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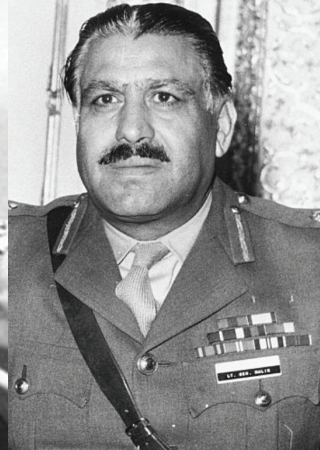
September 2021



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Pakistan expects Taliban will fulfil promises on women and human rights: Army chief

Pakistan expects that the Taliban will fulfil promises made to the global community regarding women and human rights and will not allow Afghan land to be used against any other country, Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa said on Friday. He made the comments during a wide-ranging speech at the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Kakul where he was the chief guest for the Flag Presentation Parade. Gen Bajwa said that Pakistan wanted peace in the country and the region and this desire was shown by its "sincere efforts" to support an Afghan-led process to resolve the decades-long conflict in the neighbouring country. "We have unambiguously and repeatedly asked [the] global community to play its



part in an inclusive and unbiased Afghan process as well as economic sustenance of Afghanistan," he stressed. Despite paying a "huge price" for the instability in Afghanistan and its own economic challenges, Pakistan had been hosting over three million Afghan refugees for the last four decades, he pointed out. The chief of army staff reiterated that Pakistan would continue to play its role for peace and stability in Afghanistan, which he said was "direly needed" for the entire region but especially for Afghans themselves.

"We expect that Taliban will fulfil promises [made to the] global community [regarding] women and human rights and Afghan territo-

ry won't be used against any other country," he said. Gen Bajwa also talked about the Kashmir issue, saying the people in Indian-occupied Kashmir (IoK) were under the "worst military occupation in human history". He said the hearts of Pakistanis beat with their brethren in Kashmir and they would continue to stand with the people of the occupied valley "always and ever". "Regional peace will remain elusive without a just and peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue," he said. 'Forces trying to weaken society through hybrid war' The army chief said people of the subcontinent must not forget that the ultimate goal in the struggle against imperialism was to "secure [an] independent, harmonious and prosperous region wherein all [newly] created countries could live peacefully". However, those goals had become "hostage to increasing polarisation and radicalisation in our neighbourhood", he stated, warning that inimical forces were "trying to weaken the society and state through hybrid war". Gen Bajwa said the Pakistan Army was "fully cognisant" of the challenges and was prepared to tackle them. "We will ensure the country's defence by focusing on core competencies and technology." Addressing the cadets at the ceremony, he reminded them that "only strong armed forces can guarantee the defence of the motherland." He advised them to focus on their training and gain knowledge about the latest technologies. "Pakistan Army is proud of its young officers who continue to lead their men from the front with courage and devotion to defend the freedom of the motherland," he added. During the ceremony, the COAS also awarded the Battalion Standard to 4th Pakistan Battalion which was raised on October 10, 2016.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1641660>

Future of Kashmir

By: A.G. Noorani

KASHMIR's future lies in the hands of its own people. The world outside can and must help them but it can only help so much and not more. The militancy which erupted in 1988 served only to revive an issue which was dormant in the eyes of some. It exacted a heavy toll on lives in the area. The All Parties' Hurriyat Conference which was formed in its wake has been an utter failure. Its leaders have only proved themselves to be a selfish and self-centred lot. They failed to provide strong leadership or even a convincing strategy mainly because of internal bickering. That some prospered was no secret. The only strategy they could come up with was the strategy of hartals which imposed a heavy economic burden on the common people.

Two persons are mostly responsible for the decay and virtual collapse of the Hurriyat — Abdul Ghani Lone and Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Lone was a product of a political process, well aware of its realities of political warfare. Syed Ali Shah Geelani quoted religious texts and poets profusely without much understanding. What is revealing is his public claim — twice — to absolute leadership of the Kashmir movement. Almost all rushed to reject the claim.

Only one man has struggled hard to keep the flag flying — Mirwaiz Umar Farooq.

Only one man has struggled hard to keep the flag flying — the young Mirwaiz Umar Farooq who is under house arrest. The Unionists are represented by the National Conference, led by Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah. And the People's Democratic Party is led by Mehbooba Mufti. The

two-year old constitutional coup of Aug 5, 2019, has spared neither. Its aim was to destroy Kashmir as we have known it — the political entity and Kashmir's political class.

Three politicians of some note have been bought over and now operate as the king's men. In this lies the danger ahead. Towards the end of June 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened a meeting between the centre and pro-India Kashmiri leaders in New Delhi. The lively Srinagar weekly, Kashmiri Life, published in July what was virtually the minutes of that useless meeting. Most of the politicians apparently spoke with a forked tongue; one line at the meeting, another to the press outside. What reliance can the people of Kashmir place on such leaders of the old school, let alone the 'new' leaders whom New Delhi is grooming before our eyes? Predictably, the king's men accused the existing leadership of lying while giving that meeting a whole load of lies and false claims. One participant who came out in flying colours was the courageous Mohammed Yousuf Tarigami of the Communist Party of India (Marxist.)

It's no gain for the Kashmiris that Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah reaffirmed their pledge to restore Kashmir's status as it was before the Aug 5 action. What will be its worth now if it could be snatched away so easily? The issue is the restoration of Article 370 of the Indian constitution.

Read: In Indian-occupied Kashmir, security forces crush dissent with intimidation

The member who completely prevented debate saying the matter was sub judice was talking through his tilted and frayed cap. The sub judice rule cannot, does not prevent debate on a matter of public concern as the European Court on Human Rights held in the

thalidomide case decades ago. Outlook India's Kashmiri correspondent Naseer Ganai has reported that some days before the second anniversary of the Aug 5, 2019, abrogation of Article 370, by New Delhi, the Kashmiri poet and actor Bashir Ahmad Dada had talked about "living in fear". He said, "It's not just the government that is responsible for the Kashmiri's fear-ridden existence. We, the people, are also spreading fear." Ganai quoted Bashir Dada as describing how "his friends asked him to delete a Facebook post critical of the government". The poet said: "They thought the police would arrest me otherwise. This is what has changed in the past two years. Poets have given up poetry, columns by independent writers have disappeared from local newspapers and everyone is afraid of talking."

Meanwhile, Ifra Jan, the spokesperson of the National Conference, said that the government says people are not angry, "but how do you quantify anger?" She asked, "Are people happy in non-democratic countries where nobody protests? In democracies, people show anger through public protest, which is a democratic right. Will the current dispensation allow anyone to ... say anything? A father who demanded his son's body was charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. If people were to protest on the streets, won't their lives be in danger? A government muzzling people's voices is not a sign of people being happy, it is a sign of the government being tyrannical."

It is very unfortunate that her description perfectly fits the state of Kashmir today. The writer is an author and lawyer based in Mumbai.

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After six months: Protection against Covid waning among vaccinated people, says study



LONDON: Protection against the coronavirus is waning among those who have received both shots of the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines, a new UK study has found, foreign media reported.

An analysis from the UK's ZOE Covid app study of over 400,000 people who had received both shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, showed that it was 88% effective in protecting against the coronavirus a month after receiving both shots. However, its effectiveness fell to 74% five or six months after receiving both doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

In the same study, an analysis of over 700,000 people who had received both doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine showed its effectiveness fell from 77% after a month to 67% at the four to five month mark.

The data was collected after May 26, when the delta variant became the dominant strain, said Tim Spector, who is running the ongoing ZOE Covid app study.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/883363-after-six-months>

WHY The West Craves Materialism & The East Sticks To Religion

By: Imran Khan - Prime Minister of Pakistan



My generation grew up at a time when colonial hang up was at its peak. Our older generation had been slaves and had a huge inferiority complex of the British. The school I went to was similar to all elite schools in Pakistan. Despite gaining independence, they were, and still are, producing replicas of public schoolboys rather than Pakistanis. I read Shakespeare, which was fine, but no Allama Iqbal - the national poet of Pakistan. The class on Islamic studies was not taken seriously, and when I left school I was considered among the elite of the country because I could speak English and wore Western clothes. Despite periodically shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad' in school functions, I considered my own culture backward and religion outdated. Among our group if any one talked about religion, prayed or kept a beard he was immediately branded a Mullah. Because of the power of the Western media, our heroes were Western movie stars or pop stars. When I went to Oxford already burdened with this hang up, things didn't get any easier. At Oxford, not just Islam, but all religions were considered anachronism. Science had replaced religion and if something couldn't be logically proved it did not exist. All supernatural stuff was confined to the movies. Philosophers like Darwin, who with his half-baked theory of evolution had supposedly disproved the creation of men and hence religion, were read and revered. Moreover, European history reflected its awful experience with religion. The horrors committed by the Christian clergy during the Inquisition era had left a powerful impact on the Western mind. To understand why the West is so keen on secularism, one should go to places like Cordoba in Spain and see the torture apparatus used during the Spanish Inquisition. Also the persecution of scientists as heretics by the clergy had convinced the Europeans that all religions are regressive.

However, the biggest factor that drove people like me away from religion was the selective Islam practiced by most of its preachers. In short, there was a huge difference between what they practiced and what they preached. Also, rather than explaining the philosophy behind the religion, there was an overemphasis on rituals. I feel that humans are different to animals. While, the latter can be drilled, humans need to be intellectually convinced. That is why the Qur'an constantly appeals to reason. The worst, of course, was the exploitation of Islam for political gains by various individuals or groups. Hence, it was a miracle I did not become an atheist. The only reason why I did not was the powerful religious influence my mother wielded on me since my childhood. It was not so much out of conviction but love for her that I stayed a Muslim. However, my Islam was selective. I accepted only parts of the religion that suited me. Prayers were restricted to Eid days and occasionally on Fridays, when my father insisted on taking me to the mosque with him. All in all I was smoothly moving to becoming a Pukka Brown Sahib. After all I had the right credentials in terms of school, university and, above all, acceptability in the English aristocracy, something that our brown sahibs would give their lives for. So what led me to do a 'lota' on the Brown Sahib culture and instead become a 'desi'? Well it did not just happen overnight. Firstly, the inferiority complex that my generation had inherited gradually went as I developed into a world-class athlete. Secondly, I was in the unique position of living between two cultures. I began to see the advantages and the disadvantages of both societies. In Western societies, institutions were strong while they were collapsing in our country. However, there was an area where we were and still are superior, and that is our family life. I began to realize that this was the West-

ern society's biggest loss. In trying to free itself from the oppression of the clergy, they had removed both God and religion from their lives. While science, no matter how much it progresses, can answer a lot of questions - two questions it will never be able to answer: One, what is the purpose of our existence and two, what happens to us when we die? It is this vacuum that I felt created the materialistic and the hedonistic culture. If this is the only life then one must make hay while the sun shines - and in order to do so one needs money. Such a culture is bound to cause psychological problems in a human being, as there was going to be an imbalance between the body and the soul. Consequently, in the US, which has shown the greatest materialistic progress while giving its citizens numerous rights, almost 60 percent of the population consult psychiatrists. Yet, amazingly in modern psychology, there is no study of the human soul. Sweden and Switzerland, who provide the most welfare to their citizens, also have the highest suicide rates. Hence, man is not necessarily content with material wellbeing and needs something more. Since all morality has its roots in religion, once religion was removed, immorality has progressively grown since the 70s. Its direct impact has been on family life. In the UK, the divorce rate is 60 percent, while it is estimated that there are over 35 percent single mothers. The crime rate is rising in almost all Western societies, but the most disturbing fact is the alarming increase in racism. While science always tries to prove the inequality of man (recent survey showing the American Black to be genetically less intelligent than whites) it is only religion that preaches the equality of man. Between 1991 and 1997, it was estimated that total immigration into Europe was around 520,000, and there were racially motivated attacks all over, especially in Britain, France and Germany. In Pakistan during the Afghan war, we had over four million refugees, and despite the people being so much poorer, there was no racial tension. There was a sequence of events

in the 80s that moved me toward God as the Qur'an says: 'There are signs for people of understanding. 'One of them was cricket. As I was a student of the game, the more I understood the game, the more I began to realize that what I considered to be chance was, in fact, the will of Allah. A pattern which became clearer with time. But it was not until Salman Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses' that my understanding of Islam began to develop. People like me who were living in the Western world bore the brunt of anti-Islam prejudice that followed the Muslim reaction to the book. We were left with two choices: fight or flight. Since I felt strongly that the attacks on Islam were unfair, I decided to fight. It was then I realized that I was not equipped to do so as my knowledge of Islam was inadequate. Hence I started my research and for me a period of my greatest enlightenment. I read scholars like Ali Shariati, Muhammad Asad, Iqbal, Gai Eaton, plus of course, a study of Qur'an. I will try to explain as concisely as is possible, what 'discovering the truth' meant for me. When the believers are addressed in the Qur'an, it always says, 'Those who believe and do good deeds.' In other words, a Muslim has dual function, one toward God and the other toward fellow human beings. The greatest impact of believing in God for me, meant that I lost all fear of human beings. The Qur'an liberates man from man when it says that life and death and respect and humiliation are God's jurisdiction, so we do not have to bow before other human beings. Moreover, since this is a transitory world where we prepare for the eternal one, I broke out of the self-imposed prisons, such as growing old (such a curse in the Western world, as a result of which, plastic surgeons are having a field day), materialism, ego, what people say and so on. It is important to note that one does not eliminate earthly desires. But instead of being controlled by them, one controls them. By following the second part of believing in Islam, I have become a better human being. Rather than being self-centered and living for the self, I feel that because the

Almighty gave so much to me, in turn I must use that blessing to help the less privileged. This I did by following the fundamentals of Islam rather than becoming a Kalashnikov-wielding fanatic. I have become a tolerant and a giving human being who feels compassion for the underprivileged. Instead of attributing success to myself, I know it is because of God's will, hence I learned humility instead of arrogance. Also, instead of the snobbish Brown Sahib attitude toward our masses, I believe in egalitarianism and strongly feel against the injustice done to the weak in our society. According to the Qur'an, 'Oppression is worse than killing.' In fact only now do I understand the true meaning of Islam, if you submit to the will of Allah, you have inner peace. Through my faith, I have discovered strength within me that I never knew existed and that has released my potential in life. I feel that in Pakistan we have selective Islam. Just believing in God and going through the rituals is not enough. One also has to be a good human being. I feel there are certain Western countries with far more Islamic traits than us in Pakistan, especially in the way they protect the rights of their citizens, or for that matter their justice system. In fact some of the finest individuals I know live there. What I dislike about them is their double standards in the way they protect the rights of their citizens but consider citizens of other countries as being somehow inferior to them as human being, e.g. dumping toxic waste in the Third World, advertising cigarettes that are not allowed in the West and selling drugs that are banned in the West.

One of the problems facing Pakistan is the polarization of two reactionary groups. On the one side is the Westernized group that looks upon Islam through Western eyes and has inadequate knowledge about the subject. It reacts strongly to anyone trying to impose Islam in society and wants only a selective part of the religion. On the other extreme is the group that reacts to this Westernized elite and in trying to become a defender of the faith, takes

up such intolerant and self-righteous attitudes that are repugnant to the spirit of Islam. What needs to be done is to somehow start a dialogue between the two extreme. In order for this to happen, the group on whom the greatest proportion of our educational resources is spent in this country must study Islam properly. Whether they become practicing Muslims or believe in God is entirely a personal choice. As the Qur'an tells us there is 'no compulsion in religion.' However, they must arm themselves with knowledge as a weapon to fight extremism. Just by turning up their noses at extremism the problem is not going to be solved. The Qur'an calls Muslims 'the middle nation', not of extremes. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was told to simply give the message and not worry whether people converted or not, therefore, there is no question in Islam of forcing your opinions on anyone else. Moreover, we are told to respect other religions, their places of worship and their prophets. It should be noted that no Muslim missionaries or armies ever went to Malaysia or Indonesia. The people converted to Islam due to the high principles and impeccable character of the Muslim traders. At the moment, the worst advertisements for Islam are the countries with their selective Islam, especially where religion is used to deprive people of their rights. In fact, a society that obeys fundamentals of Islam has to be a liberal one. If Pakistan's Westernized class starts to study Islam, not only will it be able to help society fight sectarianism and extremism, but it will also make them realize what a progressive religion Islam is. They will also be able to help the Western world by articulating Islamic concepts. Recently, Prince Charles accepted that the Western world can learn from Islam. But how can this happen if the group that is in the best position to project Islam gets its attitudes from the West and considers Islam backward? Islam is a universal religion and that is why our Prophet (peace be upon him) was called a Mercy for all mankind.

Tracking Naya Pakistan, Three Years into Power



Weeks before the general elections 2018, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan — now also the prime minister — unveiled his party's much-awaited manifesto that carried an elaborate plan to transform the country into “Naya Pakistan” — a term that doubled as his party's slogan through their successful campaign and beyond. After the PTI, with the help of its allies, formed the government in August 2018, Dawn.com launched the Naya Pakistan Tracker to chart the progress on PTI's promises on a yearly basis. With two years remaining in Prime Minister Imran's mandated five-year term, the progress on the commitments outlined in his party's manifesto present a mixed bag. Dawn.com's tracker has found that the PTI-led government has launched a number of projects and also set in place the instruments required for the fulfillment of some of its promises at the national, and in some cases, even provincial levels. However, progress on some promises is still stuck in its initial stages or has been marred with delays. Here Dawn.com highlights some of the important promises made by the PTI in its manifesto and where they currently stand.

Overseas Pakistanis

PM Imran, during his election campaign, had vowed to “ensure a greater stake for overseas Pakistanis”. Among a number of goals set to achieve this promise was ensuring voting rights for overseas Pakistanis and developing financial instruments that create attractive investment opportunities for them. Right to vote Just a month after the PTI came to power, overseas Pakistanis were given the opportunity to vote for the first time in Pakistan's electoral history. However, this was done by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and based on a Supreme Court order. The ruling party, meanwhile, has also been pushing for the use of Electronic Voting Machines

(EVMs). In July 2019, Prime Minister Imran directed the Election Commission of Pakistan to develop a “comprehensive programme” to give expatriates the right to vote. The premier and his government have reiterated their commitment to this promise on multiple occasions. On May 9 of this year, the government promulgated the Elections (Second Amendment) Ordinance 2021, thus, authorising and binding the ECP to give overseas Pakistanis their right to vote and to procure EVMs. This ordinance, however, is set to expire next month, with the government seeking an extension in its constitutional life. Meanwhile, on June 10 of 2021, the Elections (Amendment) Bill 2020 was passed by the National Assembly amid the opposition's outcry. It was then tabled in the upper house on Oct 16, where it has not been passed yet. PM Imran's party has emphasised the need to grant overseas Pakistanis the right to vote before next elections in 2023. Despite work done, the promise, however, is not yet complete, largely due to the hesitance of the opposition parties to include overseas Pakistan in the electoral rolls. We rated it as “partially complete”. Digital incentives for ‘biggest asset’ “They (overseas Pakistanis) are Pakistan's biggest asset [...],” said Prime Minister Imran on April 29 while launching two digital incentives for the expatriate community. In order to attract investment from overseas Pakistanis, the PTI has introduced a number of projects that focus specifically on this promise. On January 31, 2019, the premier launched the Pakistan Banao Certificate — a dollar-denominated diaspora bond aimed at attracting investment from overseas Pakistanis to help strengthen the national economy. In September of last year, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) launched the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) for non-resident Pakistanis to enable them to



of the progress towards creating the new province has been focused on setting up the South Punjab secretariat, described by the party as the first step towards establishing the new federating unit. Differences emerged over whether the

remotely open bank accounts in the country through online digital branches without physically visiting banks. By the end of July, the inflows through RDA had reached \$1.87 billion. Read: The RDA challenge In November 2020, the SBP launched a savings scheme — the Naya Pakistan Certificate — offering significantly higher interest rates compared to those prevailing in most of the developed and developing economies. Facilitating overseas Pakistanis, PM Imran's government also provided incentives such as tax exemptions and simplified biometric verification. Investments in property, tourism and the construction sector were also encouraged. This makes it one of only two promises that have been completed by the government. South Punjab One of the ruling party's promises before forming the government was to "spearhead the creation of a South Punjab province on administrative lines". Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, in October 2018, had said that "the dream would come true" during PTI's tenure. In 2018, the party started off on an active footing, setting up the Executive Council on Creation of South Punjab province and forming a committee to develop political consensus over the creation of the new province. First step towards South Punjab province Over the past three years, however, much

sub-secretariat would be set up in Bahawalpur or Multan, with PTI stalwart Jahangir Tareen admitting that there were divergent opinions within the party over the location. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi had announced that the prime minister would make the final decision on the location of the secretariat after meeting representatives from the areas. On June 30, 2020, the additional chief secretary (ACS) and additional inspector general (AIG) Punjab were formally appointed. The secretariat was to cover the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan and the civil servants would be split between Multan and Bahawalpur. Calling it a "major milestone" in the establishment of the South Punjab province, Qureshi, on Sept 1, 2020, announced the posting of high-level bureaucrats to South Punjab for a fully functional secretariat. On April 26, Prime Minister Imran laid the foundation stone of the secretariat in Multan, with Chief Minister Buzdar saying the foundation stone of the secretariat in Bahawalpur would also be laid in future. On June 7, the foreign minister requested Buzdar to ensure that officials were present at the South Punjab secretariat and to designate an institution to investigate their conduct. Building political consensus Apart from the establishment of secretariats, PM

Imran in April approved a plan for the development of South Punjab as a separate administrative zone. He also gave consent to amend the Punjab Civil Servants Act of 1974 and to carry out necessary legislation to dedicate 32 per cent job quota for South Punjab. In June, however, the Punjab Cabinet Committee on Legislative business deferred the proposal for the job quota. FM Qureshi has also called on PPP and PML-N politicians from South Punjab to help the government establish the new province and form political consensus in this regard. "You say you want a South Punjab province. If you truly want this, give us proof. Join the government, don't just make statements, step forward practically and assist us," he said in March 2020. Days earlier, the foreign minister had announced that a bill for the creation of the new province would be tabled in the National Assembly. With a lot of work yet to be done, this promise is still "in progress". Karachi "We want to make Karachi the urban jewel of Pakistan," the PTI stated in its manifesto, while announcing a number of steps towards transforming the metropolis.

Among the party's commitments was to improve the capacity of Karachi's mass transit system, develop a desalination plant, provide clean drinking water and a crackdown against the city's water mafia. During a visit to Karachi in March 2019, PM Imran announced a Rs162bn development project for the city. Of the 18 proposed projects, 10 were related to the development of the public transport network in Karachi and seven to the water and sewerage infrastructure. On Sept 5, 2020, the premier unveiled a Rs1.1 trillion package for Karachi's transformation. He visited the metropolis last week and reviewed progress on five of those projects, which are a part of the Karachi Transformation Plan. But despite all the rhetoric, the PTI government, which won a sizeable mandate from the port city, has yet to deliver on many of its promises that they championed before coming into power.

Providing water — blame game and delays
Prime Minister Imran had announced the

installation of a desalination plant for Karachi on his maiden visit to the city. However, the plant has yet to be set up. On Oct 21, 2019, the premier again urged the contracted firm to expedite work. The ruling party had also vowed to crackdown against the water mafia in the city. While there has been no progress on that commitment, the federal government is working on the Greater Karachi Water Supply Scheme (K-IV), which plans to supply 260 million gallons per day of water to Karachi in phase one. The K-IV project was originally being handled by the Sindh government. Under an arrangement with the provincial government, the federal government took up the implementation of the project as part of the prime minister's package for Karachi and directed the Water & Power Development Authority to take over the implementation responsibilities of the scheme. In June 2020, the centre blamed the PPP-led provincial government for delays with the project. Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar said K-IV, the modern Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) and freight corridor projects' construction would start within the same fiscal year. The fiscal year has now ended and yet, the citizens of Karachi are still waiting for the promises to materialise. Work on promises to end Karachi's water mafia and to champion the development of a desalination plant in the metropolis for clean drinking water has "not started" yet. Karachi's mass transit system As part of its promise to enhance the mass transit system in the city, the PTI had vowed to revive the KCR project in three phases. After 21 years, on Nov 19, 2020, the KCR started partial operations on a 14km cleared stretch of the around 55km route of the old KCR. READ MORE

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1641014/tracking-naya-pakistan-three-years-into-power-heres-where-pti-stands-on-some-of-its-manifesto-promises>

Parents must marry children at 18, proposed marriage compulsion law in Sindh

By: Rabia Azfar Nizami

For years hardliners have been making excuses for the frequently occurring incidents of sexual abuse, attributing the crimes to women or a non-restrictive way of life, instead of demanding exemplary punishment for predators. Solutions are often offered in the form of a life style which is restrictive and curb the basic rights of a citizen, while absolving the predator of all blame. Another recent attempt in this regard was the bill that Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal's Syed Abdul Rasheed submitted in the Sindh Assembly.

This bill was asking to make it mandatory for parents to marry off their children after they reach the age of 18, while it was asking for a fine of Rs500 to be imposed on those found not following instructions. The proposed bill, also called the "Sindh Compulsory Marriage Act, 2021", would make it binding upon parents to submit an affidavit at the deputy commissioner's office offering an explanation if they have not been able to marry their children off at 18. Thankfully this proposal was met with the kind of opposition it deserved, both, from the provincial assembly

and human rights organisations. According to the Women Action Forum (WAF) it was legally, ethically, and economically wrong to force parents to marry off their children. Even though we start classifying people as adults at 18, it is a crucial age for them, especially when it comes to their education and self-development, while pushing them into a marriage may cause irreparable damage to their character and impact their future.

The Aurat Foundation called this bill a joke, categorically stating that marriage should be a matter of free will and instead of contributing positively to society such a practice would only enhance poverty and frustration, resulting in issues like domestic violence. Child rights' activists also maintained that such legislation clashed with Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The International Convention gave fundamental rights to parents for making their own choices, pertaining to a child's marriage. According to Rasheed, the reason for submitting this proposed bill was an attempt to curb immorality in the country and this law would supposedly

decrease sexual crimes. This reasoning is completely illogical as studies have shown that the majority of culprits involved in cases of sexual abuse were married. Very often children are sexually abused at the hands of relatives and even clerics,



so getting married at 18 can hardly save a child, as abuse starts when they are much younger. Instead of advocating for severe penalties for committing sexual crimes, making laws which curtail the basic rights of parents and children is totally unacceptable. The provincial assembly passed The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2013 in April, 2014, which declared the marriage of children under 18 years of age punishable by law, while it also provided penalties for a male contracting party, the person who solemnised the marriage, as well as the parent or guardian concerned. There was to be a prison sentence of up to three years and a fine of Rs 45,000.

Although it was definitely an important piece of legislation to end early marriages in Sindh, the law left room for amendments.

One of the weaknesses in this law was that it did not include penalties if the groom was under 18. The law cannot be effective unless there is a penalty for whoever gives a child in marriage, irrespective of the child's gender. This law also missed out on the local government tier in substantive clauses, and the Union Councils were authorised to issue a license for nikkah registrars. In fact, the local government barely played any role in the implementation of this act. The young people of our country are our future and it is important that we create an environment for them that helps develop their character and enables them to live their lives as strong, progressive human beings. Forcing them into marriages just because the law says so, is barely a way to do that. A child's basic rights cannot be snatched away simply because the law is incapable of protecting them from the curse of sexual crimes.

14 <https://tribune.com.pk/article/97452/the-fault-in-sindh-proposed-marriage-compulsion-law>

Saudi Arabia elected vice chair of UNESCO heritage committee



PARIS: The member states of the World Heritage Committee of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) elected Saudi Arabia as vice chair of the Arab group for the period between 2021 and 2023 at the organization's 44th session held in Fuzhou in China.

Princess Haifa bint Abdul Aziz Al-Muqrin, the Kingdom's permanent representative at UNESCO, said that the election of the Kingdom had occurred due to its prominent role in supporting world heritage alongside the committee's member states, in addition to achieving UNESCO's objectives in general, and the committee's objectives in particular.

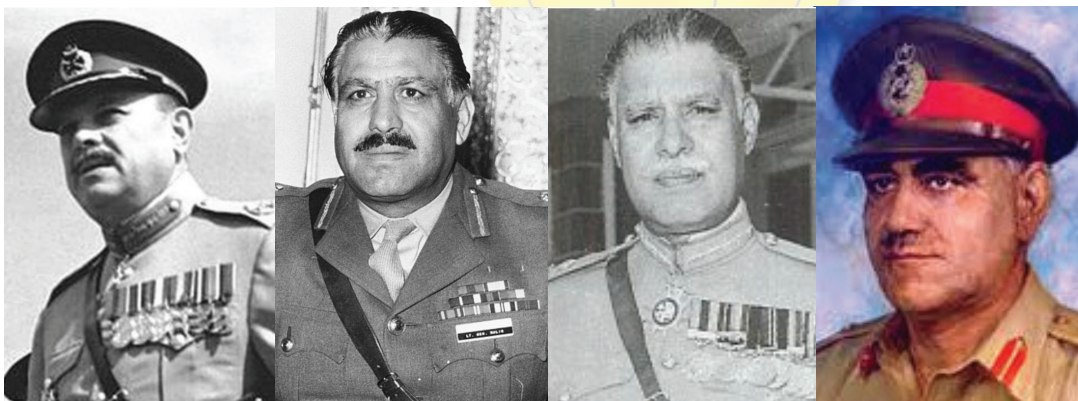
He pointed out that the committee unanimously endorsed the draft resolution proposed by Saudi Arabia to build the capabilities of workers in the field of heritage during the next ten years, which will contribute in strengthening the geographic diversification of experts, improve regional capabilities, set up plans and measures to protect endangered cultural sites, and elevate the level of technical skills of both young people and experts in various relevant fields.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1906951/saudi-arabia>

Pakistan retains the spirit and honor the memories of brave defenders who fought to protect their borders from the adversary's designs even 56 years on from the war of 1965. The Rann of Kutch became a conflicting area between India and Pakistan in April, 1965 after Indian forces intruded Pakistani area. Both armies had mobilized fully and Indian forces were ejected after short conflict. Pakistan offered cease-fire to its neighbor India and an agreement was signed that paved a way for forces disengagement. However, Indian army crossed the international border and attacked Lahore and Kasur fronts without a formal declaration past midnight on September 6, 1965. This Indian invasion is also known as Second Kashmir War taking place after Pakistan Army's Operation Gibraltar. Full scale war broke out between both countries. The aggressor India carried heavy casualties as Pakistan's armed forces halted Indian attack in its tracks. Pakistan's bravery broke all-time record as one of the pilots of Pakistan Air Force Squadron Leader M.M. Alam shot down five Indian Air Force attacking Hunter aircraft in a single sortie in his F-86 Sabre. Pakistan's Special Service Group (SSG) were para-dropped on three Indian Air Force bases at Pathankot, Halwara and Adampur on September 6/7, 1965 to neutralize Indian forces.

Furthermore, Pakistan Air Force overran area Khem Karan, 6 to 8 miles Indian territory to relieve pressure on Lahore front on 7/8 September, 1965. Pakistan Navy attacked the Indian Naval radar station set up on the coast of Dwarka in India, 320 km to the south-east of Karachi port on September 7, 1965. India witnessed heavy personnel, material and economic losses and 1617 square miles of territory as compared to 446 square miles of Pakistan's undefended territory. Moreover, Pakistan captured Prisoners of War (PoWs) including 20 officers, 19 junior commissioned officers and 569 of other ranks belonging to India. Indian aggression continued till September 22, 1965 and India asked for cease-fire in the United Nations. However, peace between India and Pakistan was negotiated under Soviet auspices in Tashkent on January 10, 1966. General Ayub Khan and Lal Bahadur Shastri represented Pakistan and India in Tashkent, respectively. Pakistani nation achieved a unity of action and purpose it had not demonstrated before for consecutive seventeen days in September, 1965. The undefended city Lahore found defenders with matchless valor and commitment to protect the motherland within no time. Shafqat Baloch, Sarwar Shaheed, Major Aziz Bhatti Shaheed, M. M. Alam, Cecil Chaudhary and Sarfaraz Rafiqui

Rafiqui Shaheed rose to the top in the people's pantheon of heroes. Pakistan celebrates September 6 each year to pay tribute to the defenders of motherland.



Gen. Muhammad
Ayub Khan

Lt. Gen. Akhtar
Hussain Malik

Lt. Gen. Abdul Ali
Malik

Maj. Gen. Iftikhar
Khan Janjua



Longest war: Were America's two decades in Afghanistan worth it?

Here's what 19-year-old Lance Corporal William Bee felt flying into southern Afghanistan on Christmas Day 2001: purely lucky. The US was hitting back at the Al Qaeda plotters who had brought down the World Trade Centre, and Bee found himself among the first Marines on the ground. "Excitement," Bee says these days, of the teenage Bee's thoughts then. "To be the dudes that got to open it up first." In the decade that followed, three more deployments in America's longest war scoured away that lucky feeling. For Bee, it came down to a night in 2008 in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

By then a sergeant, Bee held the hand of an American sniper who had just been shot in the head, as a medic sliced open the man's throat for an airway. "After that it was like, you know what — 'F—k these people,'" Bee recounted, of what drove him by his fourth and final Afghan deployment. "I just want to bring my guys back. That's all I care about. I want to bring them home."

As President Joe Biden ends the US combat role in Afghanistan this month, Americans and Afghans are questioning whether the war was worth the cost: more than 3,000 American and other Nato lives lost, tens of thousands of Afghans dead, trillions of dollars of US debt that generations of Americans will pay for, and an Afghanistan that in a stunning week of fighting has falling back under Taliban rule, just as Americans found it nearly 20 years ago.

For Biden, for Bee and for some of the American principals in the US and Nato war in Afghanistan, the answer to whether it was worth the cost often comes down to parsing. There were the first years of the war, when Americans broke up Osama bin Laden's Al

Qaeda in Afghanistan and routed the Taliban government that had hosted the terrorist network. That succeeded. The proof is clear, says Douglas Lute, White House czar for the war during the George W Bush and Barack Obama administrations, and a retired lieutenant general: Al Qaeda hasn't been able to mount a major attack on the West since 2005. "We have decimated Al Qaeda in that region, in Afghanistan and Pakistan," Lute says. But after that came the grinding second phase of the war. US fears of a Taliban rebound whenever Americans eventually pulled out meant that service members such as Bee kept getting sent back in, racking up more close calls, injuries and dead comrades.

Lute and some others argue that what the second half of the war bought was time — a grace period for Afghanistan's government, security forces and civil society to try to build enough strength to survive on their own.

Quality of life in some ways did improve, modernizing under the Western occupation, even as the millions of dollars the US poured into Afghanistan fed corruption. Infant mortality rates fell by half. In 2005, fewer than one in four Afghans had access to electricity. By 2019, nearly all did. The second half of the war allowed Afghan women, in particular, opportunities entirely denied them under the fundamentalist Taliban, so that more than one in three teenage girls — their whole lives spent under the protection of Western forces — today can read and write. But it's that longest, second phase of the war that looks on the verge of complete failure now. The US war left the Taliban undefeated and failed to secure a political settlement.

Taliban forces this past week have swept across two-thirds of the country and captured



servicemen and women who deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq served two or more times, according to the Costs of War project at Brown University. Ask the same question in Afghanistan, though, and you get different answers.

provincial capitals, on the path of victory before US combat forces even complete their pullout. On many fronts, the Taliban are rolling over Afghan security forces that US and NATO forces spent two decades working to build. This swift advance sets up a last stand in Kabul, where most Afghans live.

It threatens to clamp the country under the Taliban's strict interpretation of religious law, erasing much of the gains. "There's no 'mission accomplished,'" Biden snapped last month, batting down a question from a reporter. Biden quickly corrected himself, evoking the victories of the first few years of the war. "The mission was accomplished in that we ... got Osama bin Laden, and terrorism is not emanating from that part of the world," he added. Richard Boucher, assistant secretary of state for Central Asia during much of the war's first decade, says the criticism was largely not of the conflict itself but because it went on so long. "It was the expansion of war aims, to try to create a government that was capable of stopping any future attacks," Boucher said. America expended the most lives, and dollars, on the most inconclusive years of the war.

The strain of fighting two post-9/11 wars at once with an all-volunteer military meant that more than half of the 2.8 million American

Some Afghans — asked that question before the Taliban's stunning sweep last week — respond that it's more than time for Americans to let Afghans handle their own affairs. But one 21-year-old woman, Shogufa, says American troops' two decades on the ground meant all the difference for her.

The repeated deployments contributed to disability rates in those veterans that are more than double that of Vietnam veterans, says Linda Bilmes, a senior lecturer in public policy at Harvard University. Bilmes calculates the US will spend more than \$2 trillion just caring for and supporting Afghanistan and Iraq veterans as they age, with costs peaking 30 years to 40 years from now. That's on top of \$1 trillion in Pentagon and State Department costs in Afghanistan since 2001.

Because the US borrowed rather than raised taxes to pay for the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, interest payments are estimated to cost succeeding generations of Americans trillions of dollars more still.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1640804/longest-war-were-americas-two-decades-in-afghanistan-worth-it>



UK Decision to keep Pakistan on Red List Based on 'Data and Science'

The British High Commission in Pakistan said that the decision to keep the country on the red list, under the coronavirus travel restrictions, was based on data and science.

The British government placed Pakistan and India on the red list on April 2 and 19, respectively. However, in an updated list, the government announced that India, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE would be moved to the amber list from August 8. A day earlier it was reported that UK senior health official JO Churchill said that Pakistan was being retained on Britain's "red list" due to the "worsening Covid-19 situation and low testing rates".

The decision was met with backlash from the Pakistani public and politicians alike who termed it unjust. Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari criticised the British government, calling the measure 'ridiculous'.

"UK gov[ernment], dominated by Indophiles and despite globally documented India's continuing disastrous handling of Covid pandemic, moved India to Amber List but keeps Pak on Red [list]; then under pressure from Opp[osition] MPs gives feeble excuse Pak didn't share data," Minister Mazari said in a tweet. She further stated that the British government had never asked for Pakistan's Covid-19 data which was already publicly available as the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) has a centralised database, which is updated daily and added that it was also being shared with the UK High Commission. "Earlier UK govt had given another excuse - that more Pak passengers than Indians tested positive! Shifting goalposts!" the minister added. "We are proud of our people-to-people links with our 1.6m diaspora at the heart of our relationship. We recognise that many people are disappointed that Pakistan remains on the UK's Covid red list," the British High Commission in Pakistan wrote

on its official Twitter handle late on Monday. It said that the decision to keep Pakistan on the red list is based on data and science. "Every week we share the latest NCOC data with colleagues in London. We are ek saath (together) with Pakistan in the fight against Covid & look forward to normal travel resuming again when safely possible," it wrote in another tweet. In a letter dated August 6, Churchill while explaining the reason for keeping Pakistan on the red list of countries said the UK's Joint Biosecurity Centre continues to assess risk based on factors including incidence, trends in deaths/hospitalisations, exported cases as well as testing and test positivity rates. Her response comes after Pakistan including several members of the British House of Commons slammed the UK government for keeping Pakistan on its red list of countries at the latest coronavirus travel update while removing India from it. "In Pakistan, the combination of a deteriorating epidemiological situation, combined with low testing rates and limited genomic surveillance, presents a high risk that an outbreak of a new variant, or existing VoC [variant of concern], will not be identified before it is imported to the UK," she said in a letter.

The red list of the countries means only the UK nationals and those with residency rights will be allowed to travel to the country if they stayed in Pakistan in the 10 days before they arrive. The amber travel list means that returnees can quarantine at home, rather than in a hotel. Britain's MP Yasmin Qureshi had termed the move to keep Pakistan on the red list while downgrading India "a clear and blatant discrimination towards Pakistan".

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2314773/decision-to-keep-pakistan-on-red-list-based-on-data-and-science-uk>

Is the Taliban Takeover Still in Pakistan's Interest?

By: Muhammad Luqman Majoka - Germany



It is no secret that sections of the Pakistani security services have maintained close relationships with the Taliban for years. So what do Pakistan's leaders expect from this victory, and what effect will it have on the country? Answers from Mohammad Luqman

In recent weeks, the situation has been changing on an almost hourly basis: the Taliban has overrun one Afghan province after another, and managed to take Kabul with barely any resistance – much to the surprise of the major players. The Afghan security forces had all but been dissolved. A failure on this scale by the Afghan army, which had been built up and equipped over the past twenty years using billions of dollars, shocked all observers – and the Afghans themselves most of all. President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, leaving the way clear for the radicals to seize power. Although it is still impossible to predict the consequences of this development for the region, it is already clear that, alongside the Taliban, Pakistan is the second victor in this conflict. At least, for now; at the moment, it is difficult to assess the impact the Taliban's takeover will have on Pakistani society. And this is the crux of the matter. For several months now, members of the Afghan government have been accusing Pakistan of actively

supporting the Taliban's advance. At a regional conference in Uzbekistan, there was an unusually heated public exchange between the Afghan President Ghani and Pakistan's prime minister, Imran Khan. Khan was visibly angered by Ghani's accusation that Pakistan was smuggling thousands of Taliban fighters into Afghanistan. Khan assured him that his country had nothing to do with developments in Afghanistan and was interested in a peaceful solution to the conflict. After all, a civil war in a neighbouring country and a fresh influx of Afghan refugees would also destabilise Pakistan. This assessment may be partly true, and Pakistan certainly hasn't smuggled thousands of Taliban over the border, but there can be no denying that the Pakistani establishment maintains close relationships with the Taliban, though with a decreasing level of influence. The Taliban's invasion of Kabul also sees a "pro-Pakistan" regime seizing power for the first time in twenty years. And unlike that earlier period, this time other

actors from the region besides Pakistan are actively helping to shape a post-American Afghanistan.

The Taliban and neighbouring states

Since the USA began negotiating directly with the Taliban and announced its withdrawal, it has been clear even to the greatest sceptics that the Taliban is a major player in Afghanistan, and that the conflict cannot be resolved by military means. A degree of stability in Afghanistan is in the interest of all its neighbouring states, to prevent the conflict from spilling over into their own territory. Alongside Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia are therefore all attempting to fill the power vacuum. In recent months, representatives of the Taliban have been conducting bilateral negotiations with these countries, and seem to have reached a level of agreement on the recognition of their regime. China, for instance, is keen to make its neighbour Afghanistan an important transit country in its "Belt and Road Initiative". A stable government, even one formed by the radical Taliban, would make it easier for China to implement this infrastructure project. China would also like a guarantee from the Taliban that no Uighur resistance fighters from Xinjiang province, which lies on the border with Afghanistan, will be able to establish themselves on Afghan soil. Russia's central concern, meanwhile, is the security situation in central Asia and the suppression of local terrorist groups. Moscow fears the destabilisation of the central Asian republics, and is therefore holding direct talks with the Taliban, even though Moscow officially classes the group as terrorists themselves. The situation with Iran is similar; it is combatting Sunni terrorist organisations in the east of the country, and wants to prevent IS from gaining a stronger foothold in Afghanistan. Iran also sees itself as a protective power for the Afghan Shias, and is therefore making every effort to guarantee their safety. For Pakistan, several geopolitical factors are simultaneously in play: Islamabad

wants the Taliban to keep its Pakistani offshoot TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) in check, and prevent it from carrying out attacks from Afghanistan. The Pakistani army was, after all, only able to drive the TTP out of the tribal border regions following several military operations that incurred heavy losses. A return of the TTP would be disastrous for the country's security situation. Separatists from the Pakistani province of Baluchistan have also found sanctuary in Afghanistan, and are operating from there with relative freedom. Attacks by Baluchistani militant groups are the greatest threat to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an ambitious project through which Islamabad and Beijing aim to co-operate more effectively on transport and energy infrastructure, including transit routes through Afghanistan. The ports of Gwadar and Karachi would provide a direct link to global markets. And all of this would be easier to implement under the Taliban. But the most important factor for Pakistan is that, with the Taliban in power, India's influence in Afghanistan is being largely suppressed. Over recent years, India has managed to extend its influence considerably through investment and projects, which Islamabad has always eyed with mistrust. The security of the western border plays a central role in Pakistan's security doctrine. An enemy on its western flank would be tantamount to encirclement. And avoiding this situation is a top priority in Islamabad's corridors of power. Pakistan's support has also benefitted the Taliban, even though many of their leaders were arrested in Pakistan after 2001. Taliban cadres who had fled the country with their families found refuge in Pakistan, in Quetta or Karachi. There was always a lively exchange between the Pakistani establishment and the Taliban's leadership, through which Pakistan was able to pressure the Taliban leaders into sitting down at a negotiating table with the Americans. Islamabad's influence on the group may have waned, but both sides continue to profit

from one another.

Fears of radicalisation in Pakistan

But there is also another point of view in Pakistan: now that the Taliban has seized power, many fear a creeping radicalisation in their own society. Religious political parties and elements of the establishment in Pakistan are openly sympathetic towards the Taliban. They all regard the movement's victory as confirmation of their policies. Fazal ur-Rahman, for example, the leader of the Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), congratulated the leader of the Taliban, Hibatullah Akhundzada, on his victory. Ideologically, the Taliban and the JUI both subscribe to the puritanical Deobandi school of thought. The Deobandi movement considers itself to be on the ascendent and hopes to gain yet more influence – in particular in its rivalry with the orthodox Sunni Barelvi movement. Tensions between the two Sunni schools of thought may well increase in the future. Religious minorities and liberal forces already fear increasing reprisals if the significance of the radical forces grows in society as a whole.

Pakistan might then be plagued by another spiral of violence, as it was at the start of the 2000s. The first signs of this are already in evidence: the TTP, the Taliban's Pakistani offshoot which, it was thought, had been largely quashed, reared its head again in early 2021 with a series of dramatic attacks. In April, the group carried out an attack on the heavily-guarded Serena Hotel in Quetta, aimed at the Chinese ambassador. Whether the Taliban can really control the TTP is highly questionable, when you consider the group's loose organisational structure. It is still too early for a reliable prognosis of the effects. The next few months will therefore remain tense. But one thing is clear: the spirits of radicalism have returned once more to a region already plagued by instability.

<https://en.qantara.de/content/afghanistan-and-its-neighbours-is-the-taliban-takeover-still-in-pakistans-interest>

Congratulations on becoming bureau chief of sindh Pakistan at " Lahore International London"



The best security lies in creating a society that nobody wishes to attack. And you are the one Mr. Badaruddin Kalhoro who has worked tirelessly to make country a better and sustainable place. Congrats comrade. I am so pleased to see you accomplishing great things. Opportunities do not happen, but you create them and you are the perfect example of this quote. According to me, success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it and your accomplishments justify it; researcher, social activist, 65 national and 23 international conferences, 45 national and 5 international workshops on international security, volunteering at the climate change ministry not just for Pakistan but for the entire blue planet. All these achievements have made you the person you are today. Instead of becoming a man of success, you chose to become a man of value. You are a kind of individual who is insane enough to think he can change the world, and is the one who do. We again congratulate you and best of luck for future endeavors.



Are you a new Canadian? Here's how the federal parties are fighting for your vote

By: Raisa Patel

OTTAWA — When 33-year-old Lucas Cunha fills out his ballot for Canada's 44th election, he won't be doing so by mail. Cunha is set on going to his local polling station; as someone who became a Canadian citizen in early 2020, this is the first time he'll be able to vote in the country he now calls home. Unlike many Canadians grumbling about heading back to the polls, the Mississauga resident, who arrived in Ontario from Brazil 10 years ago, is thrilled by the prospect. He wants to wait in line, duck behind a screen and mark an "X" beside his preferred candidate, just like everyone else. "The vote is actually a privilege that we have as a citizen that not every single country has," said Cunha. "So I feel really excited for it. And I feel really honoured to finally be part of this community and have my voice heard." Cunha is one of many Canadians who are now eligible to cast their inaugural vote. More than 145,000 adults became citizens between the last election and June of this year. New citizens voting for the first time will also join more than an estimated 811,000 young Canadians who are old enough to vote in their first election. Where new Canadians are concerned, there are a number of platform issues through which parties will try to woo voters, says Andrew Griffith, a former director general of Citizenship and Multiculturalism within Canada's federal immigration department. Affordable housing is one, as is streamlining how foreign credentials are recognized, addressing family reunification and committing to tackling racism and hate. "I think a more pragmatic approach is probably stronger than the rhetorical approach," Griffith said, referring to how clearly parties will articulate their promises in their platforms. But when it comes to newcomers — especially those who could be establishing their political loyalties for years to come —

parties are thinking about more than just platform pledges. As the party in power for the last six years, the Liberals feel they have an edge. For people who arrived in Canada during that time who had a positive experience with the country's immigration and refugee system, there's a hope those voters will respond favourably at the polls, say those involved with the campaign. In a statement to the Star, Liberal spokesperson Alex Wellstead also cited the party's efforts to improve immigration levels, economic immigration and pathways for permanent residence as reasons why new Canadians should feel welcomed by the party. "We have also worked to create economic conditions for growth and innovation and brought in policies to address inequality," Wellstead said. On the ground, the Liberals are looking to the diversity of its candidates and staffers to attract new Canadians across the country. The party is running several Filipino Canadian candidates in a bid to elect the first Filipino Canadian MP in 17 years. The party has also established a presence in a slew of WhatsApp chat groups, where many immigrants and newcomers tend to communicate. A dedicated outreach team is responsible for crafting culturally sensitive messages that are then shared through different networks. The Liberals are also ensuring candidates pop up in community and multilingual media outlets, which happens to be a key focus for the Conservative party in this year's campaign. "We've had a very aggressive, and I think effective, ethnic media engagement strategy," said Conservative MP Garnett Genuis, who served as the party's international development critic before Parliament's dissolution. The party is holding weekly virtual news conferences with multilingual media about its platform commitments, and is enlisting candidates who speak languages other

than English and French to conduct interviews with community outlets. While the Conservative platform lacks a plan for addressing racism at the domestic level, it includes a section on Canada's immigration system that sees new Canadians as key to the country's post-pandemic economic recovery. That includes pledging to do away with Canada's government assisted refugee program in favour of boosting private and joint sponsorships, kick-starting a credential recognition task force, addressing processing delays and vowing to scrap the Liberals' family reunification lottery and replace it with a new system. The NDP platform is less clear on the specifics, but promises to tackle credential recognition, application backlogs and improve refugee resettlement among other commitments. Confronting racism and other forms of discrimination factors strongly into the document. NDP national director Anne McGrath believes the COVID-19 pandemic has offered a strong reason for new Canadians to turn up to the polls, given that some immigrants were exposed to additional risk by holding precarious, front-line jobs and living in multi-generational homes. As with the Liberals, the New Democrats are also banking on their diverse roster of candidates, hoping voters will be able to see themselves among those in the running. "We have really strong, some would say, rigid, equity requirements," McGrath said. Candidates themselves are doing the bulk of community outreach, which includes talking to new Canadians who are contemplating who gets their first vote. That also means ensuring that newcomers, who might be less familiar with where and how to cast a ballot, feel comfortable with the process. "We'll be working hard to make sure that first-time voters ... know how to vote, that they know how to get to the polls and that they know how to do the mail-in ballots," McGrath said.

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal-election/2021/08/20/are-you-a-new-canadian-heres-how-the-federal-parties-are-fighting-for-your-vote.html?rf>

Egyptian court sentences 24 Muslim Brotherhood members to death

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AA): An Egyptian court sentenced 24 members of the Muslim Brotherhood to death in two separate cases involving the killing of police officers. The state-owned al-Ahram newspaper said the Damanhour Criminal Court ordered the death penalty for 16 defendants affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, including Mohamed Sweidan, a regional leader of the organization, for their involvement in the bombing of a police bus in Rashid city in Beheira governorate in 2015. Six of the defendants were tried in absentia. The daily added that the blast killed three police officers and wounded 39 others. The same court also handed down the death penalty to eight Muslim Brotherhood members, including two in absentia, who were accused of killing a police officer in December 2014 in Ad Dilinjat city in Beheira. The case was dropped for three of the defendants due to their deaths. The newspaper, however, did not clarify whether the verdicts are final or can be appealed. However, the Shehab Organization for Human Rights, which is outside Egypt, said the verdicts are final as they were issued by an emergency court. There are no exact figures for death penalties issued in Egypt this year except for 10 handed down in April and those upheld against 12 Muslim Brotherhood leaders over the Rabaa sit-in dispersal case in 2013. In February 2019, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi defended the death penalty at a summit between Arab and European states. Following the ouster of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, Egyptian authorities persecuted Muslim Brotherhood members and leaders and outlawed the group. *Ahmed Asmar contributed to this report from Ankara

<https://muslimnews.co.uk/news/human-rights/egyptian-court-sentences-24-muslim-brotherhood-members-death/>



How Sweden became Silicon Valley of Europe ?

As Klarna's billionaire founder Sebastian Siemiatkowski prepares to stage one of the biggest-ever European fintech company listings, a feast of capitalism, he credits an unlikely backer for his runaway success: the Swedish welfare state. In particular, the 39-year-old pinpoints a late-1990s government policy to put a computer in every home. "Computers were inaccessible for low-income families such as mine, but when the reform came into play, my mother bought us a computer the very next day," he told Reuters. Siemiatkowski began coding on that computer when he was 16. Fast-forward more than two decades, and his payments firm Klarna is valued at \$46 billion and plans to go public. It hasn't given details, though many bankers predict it will list in New York early next year. Sweden's home computer drive, and concurrent early investment in internet connectivity, help explain why its capital Stockholm has become such rich soil for startups, birthing and incubating the likes of Spotify, Skype and Klarna, even though it has some of the highest tax rates in the world. That's the view of Siemiatkowski and several tech CEOs and venture capitalists interviewed by Reuters. In the three years the scheme ran, 1998-2001, 850,000 home computers were purchased through it, reaching almost a quarter of the country's then-four million households, who didn't have to pay for the machines and thus included many people who were otherwise unable to afford them. In 2005, when Klarna was founded, there were 28 broadband subscriptions per 100 people in Sweden, compared with 17 in the United States - where dial-up was still far more common - and a global average of 3.7, according to data from the World Bank.

Spotify allowed users to stream music when Apple's iTunes was still download-based,

which gave the Swedish company the upper-hand when streaming became the norm around the world. "That could only happen in a country where broadband was the standard much earlier, while in other markets the connection was too slow," Siemiatkowski said. "That allowed our society to be a couple of years ahead." Some executives and campaigners say the Scandinavian nation demonstrates that a deep social safety net, often viewed as counter to entrepreneurial spirit, can foster innovation. It's an outcome that might not have been envisaged by the architects of Sweden's welfare state in the 1950s.

Childcare is, for the most part, free. A range of income insurance funds can protect you if your business fails or you lose your job, guaranteeing up to 80% of your previous salary for the first 300 days of unemployment.

"The social safety net we have in Sweden allows us to be less vulnerable to taking risks," said Gohar Avagyan, the 31-year-old co-founder of Vaam, a video messaging service used for sales pitches and customer communication.

STARTUP RATE VS SILICON VALLEY

Although overall investments are larger in the bigger European economies of Britain and France and their longstanding finance hubs, Sweden punches above its weight in some regards. It has the third highest startup rate in the world, behind Turkey and Spain, with 20 startups per 1000 employees and the highest three year survival rate for startups anywhere, at 74%, according to a 2018 study by OECD economists. Stockholm is second only to Silicon Valley in terms of unicorns - startups valued at above \$1 billion - per capita, at around 0.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, according to Sarah Guemouri at venture capital firm Atomico. Silicon Valley - San Francisco and

the Bay Area - boasts 1.4 unicorns per 100,000, said Guemouri, co-author of a 2020 report on European tech companies. No one can say for sure if the boom will last, though, in a country where capital gains are taxed at 30 percent and income tax can be as high as 60 percent. In 2016, Spotify said it was considering moving its headquarters out of the country, arguing high taxes made it difficult to attract overseas talent, though it hasn't done so. Yusuf Ozdalga, partner at venture capital firm QED Investors, said access to funding and administrative or legal tasks connected with founding a company could also prove tough to navigate for non-Swedish speakers. He contrasted that to Amsterdam, capital of the Netherlands, where the government adopted English as an official language in April to make life easier for international companies.

'INTERESTING DILEMMA' FOR VC

Jeppe Zink, partner at London-based venture capital firm Northzone, said a third of all the exit value from fintech companies in Europe - the amount received by investors when they cash out - came from Sweden alone.

Government policy had contributed to this trend, he added. "It's an interesting dilemma for us venture capitalists as we're not used to regulation creating markets, in fact we are inherently nervous about regulation."

Sweden's digital minister Anders Ygeman said that social regulation could make it "possible to fail" and then "be up and running again" for innovators. Peter Carlsson, CEO of startup Northvolt, which makes Lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles and is valued at \$11.75 billion, said that ultimately success breeds success. "You're really creating ripple effects when you're seeing the success of somebody else and I think that's perhaps the most important thing in order to create local ecosystems."

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2315049/how-sweden-became-the-silicon-valley-of-europe>

Why Harry, Meghan chose not to name royal who made racist attack on Archie



Meghan Markle and Prince Harry decided not to reveal the name of the royal who made a racist remark about the couple's son, Archie. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, in their bombshell interview with Oprah Winfrey, revealed a royal raised concerns over how dark Archie's skin colour might be. According to royal authors Omid Scobie and Carolyn Durand, the couple considered "sharing this detail" in their sensational tell-all. However, they later decided if they reveal the name it would be too damaging to the royal. "That conversation I'm never going to share, but at the time, it was awkward; I was a bit shocked," Harry shared. He later clarified that it was neither Queen Elizabeth nor Prince Philip. Scobie and Durand said the unaddressed race allegations have threatened the royal family's reputation around the globe. A Buckingham Palace staffer told them, "There is a feeling that if it's ignored it will go away, but surely by now they should have learned that never happens?" The source said although the Sussexes have not been in contact with the royal family much, over the Oprah interview, "it will force people to talk in order for the healing to begin," although the source admitted that "it will take time to get past the hurt."

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/883529-why-harry-meghan-chose-not-to-name-royal-who-made-racist-attack-on-archie>

Book Review: Pregnancy Bible by Kareena Kapoor Khan



Kareena Kapoor Khan, who gave birth to her second son Jeh with actor Saif Ali Khan earlier this year, recently revealed that her second pregnancy was a difficult one. In a conversation with director Karan Johar, whom the actor is close friends with, the Ki and Ka star revealed that her experience left her feeling insecure as a woman, according to The Indian Express. The conversation was a part of the virtual book launch of the actor's Pregnancy Bible. When asked how she felt about the physical changes her body underwent, the 3 Idiots actor said she wasn't sure if she would ever be okay again. "I have had those moments, especially with my second pregnancy. When I came back from the hospital and looked at myself in the mirror, I thought I don't know if I am ever going to be okay. Being an actor, there is a part of you—it is not vanity, it is about wanting to feel, 'Okay fine, I am fit and I can be back again on my toes,'" she shared. "I thought I will never be able to. There was fear of breastfeeding because I wasn't getting enough when I delivered Jeh. There was a lot of mental distress I was going through at that time. I felt my body had stretched, my feet were feeling like 100 kgs," revealed the actor. Kareena also spoke about the experience of feeling overwhelmed in the days immediately after giving birth. She explained, "After you deliver, for the first 15-20 days, you are delirious. There is just so much pressure. When you get a moment alone in the bathroom and look at yourself, you just think, 'I don't know what's going to happen.'" As time goes on, with love and support, it gets better." The actor urged people to pay attention to pregnant women, especially in the days following birth. "After delivery, everyone is obviously focused on the child, but I feel the

most important person is the mother. She needs the most support, which people tend to forget," she said. Speaking about giving birth during a pandemic, the actor explained that the experience was very stressful. Comparing her second pregnancy with her first, in which she was expecting her son Taimur, the Uda Punjab actor shared, "This pregnancy was extremely difficult compared to Taimur's, which was a breeze. I had loved it, enjoyed it and that gave me the courage to do it again. But this was different. I had bouts where I would sit down and think, 'I don't think I can do this, don't think anything is going to be okay.' She added further, "It was (also) Covid times. With all safety protocols, we managed to do a lot of shoots. It kept me alive, happy in times that were so difficult. There was this constant fear of what is going to happen, what if I get Covid, my child gets it. There was a lot of trauma in the last trimester mentally, of wanting to step out and do things but still." On the anxiety she suffered from when going to the hospital for the delivery, she explained, "The second time when I delivered, I was worried that I was going to the hospital. It was the peak of Covid and I was constantly hearing so many stories. Just that worry of carrying him out of hospital for the first time was overwhelming." Kareena Kapoor Khan's Pregnancy Bible covers medical aspects of pregnancy with a focus on the mother and her symptoms. The journal also includes the Jab We Met actor's tips, from managing morning sickness to her diet plan, exercise regime, wellness practices and nursery set-up.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2314869/i-didnt-think-i-was-going-to-be-okay-kareena-kapoor-khan-on-difficult-second-pregnancy>

British Bangladeshi Mansoor Ahmad Honoured with Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Greater London recognition for contribution to the British Community

Commonwealth Journalists Association Britain (UK) Member British Bangladeshi Mansoor Ahmad has recently been honoured with Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London recognition for exceptional contribution to the British Community. In his statement Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE, Her Majesty The Queen's personal representative in Greater London, charged with upholding the dignity of the Crown, has recognised and thanked Mansoor Ahmad for his exceptional contribution to life in the Great City of London. HM Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London recalled Mansoor's extraordinary support for the British Community during the Covid-19 pandemic. He also acknowledged Mansoor's continued commitment for many years service in areas from education to welfare. Sir Olisa personally thanked and encouraged Mansoor to continue making a positive difference to Londoners. Mansoor is the recipient of the United Kingdom's two national awards - British Citizen Awards (BCA) 2021 & House of Lords British Community Honours Awards (BCHA) 2019. He is the first British Bangladeshi who received the All England Lawn Tennis Club recognition in 2021 for his Covid-19 pandemic efforts. Mansoor Ahmad along with his wife attended the Wimbledon Championship in the Royal Box on the 29th of June 2021 having been invited by Mr Ian Hewitt, Chairman of the All England Lawn Tennis Club. Mansoor was awarded the Mayor of London Borough of Merton's Covid-19 Award in December 2020 for his outstanding local contributions, and for the noteworthy differences which he made in people's lives during the challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic. He was also awarded the Certificate of Recognition from the British Citizen Awards in January 2019 for outstanding contributions to society, and for being an encouraging example to other British citizens. Mansoor responded upon receiving the Honour from Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Greater London recognition: 'It is a great honour for me to receive the message from Her Majesty

The Queen's personal representative in Greater London and I feel tremendously humbled and thrilled. I am really grateful for this amazing acknowledgement. I will remember this moment with great reverence.'

Mansoor has been associated with several schools in his community, where he has been contributing towards the education of students and school development planning, as well as providing backing to strategic discussions at governing board meetings. He enthusiastically served as Parent Governor, Chairman, & as a member of many other committees. Mansoor has been Merton Schools Governor and representative (Secondary & Special) for the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Panel under Merton Council. He has currently been serving as a Governor of Ricards Lodge Secondary School and St. John Fisher School, and is enthusiastically been involved with various school committees. Mansoor has authored numerous articles published in prestigious national and international journals, magazines, and newspapers. Mansoor Ahmad migrated to the United Kingdom from Bangladesh in February 2007 under the British Government's Highly Skilled Migration Programme. He is a qualified accountant currently serving as Manager of Accounts & Finance with Al Shirkatul Islamiyyah, one of the largest charities in the UK. He is a life dedicated member of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK. Mansoor has attended a good number of Seminars, Workshops and Conferences where he has spoken as presenter and key note speaker on various occasions.



Nigeria's Kano state moves to ban mannequin heads on Islamic grounds

By: Nduka Orjinmo

"Islam frowns on idolatry," Haruna Ibn-Sina, the commander of the Sharia police known as the hisbah, told the BBC. "With the head on it looks like a human being," he added. Mr Ibn-Sina also wants the headless mannequins covered at all times because to show "the shape of the breast, the shape of the bottom, is contrary to the teachings of Sharia [Islamic law]". Kano is one of 12 states in the Muslim-majority north that practise Islamic law. The legal system is supposed to apply only to Muslims. But in reality, non-Muslims come under pressure to adhere to the hisbah's rulings, including the ban on full-bodied mannequins. "We have received lots of calls and messages from those who say they disagree with the order," said Moses Ajebo, a radio talk-show host in Kano city, the second-biggest in Nigeria. Traders at Sabon Gari, a Christian-dominated part of Kano state, also expressed their displeasure with the hisbah's order. Shop owner Chinedu Anya said that displaying clothes on a headless mannequin would reduce their attractiveness to passers-by and affect his business.

Mohawk hairstyle shaved

Mr Ibn-Sina and his officers - who number in the thousands, and are made up of both men and women - have not yet gone shop-to-shop to enforce the ban. Nevertheless, there are concerns that it adds to the list of

the hisbah's pronouncements that clash with secularism and modernity. Last week Mr Ibn-Sina criticised photos from the bridal shower of Zahrah Bayero, the fiancée of President Muhammadu Buhari's son, Yusuf. He said she failed to set a good example to other Muslims as the photos showed her exposed shoulders. He also criticised those who shared the images, saying that it was a sin to do so. Last year, Mr Ibn-Sina's officers shaved off the Mohawk hairstyles of young men on the pavements of Kano city, and he also chastised others for wearing low-hung trousers. Mr Ibn-Sina also barred the use of the term Black Friday to advertise sales, saying that Friday was a holy day in Islam. He was largely ignored by radio stations and shopping malls and they faced no sanctions. Residents also received a warning against performing a dance from South Africa - where participants theatrically fell to the ground - that went viral on social media last year. While many Muslims in Kano back the hisbah's orders, a handful of younger Muslims believe that its interpretation of some of the teachings of Islam, such as on mannequins, is wrong. "Islam





forbids idolatry but the hadith [teachings of Prophet Muhammad] is clear on Allah judging your intentions. Unless you are bowing down to a mannequin, it can't be seen as a sin," said a Muslim cleric who did not want to be named. But many senior Muslim clerics, such as Halliru Maraya of the Islamic Council of Nigeria, say the position of the hisbah on the mannequins is correct as "Islam is against carving human statues, whatever name you want to call it". While the announcement in Kano is the first in Nigeria, there have been attempts in other mainly Muslim countries to restrict the use of mannequins. In 2009, Iranian police warned shopkeepers not to display female mannequins with bodily curves or without a hijab. Conservative Muslims believe that the hair of women must be covered. In 2010, Palestinian Islamist group Hamas ordered the removal of scantily-clad mannequins and pictures of models in underwear from clothing shops in the Gaza Strip.

At the time, Hamas said the rules were to protect "public morality". For those in Kano, it is not clear how the order will be enforced as Mr Ibn-Sina has ruled out seizing the mannequins he disapproves of, saying he prefers "other strategies". Muslim cleric Mr Maraya wants non-Muslims, protected by Nigeria's constitution, to challenge the hisbah's ruling on mannequins in court, saying a line needs to be drawn under its efforts to force them to

abide by Islamic law. Liquor thrown away But to oppose the hisbah could be a matter of life, death and money. More than 100 people were killed during riots to protest against the decision of the Kano state government to adopt Sharia law 11 years ago. More recently, trucks carrying alcoholic beverages belonging to non-Muslims were destroyed and bars were raided by the hisbah after it accused owners of "corrupt acts". The consumption of liquor is forbidden in Islam. Kano's hisbah is no different from those in other Muslim-majority states in Nigeria. But it has a higher public profile because of the personality of Mr Ibn-Sina. Those who know him say he is a showman who craves the limelight. He tends to go around Kano city with a media entourage to issue orders. But for him, he is only doing his job. Last year the commander caused a stir when he hired Kung Fu experts to train the hisbah officers in close combat as they do not carry arms. There was an elaborate show, to the public's amusement, to demonstrate the usefulness of the martial arts. As for the mannequins with heads, their days may be numbered in Kano. But it is still not clear if Mr Ibn-Sina will soon turn his attention elsewhere and so leave them intact.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-58175709.amp>

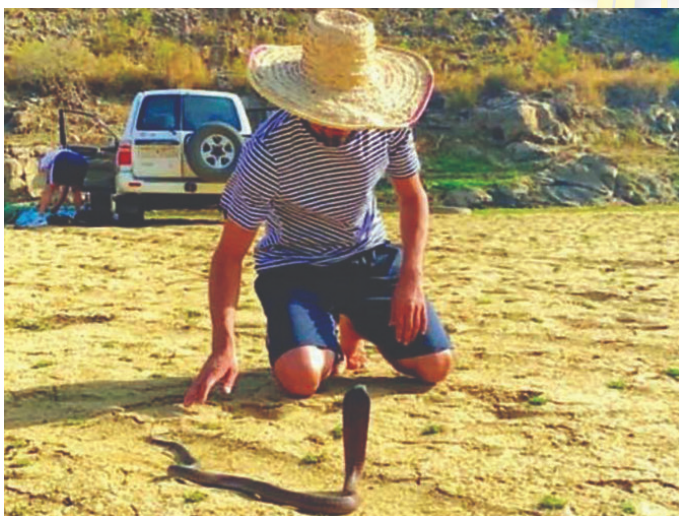
Saudi snake catcher breaking stigmas with Baha conservation group



By: Tareq Al-Thaqafi

MAKKAH: For a little over 30 years, residents of Baha in the southwest part of Saudi Arabia have sought the help of a local cobra catcher who shares a unique bond with the slithery creatures, while also trying to protect them through conservation and awareness efforts. Hamza Al-Ghamdi, an animal behavior expert and a longtime conservationist, has caught snakes in the region for “as long as I can remember” due to his unique charm and technique. He captures snakes in an attempt to protect and conserve them, and in the process tries to correct the damaging stereotype that all snakes are dangerous, venomous and will leave a human dead within 30 minutes. The truth is, “snakes are shy and would rather escape than confront people,” Al-Ghamdi told Arab News. A native of the southwestern mountainous region, he said that there are 45 species of snakes from seven main families in the Kingdom. Some are rare, while others can be found easily, but the distribution of species around the Kingdom depends on climate, terrain and the avail-

ability of prey, he added. “Some of the most venomous snakes found in the Kingdom are the Arabian cobra, a venomous snake that is endemic to Arabian Peninsula, the puff adder and the horned desert viper, and there are also those that are mildly venomous, such as the hissing snake and braid snake,” said Al-Ghamdi. The average size of the Kingdom’s snake species ranges between 55 and 75 centimeters in length, Al-Ghamdi added. He stressed that common fears surrounding snakes are “exaggerated” and called on people to protect and conserve them, especially through education and handling lessons, which can change people’s opinions of the slithery creatures. He said that smaller snakes are “clever camouflagers,” often ignored by humans due to their size or color, leading some to believe that they are earthworms. “There are also two species of boas that are known as the burrowing serpent, as well as the atractaspidae family that includes the most dangerous venomous snake — a small black but deadly one.” He said that snakes are often found in agricultural areas, and near bodies of water and poultry farming sites, especially pigeon farms. They are attracted to the smell of their prey, which include mice, baby pigeons and bird nests. But Al-Ghamdi said that cats enjoy killing snakes near residential areas, with the two animals being “sworn enemies.”



Thopel manage to create an exhibition to present these species in our region, in order to promote awareness for visitors, spread knowledge to interested people and preserve these rare species. Hamza Al-Ghamdi

Some snake species are diurnal, such as the Arabian cobra, the braid snake and the hissing snake, while others are nocturnal, due to their slow movement and inability to climb. (Supplied)

His connection with snakes is a special one found in many snake catchers, he said, telling



Arab News how he has an “emotional communication” with them, and how his time caring for them helped him reach “higher levels of concentration while performing tasks.” Al-Ghamdi said that some snake species are diurnal, such as the Arabian cobra, the braid snake and the hissing snake, while others are nocturnal, due to their slow movement and inability to climb.

And statistically, snakes pose a tiny threat to the Kingdom, he added, with snake bite numbers being relatively low and usually limited to people who carelessly try to catch them — often men and children. “I was bitten several times while handling snakes throughout 30 years and catching more than 500 cobras in that time,” he said. Al-Ghamdi believes that cobras are some of the most “highly evolved and fascinating creatures.” He said that attempting to kill a snake puts people in danger, and as predators, they will defend themselves if threatened. “They’ll snap and continuously try to bite if they feel you’re trying to kill them.” Only about one in five of the world’s snake species are venomous, with most snakes encountered by people being harmless and in fact beneficial, playing an important role in balancing the ecosystem. Predators by nature, snakes help protect agriculture by catching and killing rodents, which are major culprits in destroying crops and causing damage.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1911226/offbeat>

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Lessons from the India-Pakistan conflict

By:Gourav Jaswal

GOA, INDIA — The remarkable ethnic collage of Canada includes over 1.5 million people whose roots are Pakistani or Indian in origin. In these fraught times, I have two stories — one my father's and the other mine — entwined in the saga of these two nations, which may be of value to all Canadians. Aug. 14 and 15 are twin independence days that mark the liberation from British colonial rule and the birth of both Pakistan and India. Births, as mothers know, are accompanied with blood and pain. But even given this law of nature, these countries were born particularly red-stained: over a million people slaughtered each other during 12 weeks of riots following the partitioning of India into two countries in 1947. At the time, my father was an irrepressibly mischievous young boy living in a village not far from the freshly drawn border. The stories of horror reached his family, but since they dwelt in the Himalayan foothills, geography mercifully deterred the carnage itself from visiting. Tragedy did not spare his family, though. Two of his brothers died at ages five and eight, since the terrain that protected them also meant that they had fairly primitive health care. My father anointed his wise and charismatic older brother as his idol, and followed him into India's defence services with puppy-like devotion. By the time I was born, decades after the partition, India and Pakistan had already been at war twice, in 1965 and 1971, causing tens of thousands of deaths on both sides. I would witness yet another war in 1999, which left us with a country next door that most Indians could never visit. But as my travels took me around the world, I always crossed paths with Pakistanis — a chef in Vancouver, a co-passenger at Singapore's airport, a cabbie in

Vienna, a tour-guide in Johannesburg and dozens in every corner of Dubai. Despite the "enemy country" jingoism, I've always had a deep affinity with Pakistanis, since we share an ancestral culture expressed in language, food, poetry and sense of humour. We're even united by our sharpest division: the shared obsession with, and world-famous rivalry in, cricket. There's no country above Pakistan whose citizens I'm more likely to instantly befriend — simply because they feel like they're a part of my clan, history be damned. Ironically, due to India's size — with over a billion people and 22 official languages — I can only converse fluently with about half my countrymen. But because Punjabi and Urdu are among the four languages I speak, I can happily jabber away with about nine-tenths of Pakistanis. This is truer for my parents, as was memorably underlined during a family trip to Dubai. We hired an elderly Pakistani driver to take us around and my father and he chatted incessantly, regaling each other with child-



Railway wagons packed with Muslim refugees flee to Pakistan, as Hindus flee to India by train, in the border city of Amritsar between the two countries at the start of the first war between India and Pakistan in 1947. PHOTO BY STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

hood anecdotes. This would be unremarkable, except in one way: the brother who my father doted upon, and who lives in our home only as a portrait, was killed by a Pakistani artillery shell that tore him to pieces. This story is probably mirrored in thousands of Pakistani families, too. Just as I know that versions of this story are true in millions of homes worldwide, because every race, tribe, religion, community and country has a history that's soaked in blood. Humanity has no better path forward than to accept this with humility, wash off the stains and step ahead with hope. Yet Canada can't seem to let go of the horrors of its history. Unhealable wounds have become the leitmotif of our age, deepening past divisions, instead of strengthening present bonds. Remembering is indeed the core of a nation's narratives and the essence of personal memories. But we often forget the healing power of forgetting — an indelible lesson my father taught me by living it. In that spirit, Happy Independence Day to my brothers and sisters from both India and Pakistan.

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/lessons-from-the-india-pakistan-conflict-canadians-should-unite-not-divide-themselves-over-historical-grievances>

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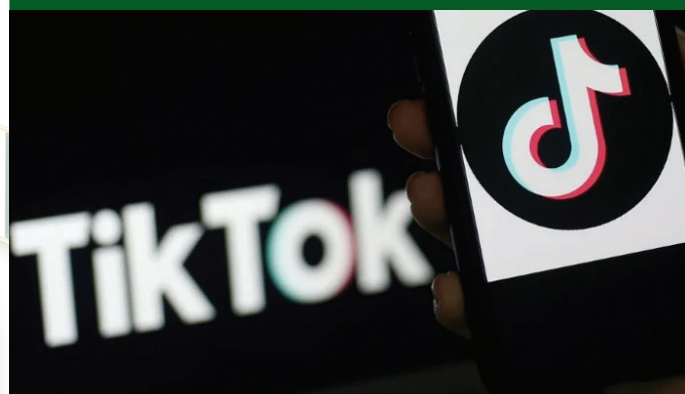


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TikTok blocked in Pakistan, again



ByteDance's video-sharing platform TikTok in the country over has been blocked yet again over "inappropriate content", the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority announced Wednesday.

"In the light of relevant provisions of Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, PTA has blocked access to TikTok App and website in the country," the telecom regulator said.

"The action has been taken due to continuous presence of inappropriate content on the platform and its failure to take such content down," the telecommunication authority added.

This is the fourth time that the government has interrupted — blocked or suspended — TikTok's services in the country due to the content shared on the platform.

The development comes nearly three weeks after the Sindh High Court (SHC) had withdrawn the suspension on TikTok services.

The SHC had on June 28 ordered the PTA to suspend the services of the video-sharing site on a citizen's petition, who was aggrieved by the "immorality and obscenity" on the mobile app.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/867276-tiktok-blocked-in-pakistan-again>

Jerusalem court freezes razing of some Palestinian homes



without permission. “It is not possible to get permits there,” Kawar said. Palestinians say the city rejects nearly all of their building permit applications. Israel captured east Jerusalem from Jordan during the Six-Day War in 1967, and later annexed it in a move not recognized internationally. Palestinians see east Jerusalem as the capital of their

JERUSALEM: A lawyer said Wednesday a Jerusalem court ruling that dozens of home demolitions in a flashpoint Palestinian neighborhood should be frozen for six months was “progress,” but not “victory.” Israel had ordered the demolition of around 100 homes in Silwan, a Palestinian neighborhood on the edge of the Old City in east Jerusalem, claiming they were built illegally on public land. Monday’s court order froze most of those demolition orders until February 2022, while also allowing 16 homes to be razed immediately. “I have reached the conclusion that there is space to grant a specific extension,” wrote Judge Sigal Albo of the Jerusalem Court for Local Affairs in the decision.

Lawyer Ziad Kawar, representing residents in the Al-Bustan area of Silwan, told AFP the ruling was “progress” but “not a victory.” He said he would appeal to foreign diplomats to put pressure on Israel over home demolitions. Kawar said his clients were applying for retroactive permission for their homes, which he said they built on their own private property

future state. In the 1980s, settlers began moving into Silwan, which sits on land where — according to Jewish tradition — King David established his capital some 3,000 years ago, making the area hallowed ground in Jewish history. Israelis have said they hope to build a park devoted to the biblical King David in Al-Bustan. Israeli settlers regard Jerusalem, east and west, as the eternal capital of the Jewish people and a place that Jews themselves have repeatedly been forced to flee through the centuries. Today several hundred settlers live in Silwan under heavy security, among about 50,000 Palestinians. This week’s court decision came after Israel’s supreme court delayed ruling on the eviction of four families in east Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The fate of the families in Sheikh Jarrah sparked tensions in May that spiralled into deadly armed conflict between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1909646/middle-east>

Meet Rawdah Mohamed: First hijab-wearing editor at 'Vogue'

Rawdah Mohamed, a 29-year-old model, behavior analyst and mother from Somalia, had become the first hijab-wearing fashion editor of Vogue's Scandinavia issue. Her presence within the world of fashion signals an uplifting shift within the industry.

Fleeing from the Somali civil war, Mohamed grew up within a refugee camp in Kenya before moving to Norway with her family when she was nine years old. Her move to

Europe marked the beginning of her experience of religious and racial persecution shaped through years of stereotypical perceptions of her religion. During her school years, Mohamed was bullied by her peers who

subjected their taunts and assaults towards her headscarf. When the situation arose to an unavoidable level, her teachers at school decided that the only solution was for Mohamed to stop wearing her hijab.

Mohamed's achievement of becoming a fashion editor of Vogue shimmers a hopeful light, suggesting a more diverse and equal environment within the fashion industry. She addresses the idea of 'tokenism', the idea that she was hired based on the diverse value of her external presence. Speaking to The Times, she shared, "There's a lot of tokenism in fashion – you're hired because you tick, say, the Asian box. But one of the things that made me comfortable in this interview process was they knew how I styled and what fashion meant to

me and the things that I tried to express through my clothing."

She added, "It wasn't just like, 'Oh yay, she's hijabi and black!' It was one of the first times



I felt I wasn't there just for decoration, but for what I had to say."

On her social media, Mohamed has spoken about such incidents where she felt her agency to govern her

own body and space was threatened. "Their solution was that I shouldn't wear the hijab to school. Sitting in a room full of adults discussing my body and what I could and couldn't wear as a young girl left more scarring than the bullying itself," she said. Her early experiences are evident in shaping her activism today, and the hopes with which she enters the world of fashion. She said: 'When I washed my hands, everyone gathered to see if my colour was coming off.' The Muslim veil or hijab has been instrumentalized as a symbol of oppression on a global scale. Mohamed works to dispel such tendencies, actively seeking to voice her opinion. In April she took to her Insta-gram page and began the trending 'Hands Off My Hijab' hashtag, aiming to

discredit the French ban on the Muslim veil, which she defined as a “hateful rhetoric coming from the highest level of government” within her caption.

Within the same post, she discusses her experiences of being bullied and rejected based on her hijab. Her activism is also demonstrated through her daily posts in which she beautifully pairs street wear with her headscarf, challenging western notions of beauty and aesthetics. “I strongly believe the only antidote to hate crime is activism. Many governments have been on the wrong side of liberation and equality before”, Mohamed explains in her post. The intricate relationship between the body and identity plays a pivotal role in today’s world. With the existence of various bodies of power, and the ways in which certain discourses gain momentum enough to become norms, certain bodies are automatically denied a holistic identity. Female bodies, especially those emerging from minority cultures and religions, are often forced to alter their appearance and existence in order to promote the world order and all the hierarchical categorisations that come with it. The Muslim headscarf remains a highly debated article, even though the debates rarely seem to promote the voices of the women who wear them. In a world where rules concerning female bodies and dressing are decided upon by more powerful groups, the idea of a woman like Mohamed working for Vogue, which is considered the fashion bible of the world, is a necessary step towards a fairer and more equitable future. In an interview, the model expresses her appreciation for her position, “Vogue Scandinavia has taken the diversity issue to the next step, meaning creating [a] work environment where people of different backgrounds are being valued.”

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2314683/-meet-rawdah-mohamed-first-hijab-wearing-editor-at-vogue>

Say goodbye to closed access group calls on WhatsApp



WhatsApp is rolling out a new feature to make conference calls much easier and smoother for users. The new feature ensures no one misses a group call again by allowing users to join video calls even after they have already begun. Head of Facebook Will Cathcart took to Twitter to announce the exciting new update. The feature was much-requested by many users who expressed anxiety on spontaneous group calls that had to be accepted or rejected upon receiving the call. WhatsApp is aiming to make communications easier and user friendly as the pandemic is increasing distances. Joinable calls will reduce the stress of answering a group call as it starts and gives people the choice of when to join. Joinable calls will allow you to become a part of the conversation at any time you wish. You can also drop off or re-join so long as the call is still ongoing. A call info screen will allow you to see who is already in the call or is invited but hasn’t joined. You can even join group calls later from the CALLS tab in the App. Simple select join and you’ll be part of the group call. The feature is all set to roll out on July 19 and is available on Android phones running version 4.1 or newer.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/866396-say-goodbye-to-closed-access-group-calls-on-whatsapp>

More and More Islamic Countries Monitor Friday Sermons to Prevent Extremism

Friday sermons have been a powerful platform for disseminating Islamic knowledge and forming public opinion and imams and Khateeb (preachers) have used this platform for educating and guiding Muslims on important issues in every age. Since the Friday prayers attract a large population of Muslims in the locality, the imams and preachers find this opportunity to deliver important messages of larger public interests.

However, many imams and preachers with political affiliations and sectarian bias also started using Friday sermons for their petty political or sectarian purposes. Speeches full of sectarian hatred or inciting Muslims against popular elected governments were also delivered in many Muslim countries. Some extremist preachers also supported extremist organisations. After the emergence of the ISIS, many preachers openly supported or glorified the ISIS as the flag bearers of caliphate. This caused chaos and violence in many Islamic countries. As Friday sermons became more and more problematic for the governments and the society, the respective governments felt the need to monitor the sermons and reign in 'firebrand' preachers.

This need was felt more after the emergence of the ISIS as preachers affiliated to hardline Islamic organisations supported the ISIS and encouraged youth to join it. In 2014, Jordan was one of the countries that was the first to decide to monitor the Friday sermons because the ISIS was gaining ground in the country due to the support of some Salafi preachers.

The Islamic Affairs Ministry told the preachers and imams to preach moderate Islam in their Friday sermons and warned them of strict action if they violated the order. The minister told them to deliver the sermon only for 15 minutes citing the example of the holy

prophet pbuh whose sermons were short and concise. Not only that, the ministry even suggested the preacher's topics for Friday sermons. Here are some of the topics:

1. Security and Stability: the need for unity in a time of crisis
2. The Hijra New Year: Lessons derived from the prophet's flight from Mecca
3. The beginning of the rainy season--- safety measures in preparation of winter.

In 2016, Bangladesh government also decided to monitor the Friday sermons after a number of terror attacks particularly attacks on a bakery took place allegedly by the ISIS and some attackers acknowledged that they were influenced by the speeches of Dr Zakir Naik.

In Bangladesh, preachers often deliver sermons that incite extremism or spread sectarian hatred. This prompted the government to control the Friday sermons in 300,000 mosques across the country. The Islamic Foundation, an institution of the Bangladesh government decided to send pre-written texts to the preachers before the prayers. They were instructed to deliver sermons against terrorism and extremism in order to prevent the spread of extremist ideas among the youth.

In 2018, the government of Pakistan also took a similar decision. Since a section of the imams and preachers of Pakistan subscribing to sectarian and extremist ideology often deliver incendiary speeches inciting hatred and violence, the National Counter-terrorism Authority imposed restrictions on Friday sermons delivered by preachers and imams. The government suggested 44 subjects on which preachers could deliver Friday sermons. However, the preachers said they will co-operate with the government but

would not accept any written script.

In 2016, Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowment imposed similar restrictions on imams of mosques. Imams were directed to read identical sermons on suggested topics to prevent terrorism and extremism. The ministry will set themes for Friday sermons. For example, one theme was:

"Importance of redeveloping squatter settlements and helping the poor"

Though monitoring Friday sermons is not new in most of the Gulf States like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt as the kingdoms and Emirates want to suppress dissent, other democratic countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh had to implement such restrictions because the preachers had made the pulpit a platform to spread sectarian and extremist ideas which were promoting extremist ideologies. In principle, the government should not dictate imams what to say and what not to as they have the knowledge of Shariah but the imams also should realise that the pulpit should not be used for sectarian or political purposes. In May this year, a preacher named Ameer Hamza was arrested for inciting violence and glorifying militants. Another preacher of Pakistan Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri who openly supported the killing of Salman Taseer and glorified Mumtaz Qadri was banned from preaching in Pakistan but he was invited to the UK to deliver sermons in some mosques.

Such extremist preachers spread hatred and incite the Muslim youth to revolt against the democratic governments and encourage them to join extremist organisations. Therefore, the governments of Islamic countries had to form mechanism to monitor the Friday sermons delivered from the pulpit.

<https://www.newageislam.com/radical-islamism-jihad/sermon-friday-extremism/d/125164>

Facebook gears up to launch digital wallet this year



WASHINGTON: Facebook is gearing up to launch a digital wallet — Novi — that would let users store cryptocurrencies, a senior company executive said on Wednesday. David Marcus, head of Facebook's crypto unit, in an interview said that company leaders "feel pretty committed" to launch the digital wallet called Novi this year. Marcus said he would have preferred to release Novi alongside Diem, a digital currency tied to the dollar that the company is also developing, but Diem's timing was uncertain. "In theory, Novi could launch before Diem, but it would mean launching without Diem and that's not necessarily something that we want to do," Marcus told The Information. "It all depends on how long it's going to take for Diem to actually go live and that is not something I am personally looking after." In 2019 Facebook said it plans to introduce a cryptocurrency that at the time was called Libra. The project however faced regulatory resistance over concerns about security and reliability. In December 2020 the Libra changed its name to Diem and moved its operations from Switzerland to the United States as part of a "strategic shift."

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/883504-facebook-gears-up-to-launch-digital-wallet-this-year>

US mosque denied shipment of religious tiles due to sanctions on Iran

By: Matthew Barakat

MANASSAS, Virginia (AP) — A US mosque in northern Virginia is asking the Biden administration to release a set of religious tiles that were confiscated at Dulles International Airport after they were deemed to violate sanctions on Iran. At a news conference Tuesday at the Manassas Mosque, Imam Abolfazl Nahidian said the custom-made tiles were shipped in June from the Iranian city of Qom, to be used in the construction of a new mosque a few miles away. He said the tiles were a gift and he paid no money for them, but a Customs and Border Protection officer at the airport blocked the mosque from claiming the tiles, citing the sanctions. Nahidian said he has received other tile shipments throughout the years without incident, including one shipment that arrived eight months ago. A letter from Customs and Border Protection informed the mosque that the tile must be shipped back to Iran or destroyed.

Destroying the tiles, which are adorned with Quranic verses, would be especially disturbing, Nahidian said. "Destroying the tiles is the same as destroying verses of the Quran, or the whole Quran itself," he said. Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said that whatever one's views are of the Iranian sanctions, it makes no sense to enforce the rules on a benign piece of religious art. "They are not weapons of mass destruction," Awad said. "We believe the government should have common sense." A spokesperson for Customs and Border Protection confirmed that the tiles were placed on hold on June 21 and that on June 30, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control determined that, under the sanctions imposed on Iran, the tiles could not be imported. The spokesperson said no final determination has been made on the tiles' disposition. The Treasury Department



Abolfazl Nahidian, of the Manassas Mosque in Manassas, Virginia, after a press conference in which he and other Muslim leaders asked the Biden administration to release a set of religious tiles that have been confiscated because the shipment was considered a violation of US sanctions on Iran, August 10, 2021. (AP Photo/Matt Barakat)

declined to comment Tuesday. Speakers at Tuesday's news conference suggested that anti-Islam sentiment may be responsible for the confiscation. "If this were a statue of the Virgin Mary, would we be here discussing this?" asked Rafi Uddin Ahmed, president of the Muslim Association of Virginia. Nahidian has led the mosque for nearly three decades, and has occasionally drawn scrutiny from critics who say he is anti-Israel and was a supporter of the ayatollahs in the Iranian Revolution. He has blamed the September 11 attack on Israel; in 1979, he and others chained themselves to the railings of the Statue of Liberty after climbing to the top and unfurling banners criticizing the shah of Iran, who was overthrown. Nahidian said his history is irrelevant to whether the tiles should be imported.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-mosque-denied-shipment-of-religious-tiles-due-to-sanctions-on-iran/>

India: Sikh man donates land for mosque in Punjab

By: Harun Nasrullah

A Sikh man donated his land to construct a mosque in the newly formed Malerkotla district in the Indian state of Punjab. While in the Moga district, Sikhs opened the doors of the local gurdwara on June 13 to help Muslims organise the foundation stone laying ceremony of a mosque nearby. Bhaloor village councillor in Moga district, Pala Singh, said that when Muslim villagers had gathered to lay the foundation stone to rebuild the century-old dilapidated mosque, “it started raining, Muslims from the village approached Gurdwara Sri Satsang Sahib. There, they held the foundation stone laying ceremony.”

The villagers gathered within minutes and made all the necessary arrangements, including langar, and also raised funds to the tune of Rs 2 lakh [over £1,900] on this occasion,” Pala Singh told The Wire.

“We had been planning to reconstruct this mosque since 2008. This was an abandoned area, and we were also facing a shortage of funds, but with the help of villagers, we will now be able to construct it,” said Anwar Khan, one of the villagers who attended the ceremony.

Muslims from Malerkotla have been organising langar [the community kitchen of a gurdwara] at the Singhu border since the farmers’ protest started on November 26, 2020. A large number of Muslims from Punjab, Haryana and Delhi had also participated in the ‘tractor parade’ on January 26 in Delhi in solidarity with Sikh protestors.

At Jitwal Kalan village in Malerkotla district, farmer Jagmel Singh donated his ancestral land to seven Muslim families for the



construction of a mosque. Jagmel’s family are long-time friends of Roshan Khan’s family.

“Around a year ago, we promised to donate our land to Muslims for the mosque. But, as the country was under lockdown last year, the project was delayed. They had been planning to buy land for some time, but when I got to know about this, I spoke to my family to donate our ancestral land, and they readily agreed,” said Kalan.

Kalan is glad that the move has brought heart-warming responses from people across Punjab and abroad. “Within days, the photos and videos were shared on social media, and I have been flooded with calls. My family feels blessed that the Almighty chose us to perform this task and serve humanity,” he said.

“I am friends with Sikhs and Hindus, both. Our lives are short, what will we gain by fighting? Religion has already created enough division, we should stop fighting,” said Kalan’s long-time Muslim friend Roshan Khan.

<https://muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/world-news/punjab-sikh-man-donates-land-mosque/>

Learning From History and Own Experience

One of the principal characteristics of a super-power is its ability to alter the behaviour of nations or a particular nation, in order to ensure the successful pursuit of its regional and global ambitions. The US after 9/11 launched a major offensive named 'Operation Enduring Freedom' against the Taliban forces as Mullah Omar refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to them and by virtue of its military might was able to easily overthrow the Taliban regime. And during the last twenty years, the US made massive investment along with its Nato allies to raise equip and train the 300,000-strong Afghan army to support the quasi-democratic government in Afghanistan and counter militant forces. But in reality, as the situation unfolded the Afghan army melted away without giving a fight and the government of Ashraf Ghani is all set to be replaced by a Taliban-led government which seems to enjoy support largely in the rural areas.

US interventions in different countries are well remembered more for their failures than successes. The pictures of US forces withdrawing from Vietnam in April 1975 still remain a memorable but tragic chapter of history. Despite the death and destruction that characterised the military adventure in Vietnam it failed to break the will of the Vietcong. During 1960s Cuba too under Fidel Castro and successive regimes have resisted US domination despite having to pay a heavy price. The irony is that generally countries such as Iran or Venezuela — where the US has brazenly intervened militarily or pressurised these through economic strangulation and strategic isolation for refusing to accept its dictates — have turned inwards and further tightened



The writer is a retired lieutenant general of the Pakistan Army and a former federal secretary. He has also served as chairman of the Pakistan Ordnance Factories Board

their hold on their people. So, it is essentially the people of these countries that are its worst sufferers and not the regimes per se. Pakistan too had a taste of US sanctions, not once but frequently, and here too our experience was that the thrust of the punitive measures was borne by the masses. Another aspect of it is that it generates ill will against the superpower and facilitates the challenger, be it China or Russia, to make inroads. A similar pattern is emerging in Afghanistan with China in the lead, and Russia, Iran and Pakistan likely to facilitate the regime's acceptance followed by its recognition. For China, having good relations with the Afghan government is vital for the BRI programme. Besides, China is obviously not concerned about promoting democracy for it considers it to be an internal matter. A recent example of this was witnessed when Beijing rushed to assist Myanmar's military-led government when the Western countries had imposed strict sanctions for overthrowing an elected government. The US and Western countries too although

keep harping on democracy and human rights are selective in pressing for its adherence. Pakistan has experienced this duality of approach frequently since its very inception. Gen Ziaul Haq was a pariah until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Similarly, Gen Pervez Musharraf was treated with disdain until 9/11 when Pakistan sided with the US against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. One cannot forget those humiliating moments when Bill Clinton addressed the Pakistani nation on our television network in which he mostly sermonised while making sure that Musharraf is kept out. And as soon as 9/11 occurred, Musharraf's fortune changed. These were some of the turns and twists of history that are firmly etched in our memories and are common knowledge. These examples only confirm that if a nation has to change course for the betterment of its people it is not a foreign country even be it a superpower that can alter the direction or transform its destiny. History also bears witness that when outside powers have intervened, the process of positive change from within has not only been delayed but distorted. And as mentioned earlier, countries like Cuba and Iran turned inwards retarding their political and economic progress. In Syria, President Assad — fearing a regime change sponsored by the US and Western countries — has further tightened his grip on its people and increased their suffering beyond measure. Moreover, the people having suffered due to sanctions bear lasting grudge against the US. For example, in my country I have seldom heard any one blaming the government for inviting sanctions. It is always the US or the West that imposes it, however justified from their perspective these sanctions might be.

42 Of course, this is not to acknowledge that sanctions have worked occasionally and helped the country by improving governance for the betterment of its people. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), by placing Paki-

stan on its grey list, although troubling and one-sided, did force the government to take more effective measures against money laundering, leading to terror financing that led to investigating and prosecuting leaders involved in these activities.

Historical experience shows democratic nations that are accountable to their people are today leading the world in economic and social progress. They are also in the forefront in the race for technological and scientific progress. For these nations, education and health of their people have always been the highest priority. China too, although not a democracy, but only when it accorded the highest priority to education and cared for its people that it was able to make phenomenal progress. Learning from our own checkered past and from the successes and failures of others we need a similar focus. Even the PM whose efforts for a Green Pakistan are laudable should also be accompanied by sermons for an educated and healthy Pakistan. Green Pakistan will not be achievable until the people have a level of education that makes them realise the fallout from global warming on their lives, and successive governments address the curse of poverty that drives them to cut trees to cook their meals.

Our young political leadership has reached the top by virtue of inheritance rather than struggle. More the reason for them to establish their credibility by formulating and implementing policies that break the shackles of poverty and ignorance of our teeming millions.

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<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2316962/learning-from-history-and-own-experience>

Ironies of a war of revenge

By: **Zahid Hussain**



AMONG the many ironies of the US war in Afghanistan was the instance when Hamid Karzai in December 2001 came very close to an agreement that provided for the Afghan Taliban to surrender and would have allowed Mullah Omar to “live in dignity”. Karzai, who was launched in Afghanistan by the CIA, was operating clandestinely in Kandahar and had just been nominated as interim president. A deal with the Taliban leadership would have ended the war much quicker and could possibly even have brought reconcilable elements of the Taliban into the new power arrangement. But that never happened. As the negotiations reached the final stages, the US intervened and stopped Karzai from making any deal with the Taliban leadership. The Bush administration rejected any negotiated end of the situation. That led to America fighting its longest war.

In an ironical twist of fate 20 years later, the Taliban are engaged in negotiations with Karzai from a position of power after triumphantly returning to Kabul. The Islamic movement is now seeking the former president's support for the new rule. More interestingly, the main negotiator from the Taliban side is Anas Haqqani, one of the leaders of the notorious Haqqani network, the most feared of the insurgent factions, which is still on the US list of terrorist groups.

The younger brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the deputy chief of the Taliban, he spent several years in a death cell before being released two years ago when Americans were desperately seeking an exit from the ‘forever war’. He was a member of the Taliban team negotiating with the Afghan government in Doha.

That also saw the rise on the Taliban leadership ladder of the 26-year-old scion of the late Jalaluddin Haqqani.

The war was already lost when the US sat across the table with the same insurgents it had sought to annihilate.

A former mujahideen commander, Jalaluddin Haqqani had strong ties with the CIA and ISI during the anti-Soviet war in the 1980s. President Ronald Reagan had declared him a ‘freedom fighter’. Just before the invasion of Afghanistan, he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Taliban forces. Its links with Al Qaeda, and its influence on both sides of the Durand Line made the network the most formidable militant force. Given the influence of the Haqqanis in the region, the US wanted to weave the group out of both Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Jalaluddin rejected the US offer to cooperate. But the CIA continued its efforts to prise the group away from the Taliban. In late 2002, US soldiers arrested Ibrahim Haqqani, a brother of Jalaluddin, in eastern Afghanistan on a tip-off by rival tribesmen, pre-empting the CIA's efforts to establish contact with the Haqqani network.

There was some indication at the time that the Haqqanis had shown some willingness to negotiate with Afghan president Hamid Karzai's new coalition government in 2002. However, the capture of a key member of the group ended the possibility of any reconciliation with the Haqqani group that would haunt the US forces for the next two decades. The group turned into its most fierce opponent. Sirajuddin Haqqani effectively took over the command of the network as his father was

sidelined because of prolonged illness. The younger Haqqani earned a reputation of being the fiercest insurgent commander. His radical worldview was shaped by his personal ties with Al Qaeda and international jihadist groups, in contrast to the other members of the Taliban leadership council who did not share Al Qaeda's global agenda.

The Haqqanis turned North Waziristan into their base that became a major cause of tension between Washington and Islamabad. Former US top military commander Admiral Mullen once described the Haqqani network as the "veritable arm of the ISI". The network was blamed for some of the most lethal attacks in Kabul targeting foreign missions. The Americans put a \$10 million bounty on Sirajuddin's head. In 2018, the network was put on the terrorist list.

But in yet another twist of fate, Sirajuddin, who was then appointed deputy emir of the Taliban, played an important role in the peace talks with the United States in Doha. Just before the February 2020 Doha agreement that paved the exit of the American forces from Afghanistan The New York Times published an op-ed piece by Sirajuddin. Read: Who are the Haqqanis, Afghanistan's most feared insurgents?

Enlisted by the United States as one of the most wanted terrorists, the Taliban deputy chief appeared extremely rational in that well-crafted write-up in America's most respected newspaper. He said all the right things that they wanted to hear. He seemed to favour giving women full rights including the right to work and access to education. He also wanted the US to contribute to Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Still under a UN travel sanction Sirajuddin may not have surfaced in Kabul as yet, but the high profile of the Haqqani network in the

new dispensation cannot be missed. Besides Anas, his uncle Khalilur Rehman Haqqani has also been very active in the negotiations with other Afghan leaders.

Successive US administrations rejected any negotiated political settlement with the insurgents and believed that the war could be won militarily until a few years ago when Washington engaged in structured peace talks with the Taliban leadership in Doha.

It was the time when America was at its weakest, losing control of large swaths of Afghanistan. The war was already lost when the US sat across the negotiating table with the same insurgent leaders who it had sought to annihilate. Some of the Taliban delegates were former inmates of the infamous Guantanamo prison.

The 2020 Doha agreement was described as a document of surrender by many observers. It was obvious that America was in a hurry to exit a war that it could never have won despite its military might. The American exit from Afghanistan has probably been more chaotic than its leaving Vietnam.

One wonders whether the war, which was driven by revenge, could have taken any other course. Yet the conflict has left Afghanistan in a far greater mess. The human cost of the war has been massive. But this is how imperial wars are fought. Zalmay Khalilzad's remark after the signing of the Doha agreement is very profound: "We must remember the lessons of history, and the darkness of conflict."

The writer is the author of No-Win War — The Paradox of US-Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow.

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