registration as a political party, and participation in an electoral process. The legal framework for peace that include a constitutional review through legal mechanisms as well as legal processes for prisoner releases and sanctions release. This framework suggests methods for reaching peace, such as official recognition of the Afghan government, respect for rule of law, further efforts for government reform and balanced development, the return of Afghan refugees, programs for social development including for refugees and former insurgents, and security measures for all citizens, particularly the reconciling Taliban, underscoring the need for a dignified process, and very important elements such an office for the Taliban, a path towards travel documents, being allowed to travel freely, help in the removal of sanctions, access to the media, and repatriation for their families.

As the the United States, conditions-based South Asia Strategy ensures the Taliban cannot win on the battlefield, both Taliban and Afghan government and its allies have no options but to negotiate to put an end to the conflict. what remains uncertain at this point, however, are the answers to two overarching questions: How will key regional stakeholders—Pakistan, Russia, Iran, China, and India—manage shifting interests and threat perceptions at a time when the United States is pushing for a peace deal, and is there a contingency plan if talks fail? While pushing for a comprehensive political settlement, complexities associated with internal political dynamics and regional posturing add to the levels of fluidity and uncertainty. It is, therefore, imperative to have contingency plans in case talks are delayed or thwarted. A Plan B would be

the least all parties could do in order to prevent a further debacle.

Bringing both sides of the Afghan conflict to Moscow is still a major success for Russia as the Kremlin seeks to reclaim its clout and influence on the world stage. However, the key to the latest Afghan peace process successes lays in the nature of the Afghan government pragmatic peace policies. It has proven abilities and charm to win over all the factions and major players; it has practiced the art of compromise; it should innovate its diplomacy in ways ensuring the protection of the basic rights of all ethnic groups of Afghanistan and ensure all of the ethnic groups that inhabit this country live side by side peacefully and happily.

Terrorism

The News

November 10, 2018

Taliban kill eight Afghan security personnel in Farah city

APP

KABUL: At least eight Afghan security personnel were killed as the Taliban stormed multiple check posts in the Farah province bordering Iran, an official confirmed on Friday. The attack came a week after the Taliban claimed to down a military chopper in the province bordering Iran.

Kher Mohammad, a member of the provincial assembly told Anadolu Agency that the rebels staged coordinated assaults on three check posts in Farah city, the provincial capital, late Thursday. He confirmed that the militants killed eight security personnel and besieged the city. Taliban spokesperson Qari Yosuf Ahmadi claimed responsibility for the deadly assaults. On October 31, a military helicopter crashed in western Afghanistan near the border with Iran, killing at least 25 officers and officials on board, with authorities blaming bad weather while the Taliban also claimed responsibility.

Taliban claimed they have the bodies of 25 people -- including Gen. Nematullah Khalil, deputy Commander of the Afghan National Army's 207-Zafar Corps, and Farid Bakhtawar, Chairman of the Provincial Assembly.

In exchange, they have demanded the body of their fellow militant who was killed in crossfire after killing the chiefs of police and intelligence last month. Afghan officials in Farah are blaming Iran for supporting the militants, an allegation rejected by the Tehran administration.