



POLITICS

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More fossil fuels equal more losses and damages — Catherine Abreu

51 per cent

is the increase in terrorist violence in Pakistan between Aug 15, 2021 and Aug 14, 2022

ENTERTAINMENT

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It is not often Baloch musicians get a platform — Naeem Dilpul

41,000

entries were sent to Cannes by Pakistani TikTok creators

Economy above politics

In an exclusive interview, former finance minister Miftah Ismail shares his thoughts on Pakistan's economic future, how the country can stave off default and how it can return to the path of growth



BY SHEHARYAR ALI

As the year 2022 comes to an end and the country welcomes a new year with hope, the prognosis for Pakistan's economy seems bleak. While the government at various levels has tried to allay concerns pertaining to the likelihood of default, economic experts and observers continue to warn against worst case scenarios while exhorting concerned stakeholders to join hands for the country's best interests.

In an exclusive interview, former finance minister Miftah Ismail shares his thoughts on the country's economic future, sharing suggestions for leaders to steer Pakistan towards the path of growth and progress.

SA: Many observers and experts have been ringing alarm bells that Pakistan is dangerously close to default. According to them, all indicators are pointing in this direction. What can a country that ends up defaulting expect? How could such a situation affect the common citizen? If a country does default, how long would it need to recover from such a crisis?

MI: Default is a very negative situation for a country. It occurs when a country finds itself unable to pay back the debt it owes. That is what is meant by default.

The common citizen is directly affected by default or a default-like situation because such a scenario brings about a shortage or no supply at all of imported commodities. For Pakistan and many other nations, these commodities include things like petrol, cooking oil and many food items, among others.

If Pakistan does default, God forbid – which, I believe can be avoided – it would take six months at the minimum to recover. What would happen if such a thing happens to pass is that we will have to go back to the International Monetary Fund and other lenders, and will have to request them that we will pay any amount due to them this year in the year that follows. We would also have to request them to reschedule any other future payments Pakistan owes.

SA: The public was given the impression that the

“ If Pakistan does default, God forbid – which, I believe can be avoided – it would take six months at the minimum to recover. What would happen if such a thing happens to pass is that we will have to go back to the International Monetary Fund and other lenders, and will have to request them that we will pay any amount due to them this year in the year that follows



government of Imran Khan was incompetent and that its policies were ill planned, but what about the Pakistan Democratic Movement? Have things not gone from bad to worse under the watch of the incumbent PDM government?

MI: To answer this question, we need to look back into the country's recent past when then finance minister of the PTI government, Shaukat Tareen, presented a very expansionary budget in June 2021. A lot of unneeded tax cuts and relief were given in the budget, which began to exhaust our reserves.

Tareen also delayed the agreement with the IMF. Although it was eventually agreed to in November 2021, the deal was once derailed by February the following year. This was when Pakistan's default rating started to climb. And who can forget the famous \$1.5 billion subsidy Imran Khan announced for fuel and electricity at the end of February 2022.

When the PDM government took charge, we had to increase the gas and electricity tariffs, which the PTI government had subsidised. These subsidies were placing a huge burden on Pakistan's economy. We had to increase the prices for fuel because the country was buying it from the international market at an expensive rate. Our economy was not in a position to subsidise the fuel.

All of these steps were taken at the cost of our political mileage, but these same steps eventually helped us reach the agreement with the IMF. We showed that Pakistan comes first and that our political priorities should always be second.

SA: If we suppose that Imran Khan sabotaged or derailed the IMF deal at the start of 2022, what about status of the agreement under the current finance minister? Why is the IMF review currently hanging? Is Finance Minister Ishaq Dar trying to salvage political mileage for his party by refusing to accept the demands of the IMF?

MI: We cannot compare Ishaq Dar with Imran Khan. It is like comparing the one who brought us on the verge of default with the ones who averted it. Imran Khan and his populist policies were responsible for bringing about this critical situation – of Pakistan being on the verge of default. The PDM, on the other hand, managed to avert it by agreeing to compromise its popularity and vote bank.

I do not believe that there is any harm in doing politics per se. There is always a margin for it and politics is what a politician is supposed to do. But yes, when the nation is facing tough situations, the national interest should be placed above everything else. In this, I hold a firm belief.

SA: The recent unprecedented monsoon and the subsequent floods ravaged many of our food crops. At the same time, we also have import curbs imposed on the country. Should we foresee a crisis pertaining to the supply of food and other essential commodities in Pakistan?

MI: Food items are being imported and there is not going to be a shortage of wheat or rice in the country. Yes, the rice crop was somewhat destroyed by the rains and floods

in Sindh. But the rice fields of southern Punjab remained safe. Pakistan rice production remains good enough and the country will also manage to export this crop.

SA: Pakistan's textile sector, which accounts for the largest number of exports from the country, is also dependent on imported yarn due to insufficient cotton production locally. Much of the cotton crop was destroyed in the devastating floods as well. Do you believe our textile sector will be able to compete in the global market if it continues to rely on imported raw material?

MI: I do not think this is big problem. While we are definitely forced to import raw material, our textile industry is capable of generating four to five times the value from the products manufactured using it. Thus there is no imbalance.

SA: What can the government and other stakeholders do to increase Pakistan's exports?

MI: There should be a proper strategy for export promotion and we should reject import substitution. Just ensuring a proper supply of electricity and gas to the industry at the competitive rates that the governments of India or Bangladesh are offering along with keeping Pakistan's currency at its realistic value will yield results in the export sector in the coming years.

SA: Is there any sector that government should focus for export promotion?

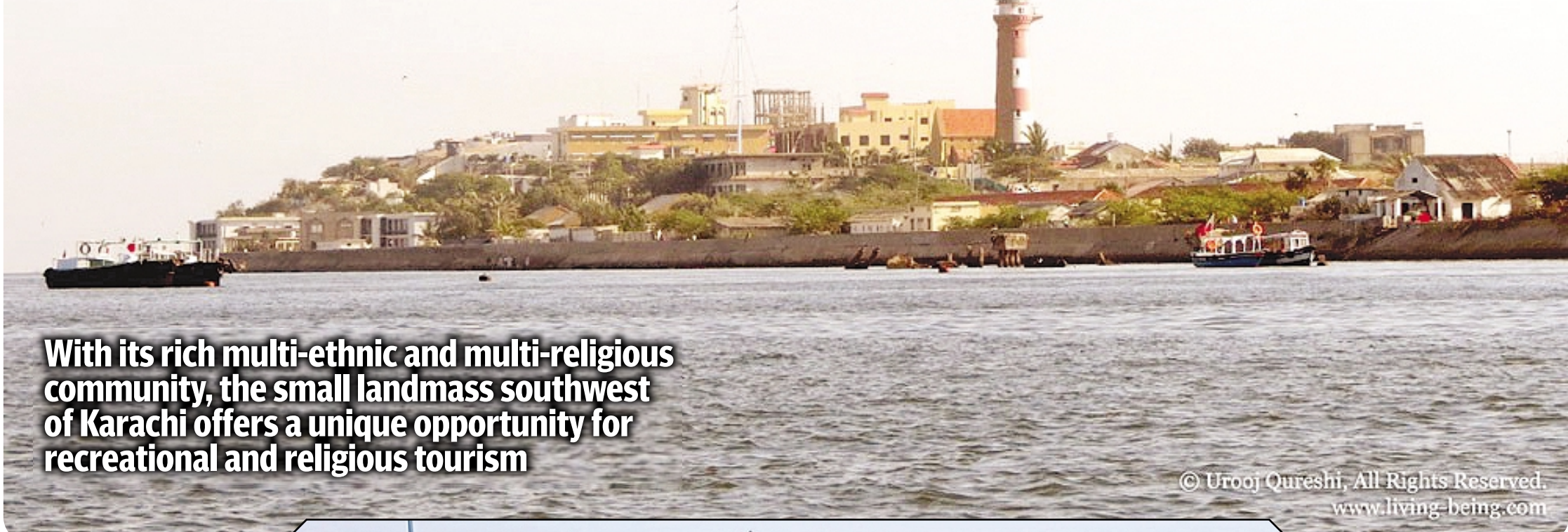
MI: No, this is not the job of the government. Just provide our industries with electricity, gas and security, and things will eventually get better. Provide Pakistan's youth good education and you will also see our IT exports increasing.

For information technology, let me be clear, Pakistan lacks trained youth in the field of IT. I have written about this too that when India in the 1950s was opening Indian institutes of technology, Pakistan had sent home seven prime ministers. We should focus on building institutes at the same level as the IITs and gradually we will have similar opportunities in this field too.

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MANORA — A LIVING MANIFESTATION OF DIVERSITY



With its rich multi-ethnic and multi-religious community, the small landmass southwest of Karachi offers a unique opportunity for recreational and religious tourism

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By SARAH ATHER KHAN

Manora has a long lineage of human habitation, having attracted a variety of cultures and civilizations that have left their mark, as evidenced by the island's tangible and intangible heritages. Manora is a small landmass lying southwest of Karachi, and it enjoys a rich ecological, physical, cultural, and religious history.

Manora's pluralistic fabric is a rich blend of multiethnic communities speaking Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, Pashtu, Kokani, and Urdu. This multiethnicity is the consequence of a number of reasons, including the diverse ethnic admissions to the Karachi Port Trust (KPT), people who chose to remain in Manora after their term was ended, and the local fishing community, which makes up the majority of the Sindhi and Balochi populations in the area.

Presently, the culture of the island is visibly split; only a very small portion of the population can be considered as "locals". Most of the island is dominated by security agency personnel recruited locally, along with a culture of official control and discipline. However, the locals still cherish and practise a shared culture of respect, security, privacy, social trust, and peacefulness that has been long prevailing on this island.

The multi-religious community of Manora, which includes Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, is a good example of how different religious communities can live in peace with one another. The 2.5 square-kilometre peninsula has a variety of religious places, and holy festivals of every religion are held here with great fervour and enthusiasm, strengthening its multi-religious fabric. The three most significant festivals observed here are Christmas, Urs of Shah Ghazi, and Diwali.

The site for Diwali celebration is Shri Varun Dey Mandir, a Hindu temple owned by the Pakistan Hindu Council. The Varun temple contains two other shrines, one to Jhule Lal and the other to Shiva. Jhule Lal is believed to be an incarnation of Varun and is usually represented sitting cross legged on a lotus, balanced on a palla (fish) swimming in



the Indus River. Varuna is a Hindu god who represents water and is thought to watch out for the safety of fisherman at sea. The temple is one of the island's most significant historical landmarks. Worshipers of the temple bow to their Lord as they cross the waves, showing how highly they esteem the structure. Due to the puja (worship) that is held there on the full moon dates of every month, and the two main Hindu religious holidays, Diwali and Holi, the temple becomes a key destination for religious tourists.

The thousand-year-old shrine of Yousuf Shah Ghazi is the principal magnet for believers who have spiritual attachment with the Sufi saint. The shrine is visited via boats by many people—irrespective of age, religion, caste, and colour—throughout the year. But the annua urs is the time when there are thousands of devotees visiting the island. Between the 12th and the 19th of Rabi-ul-Awal, the Urs of Baba Yousuf Shah Ghazi is grandly observed with great religious fervour, and meals are provided at the langar for everyone, regardless of faith, caste, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Two churches on this island are reminiscent of the British colonialism. One of the oldest churches is St Paul's; it is a Protestant community Church and was constructed in 1864. The other is Sir Anthony's Church, a Roman Catholic Church; its foundation stone was placed in

1921. For the celebration of their significant religious celebrations of Christmas, and Easter, the Christian community is drawn to these historic landmark religious locations.

Manora offers a unique opportunity for recreational and religious tourism. For a long time, Manora has been favoured by local and foreign tourists for its brown sandy beaches and clear blue skies, major attractions of recreational tourism that provide opportunities for rejuvenation far from the chaotic and urban Karachi. Due to the prevalence of the old belief of crossing sea to ward off evil spirits, historically, Manora has been a popular spot for removal of spells and witchcraft.

Another reason for Manora's robust diversity is its governance. KPT, the Cantonment Board of Manora, and Pakistan Navy are the three most significant stakeholders governing Manora. They oversee providing, managing, and maintaining public services and social and physical infrastructure within their respective domains of influence. This fractionalization, however, has resulted in the fragmented development of the island; it is devoid of a comprehensive integrated plan.

The Karachi Coastal Comprehensive Development Zone (KCCDZ), Diamond Bar Island, and Sugarland City Karachi Waterfront were among the proposals made in the past for and surrounding the areas

of the Manora Island. The KCCDZ project calls for building of three artificial islands by reclamation of land in the nearby seas; it will be situated in the backwater area on the west embankment of the KPT. KCCDZ was initially planned in 2001, and it has since been updated in 2022 to exclude the Machar Colony's four hundred acres from the plan. An ultra-modern urban infrastructure zone, residential redevelopment to raise local living standards, integration of industries like IT, fashion, and media, improvement of marine ecosystem, and a significant amount of potential for foreign investors are part of this \$3.1 billion redevelopment project proposed on 1,581 acres.

The Karachi Waterfront Sugar Land City was proposed in 2005–2006, suggesting a development of world class infrastructure and amenities on 60,000 acres at Hawk's Bay Sadnsipit area and Manora ridge, turning the island into a tourist resort with a water sports arena on the shore. The concept featured residential, commercial, recreational, and entertainment facilities, as well as special economic zones, with the goal of creating a hub for trading, manufacturing, and services industries.

In 2006, plans for the Diamond Bar Island, which would have included 12,000 acres of the Bandal, Buddo, and Manora Islands, were suggested. The project included residential villas and apartments,

hotels, shopping malls, office buildings, and business centres, in addition to a golf course, clinics, schools, technical colleges, universities, a marina, theme parks, resorts, and co-generation facilities. Highway bridges with six to eight lanes would connect Karachi with the imagined Diamond Bar Island City.

The multi-million-dollar proposals attest to the fact that this area possess a huge potential for development and is therefore attracting foreign investors. However, they are examples of large-scale, high rise, high end, modern, gentrified development that pose a risk to fisherman communities, local populations, historical buildings, and visual and cultural identity of Manora. They are also a huge threat to Karachi, exposing her to natural disasters due to deforestation of mangroves.

Recently, a few small-scale initiatives have been implemented in Manora to aid in the promotion of tourism. These spot interventions, without any comprehensive planning, are attracting and facilitating thousands of day-trippers to Manora beachfront, but inevitably are also contributing to problems like stress to limited resources, environmental deterioration, overcrowding, and congestion.

The Manora Island is a gateway to Pakistan's main economic hub, a home to three naval bases and a cantonment area. Due to its close proximity with the port and nation-

al security concerns it cannot be fully developed as a tourist destination despite its rich cultural, religious, ecological, and physical diversity. Planning for Manora, generally and specifically for tourism, revolves around two key questions: How much tourism? And how?

Lack of tourism planning in any area often causes threat to pristine environments, irreversible damage to cultural and heritage, and over-exploitation of natural resources, to name a few drawbacks. The peninsula calls for an integrated plan, made with collaboration of all local and administrative stakeholders, with a concern for its ecological and social cultural assets.

According to Arif Hasan, one of Pakistan's leading architects, activists, social researchers, and writers, urban development must be based on certain principles of sustainability, equity, and justice; it must respect the ecology, with land use determined on the basis of social and environmental considerations; it must give priority to the needs of the local population; and, most importantly, it must respect and promote the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the communities.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz, one of Pakistan's leading architectural designers, prioritizes the qualitative qualities of people over the quantitative effects of growth while making plans for human settlements. He advocates that inclusiveness, prosperity, and wellbeing of local stakeholders should be among the guiding principles of planning, along with economy based on need rather than greed, sustainability, and conservation of history and values.

Planning for Manora should take into account the island's cultural, historical, religious, and ecological diversity, capacity for tourism development should be evaluated in the physical-ecological, socio-demographic, and political-economic domains to safeguard the island from the detrimental effects of unplanned and unregulated tourism development.

Sarah Ather Khan is a freelance contributor and an assistant professor the NED University Architecture Department. All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

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SA: The government is burdened with so many loss-making departments. Would privatisation be a good option for government to ease its burden?

MI: Governments are not supposed to sell petrol or run airlines. These entities or corporations should be sold to the private sector. Not only these, but electricity supply companies, including transmission companies, should be privatised regardless of whether they are turning a profit or running into loss. It will relieve the government from a great burden.

SA: Do you think our agriculture sector needs any sort of overhaul? Should we focus on increasing the yield of our crops using new technology and techniques such as those used in India and China?

MI: The government can support the agriculture sector with cheap supply of gas, subsidised fertilizer but other than that, what we lack is the availability of genetically modified organism seeds.

If farmers are provided with modern seeds and agriculture extension training, we will start to see results in the field of agriculture. I do not compare our agriculture sector with China but we can compare it with India since both the countries have

similar weather. If India can yield one maund (40 kilogrammes) of wheat from a single acre, why are we only yielding 32 kilogrammes from the same size of land.

Similarly we can also increase productivity of the cotton crop by adopting modern methods in the field of agriculture. Let me conclude this by saying that India has bigger land and that we should not do a complete comparison. But we can compare the province of Punjab in both countries in term of crop production on both sides.

SA: Why has the government failed to control inflation despite imposing a higher interest rate of 16 per cent?

MI: Prices of essential commodities are at an all time high globally. Increasing interest rates is one way to control inflation but on the other hand the government is focusing on providing relief to the lower income or less-privileged strata through the Benazir Income Support Programme. The government disbursed Rs70 billion for those affected by the floods as well. These are the measures taken by the government to minimise the affects of inflation on the less-privileged segments of Pakistani society.

SA: Why have we failed to in-

crease Pakistan's tax base? Why is it always the salaried class that bears the brunt over other income groups in the country?

MI: I absolutely agree that Pakistan's tax base should be widened. For example, there are 2.2 million retailers or shop owners in the country but only 30,000 of them are paying taxes. There is no harm in bringing these shop owners into the tax base as it cannot be only the salaried class that pays taxes in the country. Therefore, the tax base should be widened to increase revenue.

SA: Why do people prefer investing in real estate instead of investing in manufacturing and export industry, etc, in Pakistan?

MI: In the recent past, we did see a boom after PTI government provided amnesty and relief to the real estate sectors. Meanwhile, if you are setting up a manufacturing industry, you will be burdened with so many questions and compliances from various government departments, provision of utility services, labour related issues and heavy taxations. If you choose to park your wealth in buying a plot, you are going to have no such issues. And yes, it is the easiest way to get rich in Pakistan.

SA: What is the way forward for

Pakistan's economy? What are your basic suggestions for the country to progress?

MI: It is very simple and no rocket science. If our exports of \$31 billion and remittances of \$30 billion amount to collective \$61 billion of foreign inflows, why can we not keep our import bill under this figure instead of running it up to \$80 billion.

In a way, it is as simple as running your household or a factory, but why can the government of Pakistan not understand that we cannot continue to borrow money for our deficits. Some day those lending us money will eventually either refuse to loan us more or put forward strict conditions on lending. Pakistan simply needs to start living within its means or income.

Privatisation, as I said before, is a must otherwise the burdens on the state will continue to multiply. Other than this, the government should prioritise birth control in the country. Last but not least, the children of this country should be provided with the best opportunities for education and this is a great responsibility on the part of government. Provision of education to every child will automatically set Pakistan's course on the right track for the future.

SA: If we draw a comparison between the economies and

spending of Pakistan and India, including the defence budget of both countries, we see a huge disparity. Would initiating trade relations between the two neighbours not bring mutual benefit?

MI: At the moment, I see India as a bigger reason behind whatever tensions or problems persist between India and Pakistan at the moment. Or you can also say India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is that reason. His politics has always revolved around stoking and exploiting anti-Muslim sentiment. Two thousand people died in the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat and the Indian Supreme Court failed to provide justice to Muslims in this regard.

Even if we put aside the issue of Kashmir and the oppression against Kashmiri Muslims, people are being killed in a state like UP for eating beef. Narendra Modi's anti-Pakistan agenda is basically an extension of his anti-Islamic rhetoric. He needs to show his voters that he is anti-Muslim and anti-Islam, and so, he must express his for Pakistan as well.

Another element in this regard is how in Pakistan, political parties do not get any votes for using anti-India rhetoric. In India, however, a large number of votes can be gained by abusing Pakistan. So, as long as Modi continues to

lead India, peace between the two countries will be very difficult.

If we opt for peace believing Pakistan to be a weaker side in contrast, it is going to be a very uneven, unsustainable peace. So, it is better to remain hostile neighbors for another 10 years as we have been for past 70 years instead of unequal treatment in the name of peace.

SA: As a former finance minister and a politician, how do you feel when you hear about the brain drain from Pakistan?

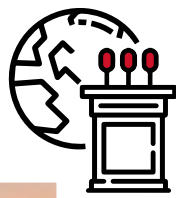
MI: Yes, it is a phenomenon and people who are eligible do opt for better opportunities in foreign lands, including educational scholarships. What is going to be left behind if our qualified youth will leave the country? But, if things get better in Pakistan, this issue will be resolve itself.

SA: What do you think about the future of leadership in Pakistan?

MI: Pakistan has never had any vacuum of leadership in the country. In 1970s we had Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Later Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif emerged as leaders and then we saw Imran Khan's entry into the nation's politics.

Sheharyar Ali is a freelance journalist. All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

Cover: Mohsin Alam



CLIMATE TALKS, ALARM BELLS AND HOLLOW VICTORIES

While COP27 concluded last month with a landmark agreement to create a loss and damage fund for vulnerable nations, a prominent climate expert explains why the summit continued a legacy of failure by not winning a pledge on reducing fossil fuel use

By **HAMMAD SARFRAZ**

The UN climate talks, known as COP27, concluded last month with what has been hailed as a landmark agreement to create a fund to aid vulnerable nations harmed by climate change. While poor countries have every reason to celebrate the promise of financial compensation to deal with the brutal consequences of climate change that they are barely responsible for, the COP 27 ended without moving the needle on the emissions pledges – the central stalemate that has haunted these conferences.

Since the conference, experts have raised several questions over the rhetorical performances, proposals, and promises that usually emerge after every meeting of this nature. Not too long ago, COP26 was presented to the world as a ‘make or break’ moment for humanity. Alok Sharma, the conference president, termed the gathering as ‘our last best hope’. He wasn’t alone on the list of performers who came across as hyperbolic; Charles, now King of the United Kingdom and the 14 other Commonwealth realms, called the summit ‘the last-chance saloon’.

One year on, we are where we were, struggling to reduce the use of fossil fuels – the primary cause of current climate change – that has significantly altered the Earth’s ecosystems.

Ironically, a month before the COP27 talks in Egypt, the UN cautioned that without reducing emissions by 45 per cent, humanity was on a spiral of self-destruction. In its annual edition of the Emissions Gap Report, the body stated that the “global community was falling far short of the goals set in Paris, with no credible pathway to 1.5°C in place.”

According to the 132-page document, the updated national pledges since COP26 – held in 2021 in Glasgow, UK – make a negligible difference to predicted 2030 emis-

To learn more about the recent climate talks, the Express Tribune contacted Catherine Abreu, director of the non-profit Destination Zero, which calls for an end to fossil fuel use. According to the award-winning Ottawa-based expert on climate policy, the recent UN climate talks failed to acknowledge the cause of climate change and continued to focus on the consequences. “We saw that this COP continued a legacy of failure of COPs to acknowledge the cause of climate change which is the production and combustion of fossil fuels,” Abreu said by email.

Despite the harm caused due to the production and combustion of fossil fuels, the world seems to have an insatiable appetite for coal. According to a report released by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Paris-based energy watchdog, the global use of coal is expected to set new records as the conflict in Ukraine and growing demand in India and Europe push consumption of the fuel to new highs. In Europe alone, consumption of coal is expected to increase this year for the second year in a row due to the reduction in gas supplies from Moscow in the wake of the Ukraine war. According to the IEA’s report, three of the world’s biggest coal producers India, China and Indonesia will create new records by the end of this year.

Empty promises

According to experts, this trend flies in the face of promises made at last year’s climate talks, where more than 190 countries pledged to reduce the use of coal to rein in emissions. Even at last month’s COP27, despite apparent support from the United States, language emphasizing the need to not just phase down but phase out the use of fossil fuels was scuttled by Russia, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

Describing the outcome as unbalanced, Abreu said: “More fossil fuels equal more losses and dam-

next COP that is to be held in the United Arab Emirates, Abreu, who has served as the Executive Director of Climate Action Network, Canada’s primary network of organizations working on climate change and energy issues said: “I think eliminating the cause of climate change which is fossil fuels, will be the big battle heading into COP28 and will likely be a conversation that continues to characterize these talks for years to come. What we saw in Sharm El-Sheikh was a real reckoning and an attempt to wrestle this process into something that can deliver meaningful practical results and that’s why countries are pushing for this process to go into the nitty gritty details on the causes and consequences of climate change.”

“It’s not until we see the process achieving that balance of being able to address both sides of the problem that we’ll get to a place where it is delivering that implementation space that countries so desperately need to cooperate on delivering their Paris agreement commitments,” she added.

Last month’s climate conference

But for developing nations, COP27 offered a glimmer of hope – the creation of the loss and damage fund, something they have struggled for decades. On this, Abreu had a very straightforward assessment: “There is nothing yet that developing countries can count on beyond the idea that a loss and damage fund will be created.”

The real money, she said, hasn’t been placed on the table yet. “So, for developing countries to be able to count on this process they need to see real money being delivered. Unfortunately, we have seen a long history of financial commitments made under this process being walked back from or long delayed, in particular the 100-billion-dollar pledge from Copenhagen that hasn’t yet been delivered.”

“So, the big question now is will real money be put on the table for loss and damage that developing countries can count on as they move forward dealing with multiple compounding crises and attempting to meet their countries’ energy access needs and develop-

climate-related disasters than before.

According to UN estimates, the ongoing degradation of the ecosystem would cost a whopping \$3tn every year by the end of this decade. “The loss of nature and biodiversity comes with a steep human cost – a cost we measure in lost jobs, hunger, disease and deaths,” UN chief António Guterres cautioned in a speech this week. Taking an aim at governments and companies, Guterres urged both sectors to move away from nature-destroying activities.

Commenting on the fund created to compensate countries for the damages caused by climate change, Abreu said: “Any one fund is not going to be able to deal with the multiple compounding crises that countries and communities around the world are dealing with and we need a fundamental reconfiguration of our financial infrastructure in order deal with those multiple compounding crises, find solutions and provides support to those who are experiencing the biggest impacts from those crises.”

the loss and damage agreement – as vague and toothless in a recent New York Times article. “It represents a remarkable step forward following decades of desperate advocacy by the world’s climate-vulnerable countries and decades of indifference exhibited by the world’s historic polluters,” David wrote.

Other experts have termed the agreement as an escape route for developed nations, allowing them to abdicate their main responsibility, which is to focus on lowering emissions to prevent climate change.

Describing the agreement as a huge win for vulnerable countries who had been asking for the UN climate talks to acknowledge the true consequences of climate change which are losses and damages for three decades, Abreu said: “It is true, however, that the details of what the loss and damage fund is going to look like, how it will operate, who will be able to access it, what kinds of support it will offer, how much support it will offer, what kinds of conditions countries will have to meet in order to access that support – all of these questions are up in the air.”

The language and ambiguity, the Ottawa-based expert noted, would become a major source of contention and need for negotiations in the year ahead.

“The COP agreements are always a consensus-based document. So, yes there’s often constructive ambiguity that is built into the language of these agreements in order to achieve consensus and leave the door open for further negotiations and positioning,” she explained.

What’s in store for the future?

According to data from the Global Carbon Project, a coalition of international climate science bodies, carbon dioxide emissions are expected to rise 1 per cent, crossing the 37bn mark this year. And the highest increases, Global Carbon Project said, will come from India and the US. Both countries have set net zero targets but no coal commitment, according to data published by the IEA, the Paris-based energy watchdog.

Similarly, according to projections from Climate Action Tracker, an independent research group, which rates countries’ climate finance pledges, every rich nation’s funding promises are inadequate. That coupled with the changing geopolitical landscape, the climate agenda, many experts believe is expected to face tough days ahead.

Photos: Agencies



sions and that the world appeared far from the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C. And yet, despite the huge ramifications, the recent climate talks failed to deliver on reducing emissions and limiting global warming to agreed temperature thresholds.

ages and while we a fund has been set to address those damages, we don’t yet have the UN climate talks putting forward mechanisms to mitigate the mounting losses and damages and the costs associated with them by eliminating the cause of climate change which is fossil fuels.”

When asked to comment on the

was always going to be a struggle, experts had no doubts about that. The ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict that has resulted in an energy crisis, simultaneously triggered global inflation, food shortages and all of this was never expected to mean well global climate agenda and the uphill task of reducing emissions.

ment goals without further expanding fossil fuel.”

Can funds cope with the demand?

The climate crisis is unfolding at a greater pace than expected. Given the rise in consumption of fossil fuels, and the decarbonisation strategy being sidelined by some, the chances are that the world will witness more

COP27 – the agreement

Most experts view the agreement reached in Egypt last month as vague on all key points: who will cough up the cash for the fund and who will receive it.

David Wallace-Wells, an American journalist known for his writings on climate change, described



TTP TERROR REDUX

STORY BY : NAVEED HUSSAIN DESIGN BY : IBRAHIM YAHYA | MOHSIN ALAM

Years of vacillating between appeasement and use of force towards the TTP has brought Pakistan back to square one. As the terror outfit ramps up terror activities in the country after tearing up a ceasefire that it never really honoured, the country finds itself with difficult options to strike back

The TTP terror redux is here. But shall we call it a “redux”? Did the TTP ever call off its terror campaign in Pakistan? No, it did not. A ceasefire it publicly tore up in November had already been violated countless times by the group since its announcement in June 2022. The government wouldn’t say it publicly, perhaps to maintain an illusion of peace in the country. The ceasefire collapse, or its formal announcement by the TTP – to put it correctly – was the final nail in the coffin for the latest peace initiative brokered by Afghanistan’s new Taliban rulers. It wasn’t the first time the government engaged the TTP in negotiations. It had tried multiple times in the past, but every time the result was the same.

What’s wrong with our counter-TTP strategy?
In one word: ambivalence.

The government approach vacillated between appeasement and use of force until December 2014 when the TTP carried out the most sickening attack in its bloody campaign at Army Public School in Peshawar. This was the decisive moment in Pakistan’s battle against homegrown terror. It united the nation against the TTP. All political parties sat together to produce what is now known as National Action Plan (NAP), a 20-point comprehensive strategy for a coordinated national effort to eliminate terrorism. Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which was already underway in the Waziristan region, was expedited and expanded to other areas along the Afghan border to destroy TTP’s de facto rule there. An in-sync nationwide effort was also initiated to deoxygenate religious extremists’ narrative by introducing a set of policy reforms. The aim was concrete, verifiable and irreversible gains against terrorism and violent extremism. Monitoring committees were formed at the federal and provincial levels to oversee NAP’s implementation. The subsequent Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad tried to eliminate the “residual/latent threat of terrorism” and consolidate the gains made in the earlier military operations.

The military’s kinetic operations were a success. Beaten, battered, and bruised, but not broken, the TTP and its affiliates fled across the border into Afghanistan to recuperate and regroup in safe havens there.

NAP started napping and our priorities shifted elsewhere as the TTP violence ebbed.

Paradoxically, while the TTP was officially branded as the biggest threat to the state of Pakistan, its mother-ship in Afghanistan was treated as a “strategic asset” for the achievement of foreign policy objectives in a fissiparous country notorious for its fluid political loyalties. To expect anything good from the Afghan Taliban, the source of TTP’s inspiration, simply defied explanation, but our strategists were blinded by their obsession with India’s growing influence on the West-backed Afghan rulers.

On August 18, 2021, the Pakistani strategists made no secret of their glee when an Indian military plane, carrying the country’s diplomats, took off from an Afghan air base, temporarily ending Delhi’s diplomatic presence in Afghanistan which officials in Islamabad frequently blamed for stoking terrorism in Pakistan.

The Taliban’s rapid victory march, the dramatic escape of President Ashraf Ghani, the chaotic exit of foreign forces, and the fall of

Pakistan

GTI RANK
10

GTI S
7.8

Total deaths since 2007



Deaths by group



“The National Counter-Terrorism Authority said in a report last month that the TTP used the peace process to regroup and reorganize. “The TTP, during peace process, gained considerable ground; increased its footprint and magnitude of activities,” it stated.

Kabul were touted as success of our Afghan strategy. And to prove it, Pakistan’s then spy chief, Lt Gen (retd) Faiz Hameed, made a euphoric dash to Kabul to reassure a disconcerted world, “Don’t worry, everything will be okay,” and then prime minister, Imran Khan, praised the Afghans for “breaking the shackles of slavery”.

The euphoria proved short-lived. Dozens of TTP commanders and fighters were released from Afghan prisons after the fall of Kabul. The Taliban victory rejuvenated the TTP and offered it greater operational freedom in Afghanistan. An upsurge in TTP attacks followed. Unofficial data show a 51% increase in terrorist violence between August 15, 2021, and August 14, 2022. At least 433 people were killed and 719 injured in 250 attacks across Pakistan, according to a tally maintained by Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies. There were 165 attacks that killed 294 people and injured 598 from August 2020 to August 14, 2021.

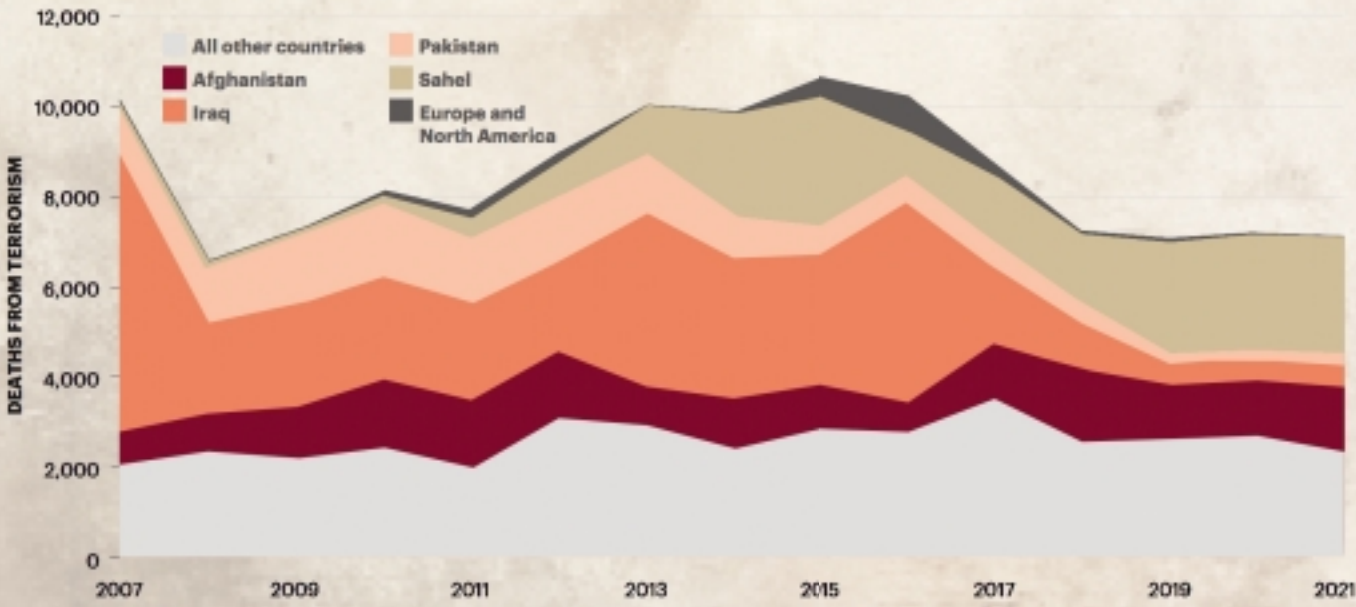
Pakistani officials were surprisingly unperturbed. At the time, a top security official tried to downplay the uptick in the TTP attacks during a background briefing. He sought to reassure the audience that the fresh wave of TTP terror would subside within “four to five months”, saying that the new Afghan rulers should be given time to establish their writ.

The Taliban regime was non-committal on a crackdown on the TTP despite repeated calls from Pakistani officials. Instead Sirajuddin Haqqani, the interior minister in the interim Taliban regime, offered to broker peace negotiations between the two sides. Pakistan accepted the offer despite bitter experiences of the past when the group used negotiations as a ruse to regroup and reenergize. Lt Gen (retd) Faiz Hameed, then corps commander Peshawar, oversaw the negotiations, which also involved Pakistani tribal elders. It was a bad idea to have direct talks with the TTP because a state actor was obliged to sit across the table with a non-state armed group giving it legitimacy. Months of behind-the-scenes negotiations hosted by Haqqani pulled a breakthrough in June. Those privy to the talks say too much was conceded to the TTP in return for a shaky ceasefire risking the country’s antiterrorism gains, just because the overseer wanted to have another feather in his cap.

Subsequently, TTP fighters reemerged in border regions of Pakistan, particularly in Swat, to test water. The common perception was that the TTP’s return had a tacit approval of the authorities. Targeted attacks on tribal elders and politicians, extortion, and even kidnapping of security officials started as TTP terrorists sought to set up a de facto reign in the region. However, local residents rose up against the return of the TTP scourge. Massive protests were staged in major cities of Swat, saying no to efforts to reestablish the regressive group as a legitimate part of the re-

Deaths from terrorism, 2007–2021

Total deaths have decreased 33.5 per cent from their peak in 2015.



Source: Dragonfly TerrorismTracker, IEP calculations



gion which it once subjected to a reign of terror.

A month after the truce, al Qaeda chief Aymen Al-Zawahiri was killed in a US drone strike in an exclusive Kabul neighbourhood. Taliban's defence minister Mullah Yaqoob pointed finger at Pakistan, laying bare tensions between the two neighbours. "According to our information the drones are entering through Pakistan to Afghanistan, they use Pakistan's airspace, we ask Pakistan, don't use your airspace against us," Yaqoob told a news conference. Islamabad denied the charge. The friction led to an unannounced end to the Haqqani-brokered peace initiative as the Taliban sought to leverage their influence over the TTP to pile up pressure on Pakistan over the Zawahiri strike.

Towards the end of August, five TTP senior commanders, including the group's founding member Abdul Wali, alias Omar Khalid Khorasani, and intelligence chief Abdul Rashid, alias Uqabi Bajauri, were killed in targeted attacks in Afghanistan. The TTP blamed Pakistan's security agencies and resumed sporadic attacks on Pakistani security agencies on the pretext of "retaliation" without publicly scrapping the ceasefire. By its own admission, the group carried out nearly 60 attacks in November alone.

The peace initiative was rendered as good as dead, especially after the transfer of Faiz Hameed and preoccupation of Haqqani with a resurgent IS-Khorasan. Frustrated by the persisting stalemate on its key demands, the TTP publicly scrapped the ceasefire and timed it with a top Pakistani delegation's visit to Kabul towards the end of November. A fresh wave of deadly terrorist attacks has followed, triggering talk of another military operation. "The situation in parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the tribal districts, has deteriorated to the extent that a major military offensive cannot be ruled out," an official said late last month.

So, we are back to square one.

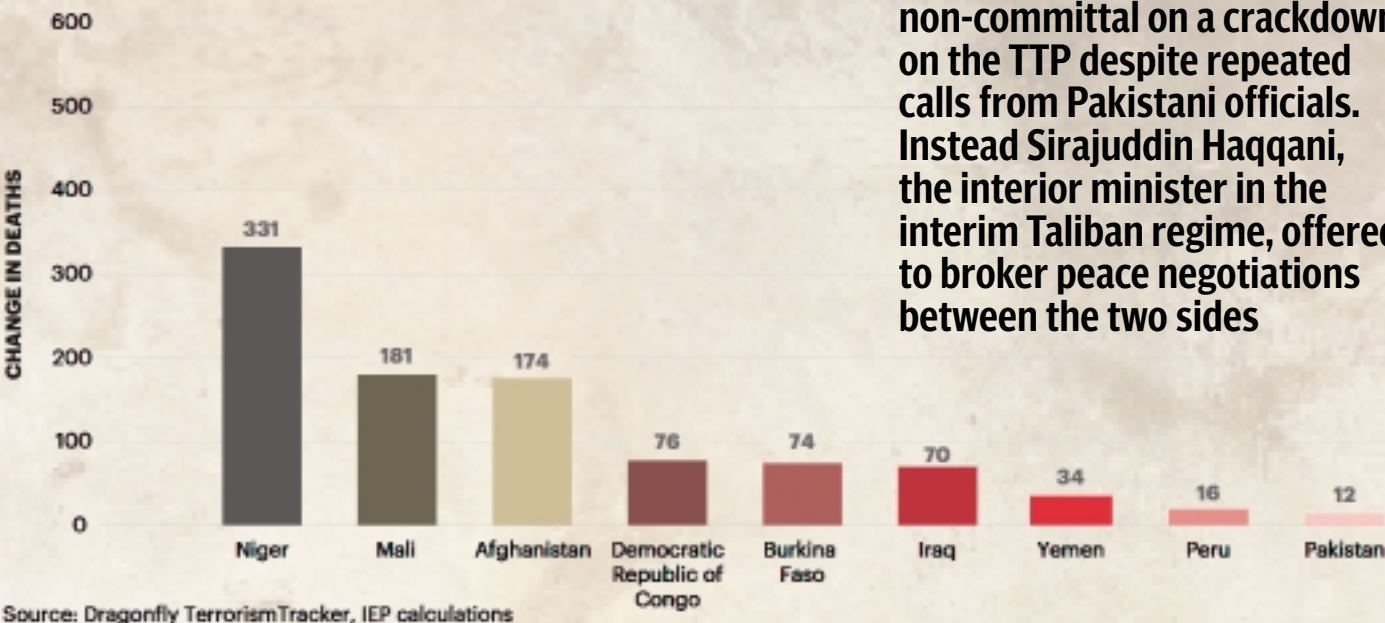
The National Counter-Terrorism Authority (Nacta) said in a recent report that the TTP used the peace process to regroup and reorganize. "The TTP, during the peace process, gained considerable ground; increased its footprint and magnitude of activities," it stated. "The withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan gave impetus to TTP activities with its base [still] intact in Afghanistan." Ironically, nobody is willing to take ownership of the moribund peace initiative. The incumbent coalition government blames its predecessor, especially Imran Khan, for starting "negotiations with those who martyred our schoolchildren at APS". But Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said in June that the parliament had authorized the military to hold talks with the TTP. A day later, a senior politician of a government ally disputed Sanaullah's claim saying that the military had briefed a parliamentary panel on talks that were already underway. "No permission was sought by the military from parliament for holding talks with the TTP," PPP's Raza Rabbani said.

Is a negotiated settlement possible?

Probably not.

The group's core demands are akin to the state's capitulation. Its refusal to disarm and disband and its insistence on reversal of ex-FATA's merger with K-P snitch on its sinister plans to establish

Largest increases in deaths from terrorism, 2020–2021



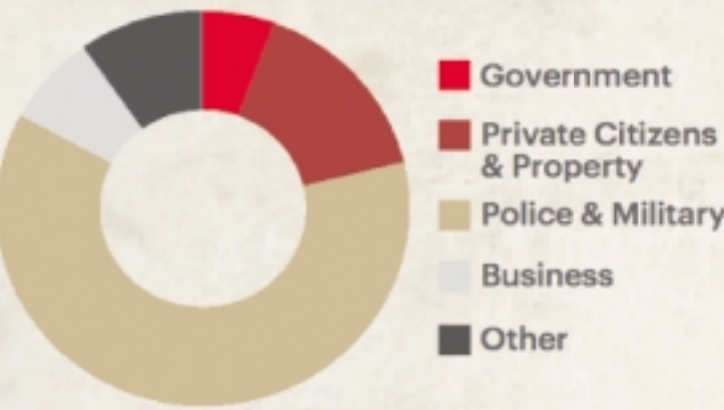
“ The Taliban regime was non-committal on a crackdown on the TTP despite repeated calls from Pakistani officials. Instead Sirajuddin Haqqani, the interior minister in the interim Taliban regime, offered to broker peace negotiations between the two sides

AT LEAST 433

people were killed in 250 attacks across Pakistan between August 15 last year and August 14 this year, according to a tally maintained by Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies. Another 719 people were injured in these incidents of violence as well. The figures represent a 51 per cent increase over the violence recorded between August 2020 and August 2021

CORE
825
275 DEAD
469 INJURED
186 INCIDENTS

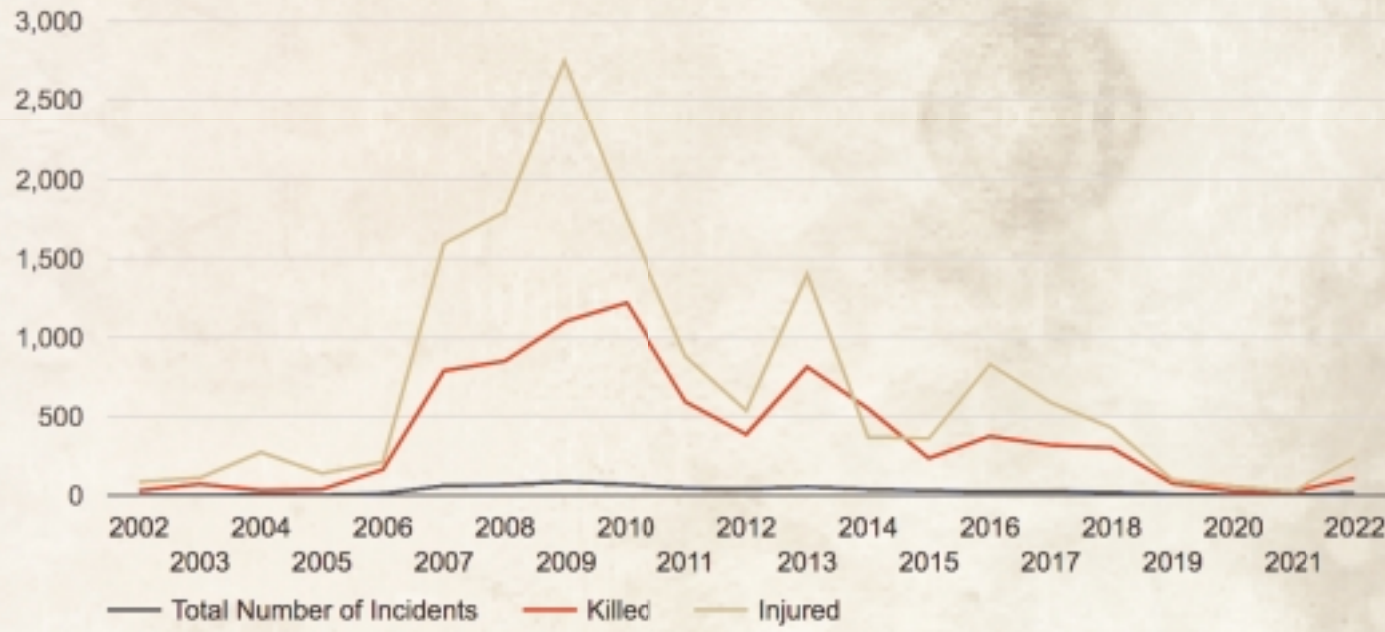
Attacks by target



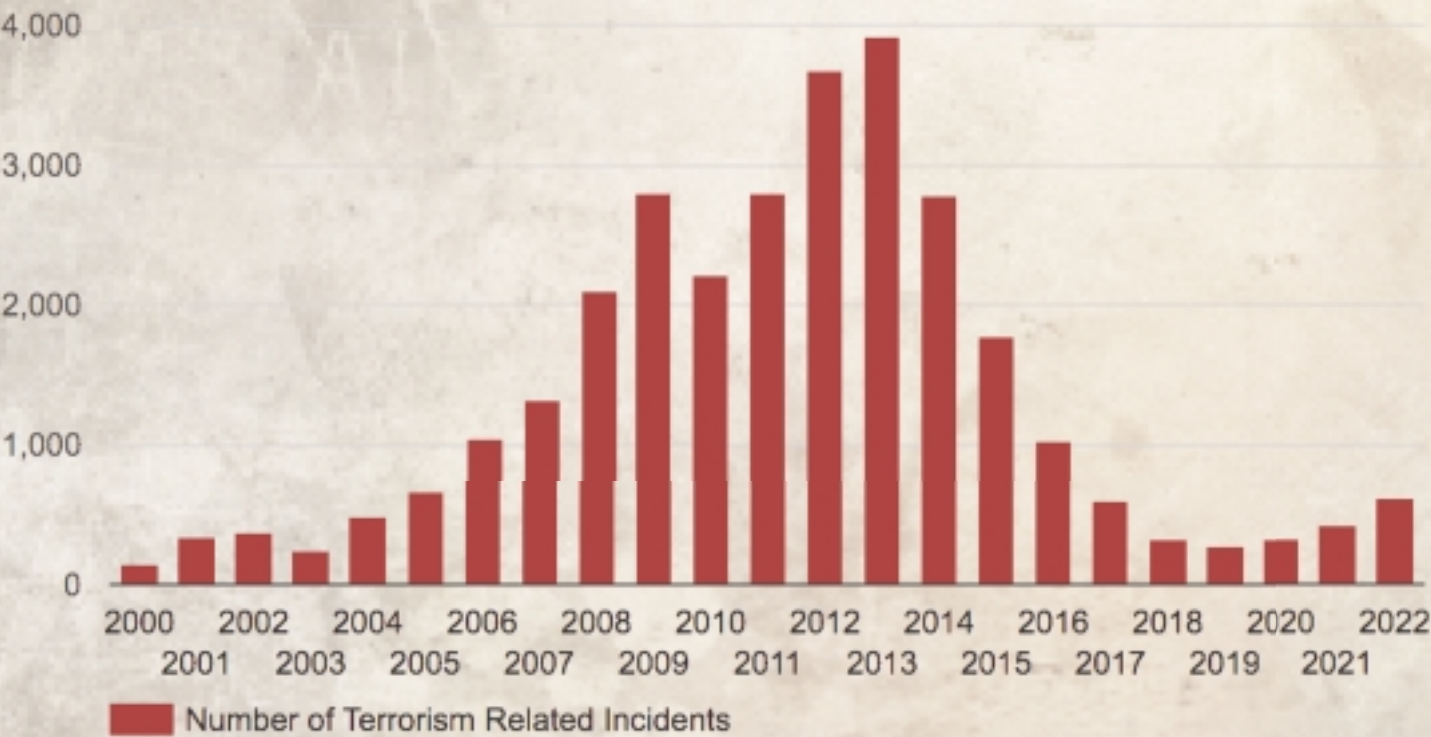
a mini "Emirate" and gradually export its regressive ideology to the rest of Pakistan. The Taliban's victory has strengthened the TTP's belief that it is doable, especially at a time when Pakistan is politically volatile and economically fragile. The group also knows that its fighters now enjoy de facto political asylum in Afghanistan where the Taliban are firmly ensconced.

The Taliban regime has no incentives to crack down on the TTP. They would never like to alienate and antagonize their former "brothers-in-arms" which, it fears, could trigger defections to the rival IS-Khorasan, create splits within their own ranks, and endanger their ideological affinity and ethnic amity with people in Pakistan's border regions who they have always fallen back

Yearly Suicide attacks



Number of terrorism related incidents year wise



TTP amnesty for its crimes against humanity and integrating it as a legitimate actor of society.

The resumption of hostilities by the TTP has pushed the government back to the drawing-board to recalibrate its strategy. There are reports that the government might be considering the use of military force to stem the tide of TTP violence. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has already dropped a broad hint. "As far as the TTP [safe haven] is concerned, it's absolutely our red line, it is something that we will not tolerate... we would be willing to consider each and every single option to ensure the safety and security of our own people," he said on his recent visit to the US.

“ The resumption of hostilities by the TTP has pushed the government back to the drawing-board to recalibrate its strategy. There are reports that the government might be considering the use of military force to stem the TTP violence

The United States has already offered to help Pakistan deal with a resurgent TTP and secure the border. "We are concerned by the threats posed by Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan to Pakistani security and stability. During my visit to the GHQ, we discussed opportunities to address this threat," CENTCOM commander General Michael E Kurilla said during his visit to Islamabad in Dec.

However, the nature of any "major military operation" by Pakistan is unclear because the TTP doesn't have visible organized presence anywhere in the erstwhile tribal belt that it once virtually ruled. And this is amply clear from the demand by TTP terrorists during the recent CTD Bannu siege for a "safe-passage" into Afghanistan. TTP's safe haven is across the border. Will the military carry out cross-border actions against TTP targets using manned or unmanned aircraft?

A cross-border military action wouldn't be unprecedented. In April 2022, Pakistan did launch airstrikes against TTP targets in the eastern Afghan provinces of Khost and Kunar which also caused some civilian casualties. But this option would have disastrous pitfalls. It would set a dangerous precedent for other regional countries that accuse each other of harbouring terrorists. It could also damage Pakistan-Taliban relations beyond repair because the last strike had triggered a seething response from Kabul with Zabihullah Mujahid calling it "a cruelty" that would pave the "way for enmity between Afghanistan and Pakistan." He warned that Islamabad "should know if a war starts it will not be in the interest of any side."

Cross-border military strikes would also rejuvenate anti-Pakistan sentiments, marginalize pragmatists in the Taliban ranks, and increase support for the TTP in Afghanistan. And accepting US help for counter-TTP operations inside Afghanistan might exacerbate the Pakistan-Taliban mistrust to the point of no-return because the theocratic regime would take it as a repeat of the post-9/11 "betrayal" by Pakistan.



BALOCH MUSIC THROUGH HISTORY AND TIME

As contemporary Baloch singers and musicians continue to work on fusions and experiment with Balochi music, this ancient art form has seen an evolution in the last decade or so

By SOMAIYAH HAFEEZ

For the longest time, I remember being in awe of my mother as she would recite Balochi poetry in a tone that was wrapped in a warm blanket of nostalgia. I couldn't understand most of it because of the richness of the language, yet the melancholy was able to pierce my heart and keep me engaged, as I would interrupt her to explain the meanings.

Over the years, I became more interested in Balochi music and reclaiming my lost identity. I realised that what my mother sang in her sing-song voice was the original Balochi music form called zahirol (which literally translates into "a melancholic song or a song of separation"). Zaheerag forms the musical structure of traditional Balochi music.

In his detailed essay on Balochi music, titled "The Musical Base of Baloch Minstrelsy", Dr Sabir Badal Khan, a professor and researcher, writes that "Zahirol is both a genre of song expressing loss or absence (especially of distant loved ones) and a general term for several melody types used in narrative song performance" and that "Janmahmad, a Baloch writer from Dasht in Makran, maintains that "the entire Balochi musical structure is based on zaheerag."

Balochi music is an ancient and evolving art. In the last decade or so, the art form has seen an evolution as contemporary Baloch singers and musicians have been working on fusions and experimenting with the art.

Naeem Dilpul, a civil servant by profession and singer by passion, found music to be cathartic, since childhood. "Singing was my natural way of expression and of releasing any tensions," he says. "Whatever I felt, I expressed it through singing and composing without even knowing what I was doing."

Dilpul grew up listening to Noor Khan Bezanjo, Shaukat Safer and Arif Baloch — some of the giants of Balochi music during his childhood and to date. As a child, Dilpul wanted to be a singer, but as he grew older he realised that this wasn't possible.

"During childhood you have desires and dreams but as you grow up, you are faced with a social reality and limitations," he says. "The only reason why I didn't pursue music as a full-time career was because it doesn't give you an income in our society, because singers are limited to per-

forming in functions.

Dilpul went on to do different things in his life but the passion remained. As a Balochi language enthusiast, he did his MPhil in linguistics and it would bother him to see that people around him weren't as interested in Balochi music as he thought they should be. He wanted to engage them in Balochi music.

"I did not like the trends and compositions that were going into music at the time," he recalls. "I always questioned them. Perhaps it was an urge to deviate so I studied music of different cultures and how they evolve."

Dilpul released his first song called Arz-e-Kaana [The Plea] in 2018. The song came as a fresh breath of air in the Balochi music industry. An individual product and with no platform backing it, Arz-e-Kaana had the touch of Balochi folk music as well as contemporary music. Both its melody and beat were new. Written, sung and composed by Dilpul, with visuals of the breathtakingly majestic mountains of Balochistan in the back drop as Ahmed Baloch, a Baloch Khatak dancer performs daringly. Arz-e-Kaana leaves the listener touched and in reverie of a longing.

"For me it was a passionate decision to make Arz-e-Kaana and when it became a hit, it inspired other artists to try something new on their own. It also push me to continue making music on the side as I had initially thought of only doing one song," says Dilpul who believes that if he wasn't a civil servant he wouldn't have been able to pursue his passion. "Now mostly artists are making music through self-investment," he explains. "Having a platform is a big thing and it is not often Baloch musicians get a platform."

To understand the evolution of Balochi music, one has to know a little about its history. According to Ishaq Raheem, president of the Balochi Music Promoter Society, which was formed in 2018, Balochi music characterised by zaheerag and sung by pahlawan (Balochi term for singer of classical poetry; minstrel) dates back to the 15th century. This mostly included the narrations of historical events.

Another mode of music was folk music. As per Dilpul, the first Baloch singer to fuse pahlawan style music and folk music was Faiz Mohammad Baloch, who received the Pride of Performance by the President of Pakistan in 1979.



"He changed night long performances into 5-8 minute songs. After him Sabzal Sami sang Balochi zahirol, otherwise hard to sing," says Dilpul. In one way or the other, the melody was evolving but the sound system and sound engineering remained stagnant and almost non-existent. Dilpul explains that a significant change came with Nooral Muhammad Nooral, who started singing verses of literary poets like Syed Zahoor Hashmi and Atta Shad, connecting such as music with literature. "Nooral's sound system was improved as he had exposure in Dubai.

After Nooral, the era of Noor Khan Bezanjo and Arif Baloch began. Both of their music seemed similar because they had the same music director," says Dilpul.

Suroz, tamburag, banjo and kuzag (a large earthenware water jar that is filled with water to generate sounds as it is hit) are some traditional Balochi musical instruments. Music has remained an indispensable part of Baloch culture. Sipat is a music form that Baloch women sing for seven nights in a row when a child is born. Nazenk is another form of folk music that is sung in Balochi weddings as songs of praise for the bride or bridegroom.

Many Baloch artists have been emerging in the wider public

old, but says that the duo was instead inclined towards listening to Western music. As they grew up and fell in love with poetry, they moved towards Balochi folk music and ghazals.

"We would listen to Faiz Muhammad Baloch and Jadok Baloch, who lived in Lyari during their lifetime," recalls Baloch. "There were some Omani Baloch bands too that we listened to but their music was different to what we were consuming here. Our field of vision expanded and we too became passionate to explore different genres and experiment with music."

The musical duo focusses on the storytelling perspective of music as they are trained filmmakers.

"We worked on visuals in our videos as Balochi music lacked

remarkable, it isn't Balochi music in its essence.

"If we want to make Balochi music progress while contemplating it, it has to be done so that even if a shepherd hears it with modern instruments like guitars," says Mazar. "He should feel a yearning and remembrance for his mountains and land. On the other hand, even if someone with a liking for modern music hears it, they appreciate the zahirol too. The listener has to be engaged—it has to have the components of zahirol as well as glimpses of contemporary music. For this one has to know both Balochi music, as well as modern music."

The Balochi Music Promoter Society has been working on resurrecting the dying art of traditional Balochi music while



sphere, many of them come from the misunderstood and violence-ridden town of Lyari in Karachi. The Baloch Twins, a musical duo who started performing music professionally in 2016, is one example.

"We have been doing music for a long time and I don't even remember when we started," says Adil Baloch. "Music was always there. We used to live music as children. The environment we were surrounded with was not pleasant so we sought solace in music in a chaotic environment. When on one side we heard explosions and gunshots, listening to musical notes brought us peace."

Baloch recalls being introduced to music genres such as classical folk when he was only six years

that — the songs would be about something else and the visuals would depict something else altogether," says Adil.

"Our mantra is only evolution because music cannot be stagnant," Naseeb Mazar, a classical Baloch singer, and the son of renowned Balochi singer Pahlawan Mazar Ibrahim.

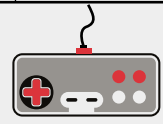
Mazar believes that a huge difference in the music of his late father's time and that of his own is the commitment towards art. "They lived their lives as artists and embraced that life wholly, learning music properly and devoting themselves to their art," he says.

Speaking on the evolution of Balochi music and its blending with modern music, Mazar says that while what contemporary Baloch musicians have done is

promoting Balochi music and helping it progress. "We conduct programmes and support artists," says Raheem. "We have published books on Balochi music and are working on publishing a magazine on Balochi music called "Zemar" (Balochi word for music) which contains articles on Balochi music. Whatever we know of our ancient history has mostly been written through our poetry which was passed on through singing. Pahlawans have played the biggest role in Balochi music, literature and history. This is why we must work to keep the art of Balochi zemar alive."

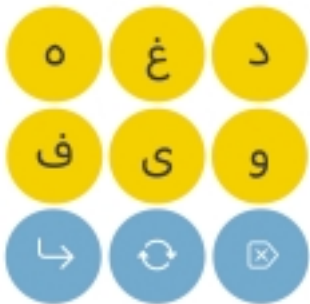
Somaiyah Hafeez is a freelance feature story writer and she tweets @sommulbaloch. All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

T Magazine's picks



Play this week:
Word puzzle: Hijjay

Gaming



Enjoy word scramble? Here's an online Urdu word game on www.hijjay.com. Six letters are displayed, you make twenty words of at least three letters, to cross the first level. The words keep adding to the list below the scramble until you complete twenty words. A click on any word takes you to the Urdu Lughat Board dictionary. A new set of letters appears daily, which makes around 47 words from the daily refreshed 46,000 word-vocabulary reservoir, to which you can add words too. Warning: Addictive.

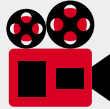


Read this week:
12 Rules For Life

Books



Canadian clinical psychologist and internet celebrity Jordan Peterson's book is designed to provide self-help to those who have lost their way in today's fast-paced and high-pressure life, have mental health issues or are confused at a crossroad in life. Also a fascinating and intriguing read for those who do not fit any of the above categories. It covers a broad range of topics, and Peterson draws from his life experiences, religion, and history to build a strong case for his points that provide good advice for people.



Watch this week:
Insider Food

YouTube



Feast with your eyes on this American food YouTube channel that discusses food at length. Insider partners up with bloggers and celebrities to find out how authentic Greek yoghurt is made to how your favourite crisp has different flavours and uses different processing methods. Food experts travel to a food's area of origin to see how it's made, find out its history or they try out the wackiest, spiciest, and non-mainstream foods and diets. The best part is that on this food adventure, you don't put weight on.

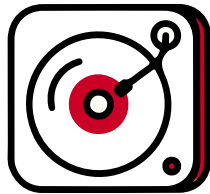


Follow this week:
The Joe Rogan Experience

Podcast



Hosted by American actor, comedian, and presenter Joe Rogan, this long form conversation with guests is a hugely popular podcast in the US, currently distributed exclusively on Spotify. You will learn, be inspired and entertained as Rogan discusses current events, comedy, politics, philosophy, science, and hobbies, but viewer discretion is advised. Accused of being a darling of the conservative right, some think Rogan spreads conspiracy theories and misinforms people. One of his best episodes is about cobalt mining in Africa and how it has led to slavery in the modern day.



#FILMTOK: FROM THE BIG SCREEN TO THE SMALLEST

Novel social media platforms are changing the way a generation consumes and engages with entertainment products. As TikTok democratises filmmaking so much so that even prestigious events like Cannes have to notice, could this be the future

By NABIL TAHIR

During the height of COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and work from home enhanced a pattern of spending a great deal of time watching TV. One other thing that has undergone a big change is the attention span of Gen-Z. With so much spare time to pour over old and new content, the film corner of TikTok has exploded as a subgenre to rival its reading counterparts BookTok and FoodTok.

BookTok and FoodTok are apps on which readers and foodies gather to share their recommendations and writers and cooks share their work. FilmTok or FilmTikTok is where filmmakers and film lovers connect.

Creators and studios are showcasing their filmmaking and editing skills on TikTok with quality short-form content. Upcoming artists showcase their acting skills, and filmmakers show their talent by directing and shooting a video that can grab viewers' attention. Making a short video to give a message or tell an entire story is difficult, but content creators on TikTok are doing a great job. It is every filmmaker's dream to showcase their work on an international stage, and TikTok has unlocked a global avenue for content creators.

Participation in international festivals, such as the Cannes International Film Festival and Doha Film Festival, via TikTok has also risen. Recognising creators' skills, the Cannes Film Festival and TikTok partnered to identify the top filmmaker on TikTok. As part of the partnership, TikTok held a short film competition to select three winners to send to the festival. Cannes Festival does not allow selfies on the red carpet, but this year, TikTok offered a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes world of one of the top film festivals in the world.

Pakistan through short films

FilmTok or FilmTikTok, with their 14.3 billion and 5.3 billion views on videos, motivated content creators to send in entries for the Cannes Film Festival competition. Pakistan recorded the highest number of submissions, with 41,000 entries, approximately 58 per cent of all submissions.

This number is a reflection of how much TikTok has inspired creators in Pakistan to gain confidence and use their editing skills to make videos that are worthy of being submitted to a global event like Cannes. One of the creators is Zainab Tariq, known as Baekartoot on TikTok. Baekartoot is an Urdu/Punjabi word that means "someone with ill doings." Tariq creates humorous pieces with her smartphone. She does not have any experience in filming and acting, and her process of learning continues as she creates content.

Tariq believes that TikTok has changed the way the world used to consume content. "A couple of years ago, long-form videos were the IT thing, and now everybody just wants to scroll and not spend more than thirty seconds on a video unless it is very entertaining. TikTok has also managed to force other apps to shift to short-form content," she said. Tariq says that most of the content in Pakistan is lip-syncing, and there are just a handful of creators who write proper scripts and make original content.

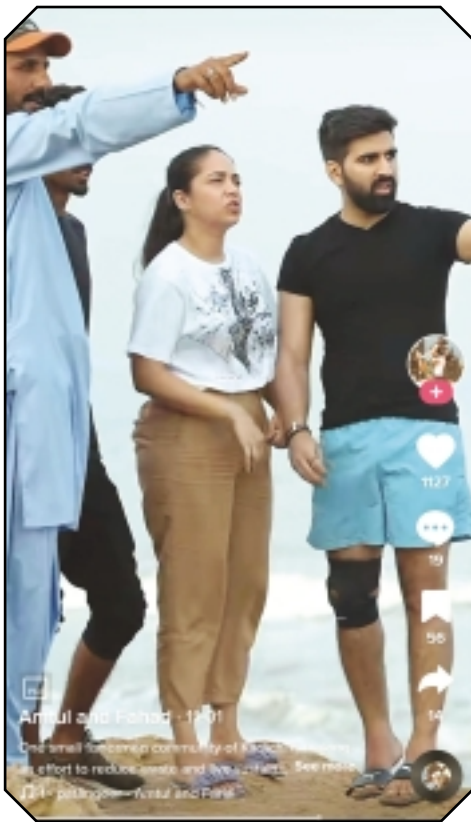
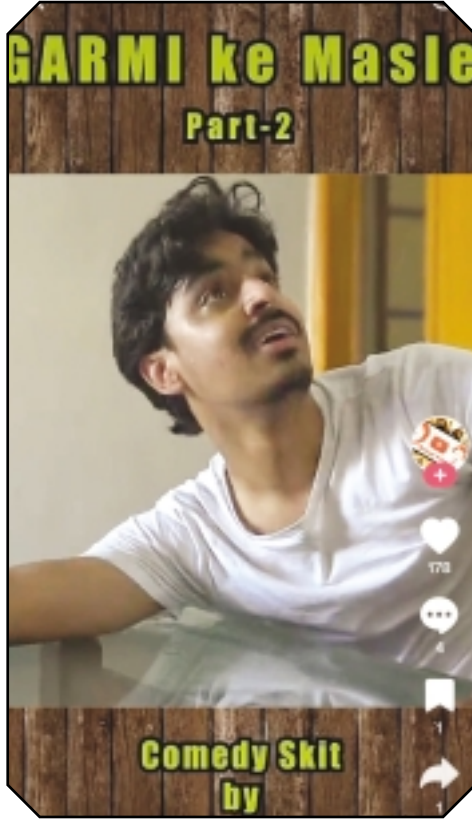
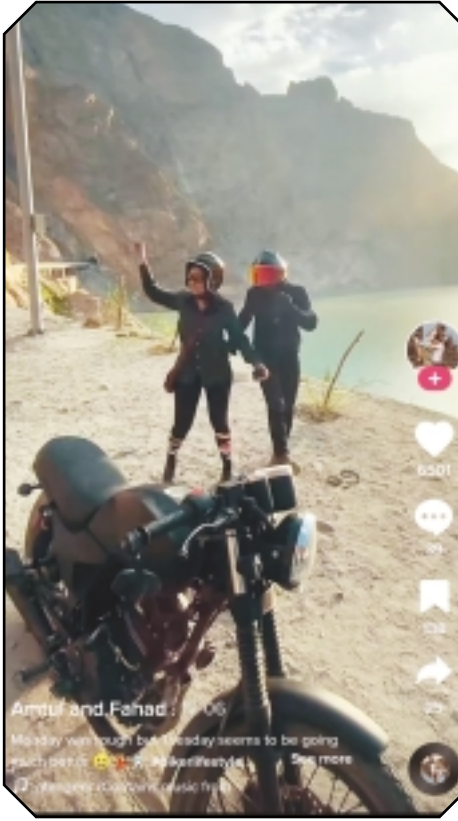
Another creator, Ghazanfar Jaffery, runs a comedy skit account named Bekaar Films. He is also of the opinion that TikTok has intro-

duced a new way of making short videos. "TikTok renewed the essence of short videos. In this age, people don't have a lot of spare time; they want quick content, and TikTok gives them that," he said, adding that comedy videos like skits and pranks are most popular because people are always in search of a good laugh.

Before TikTok, there was no representation of Pakistan at the Cannes Film Festival. But the highest number of submissions from Pakistan shows how much talent Pakistani creators have and how interested they are in filmmaking. TikTok has given a platform to people from all walks of life. We see a farmer from a remote village telling a story through a short video and entertaining people. "TikTok has made it easy for everyone to make videos. Through TikTok, I've seen that people from all areas of Pakistan, irrespective of their social class, are doing wonders on TikTok," added Jaffery.

Use of #FilmTok

Young and upcoming filmmakers



on TikTok is very candid. "They like relatable, witty, and short content. Instagram is a slightly uptight sister of TikTok, but after reels, the audience is loosening up. Bollywood and Lollywood songs dominate South Asian reels. You have a meagre chance of going viral if you don't use a relatable desi song or sound on reels. Whereas TikTok is a proper global community at this point. People on the UK TikTok are using Bollywood songs for content and are getting massive views. And South Asians are using Chinese songs for content and going viral," she said.

Giving an example, Baweja said that she recently mimicked the Indian actor Imran Hashmi in a video and posted the video. The video imitated a mainstream sad Bollywood song from the early 2000s and gained 740k plus views and 134k likes on TikTok, whereas on Instagram, it barely crossed 366k views and 30k plus likes. The choice of song in the video wasn't trending at the time on reels. Another reason could be the different niches on both platforms. The video was majorly re-shared and watched by British Asians on TikTok. There could have been a sense of nostalgia that forced the audience to hit the like and re-share button. Whereas on Instagram, the video was mainly watched in Pakistan and India. Since the song wasn't trending, and there weren't any feelings of nostalgia, the audience couldn't relate much.

Baweja says that TikTok with its different trends, challenges, and easy access to music has made videos more fun. "Because of all that, short-form videos gained much more popularity as they started to seem very attractive to the audiences. TikTok definitely removed the barriers to creating and made it much easier and simpler to create short-form videos," she said.

Notwithstanding the category of your content, if you know how to tell a story and keep the viewer interested in your video, TikTok helps it to reach a larger audience where it is loved and shared. A person from a remote area of Pakistan can arrive on the global stage. Just like #BookTok and #FoodTok, #FilmTok is also gaining popularity in Pakistan. That day is not far when we will see a Pakistani among the top short-form video creators worldwide.



FilmTok or FilmTikTok, with their 14.3 billion and 5.3 billion views on videos, motivated content creators to send in entries for the Cannes Film Festival competition. Pakistan recorded the highest number of submissions, with 41,000 entries, approximately 58 per cent of all submissions

Tariq creates stories about people's daily lives, and what they face at home or outside. That allows her audience to connect the link between her videos and the stuff they go through on a day-t-day basis. She says that she spends more time making a good video than making a number of videos. "I believe in quality content over quantity. I write humorous skits, but I often like to create cinematic masterpieces with my smartphone. For example, I watched Laal Singh Chadda recently. While the song "Turr Chaleya" was playing, I envisioned an emotional scene of a character in a bathtub. The scene portrayed the helplessness of the character

in some profound moments of vulnerability," she said. To ensure that the video reached the right niche of aspiring filmmakers and actors on TikTok, she used the hashtag FilmTok in the caption.

Zainab Tariq was one of the creators who made it to the Cannes Film Festival TikTok short film competition. "My video was shortlisted for the top ten videos from Pakistan, but it is yet to reach the international ranking. I made a video that portrays the stages of grief of a female character who has recently lost her partner. The video made it to the Cannes Film Festival. I am working on improving the quality so I can reach the international

ranking," she said.

Amtul Baweja, who creates travel videos under the account Patangeer, also believes that by introducing FilmTok, TikTok has given a chance to creators to showcase their skills to the world. "TikTok has revolutionized how short-form content is consumed and produced, and it has made content accessible to the general masses who want to express themselves. People who had never even thought of editing a video can now create amazing content with TikTok. Effectiveness of short-form videos has definitely increased because now, with the help of text, emojis, cuts, and other features of TikTok, you can pack a lot of information in a few seconds.

The short video trend

Since TikTok introduced a new way to make short videos, creators have evolved and developed the talent to tell a five-minute story in thirty seconds. "Everybody wants short content; even my parents scroll TikTok all the time," Baweja said. She further explained that in her experience of regular content creation on multiple social media platforms for the past three years, the audience



By **ALI ASAD SABIR**

In the risk-averse market of Pakistan, incumbents need to see a significant player take risks on an idea, wait till it bears fruit and then attempt to replicate it with 1% of the same budget.

Netizens across Pakistan witnessed how the success of Coke Studio led to the short-lived, poorly thought-out, copy-cat of the same concept by indirect and direct competitors in the youth-focused segment.

According to several leading executives in the \$2 billion advertising ecosystem of Pakistan, we can expect to see a series of attempts by large advertisers in creating various solutions within the advertising technology (AdTech) stack.

These will include a supply side platform (SSP) that gathers media inventory of digital publishers, a demand side platform (DSP) that automates media buying, an advertising exchange that facilitates buying & selling on both sides, and an ad server that places ads on various online touchpoints and connected devices.

But why is this sudden obsession with AdTech left advertisers scrambling for talent?

The first-party data play

With COVID-19 ushering in a new wave of online commerce boost, retailers and quick service restaurants (QSR) players across the country witnessed exploitative deals at the behest of online marketplaces.

Given that buyer data is not shared with listed merchants and said data could provide insight into buyer psychographics, this prompted leading players in fashion and QSR to leave marketplaces and create their own online stores from scratch.

The data from these first-party data-gathering online stores has become a key basis for setting up brick & mortar locations in areas stereotypically assumed to have residents with weak purchasing power.

For the fashion industry these locations doubled as components of the omnichannel play. Meanwhile for the QSR industry, these locations doubled as cloud kitchens to also meet serve the operational side of eCommerce and a touchpoint to capture audiences that like to dine out.

The aforementioned owned media strategy is why KFC dominates Google Trends data across the country's fried and fast food ecosystems. For companies looking to speed along the process of setting up online stores, white-label eCommerce apps are available such as Eat Mubarak and Chikoo, with the former being used by Nandos for its online ordering site, per inspect element.

The discussions around an owned advertising technology ecosystem really began in mid-2020 after Profit by Pakistan Today reported that Unilever had secured a white-label solution by VentureDive to create a quick commerce solution called Munchies. This was to capture first-party data of its end-user

base, which no online marketplace was willing to share.

Months later, Profit by Pakistan Today reported that Unilever partnered with Leopards Courier to launch SuperSauda, a replica of Pandamart, albeit with only products created by Unilever. There were a few exceptions in categories outside their scope, such as carbonated soft drinks.

These moves prompted multiple CPG and QSR players to create their apps, which require sophisticated customer acquisition and retention tools, most of which are based outside Pakistan and lack customization by design.

Winning media reviews

Sensing the opportunity of capturing first-party data and owning oversight over the media supply chain, both two leading telecom operators have begun to initiate conversations and recruitment efforts around hiring product managers with experience with the AdTech stack.

The intent here is to create the AdTech stack from scratch and offer an ad exchange. This exchange will consist of a DSP and SSP. This will also include data verification system.

In order to do this, the telecom operators would need to undertake the painstaking effort of approaching advertisers through various media agencies and approach all manner of digital and platform publishers with digital ad sales deals. Given the amount of AdTech consolidation worldwide, it is more likely that they partner with an existing media agency to do

this for them.

Given that both telco operators are in the middle of media reviews, advertising agency groups are eager to demonstrate their proficiency in the AdTech space, promising to partner or co-create a solution much more in line with their existing clientel.

In the interest of meeting this demand and in capturing more sections of advertising expendi-

ture across the digital media supply chain, executive headhunters have confirmed that large advertising agencies have initiated the search for CTOs that will build AdTech stacks for them.

The rise of advertising fraud

While investments in DTC business units bore fruit, they also exposed advertisers to the unspoken market reality of advertising fraud in the form of domain spoofing, ad blocking, invalid traffic, non-viewable ads, off-target campaigns, and many more issues. Led by white-collar criminals, ad fraud burns advertising expenditure (AdEx) that chases vanity metrics.

Per a report from Profit by Pakistan Today, this was one of the reasons various locally produced influence marketing and creator economy start-ups and platforms were launched including Amplifyd, Bradri, INCA, Linkstar, Social Champ, and Walee. These platforms can track which influencers have fake followers, rank creators by their engagement, and attach a quality score to their user generator content and following.

As COVID-19 created a recession and forced marketers to utilise insufficient funds for affiliate marketing, the chase of vanity metrics led them to pick influencers with seemingly high reach but low engagement.

With influencers working with sham PR agencies that inflated social media followings with fake or bot accounts, advertisers that sought these creators saw little return on advertising spend (ROAS).

They will also be fooled by those ignorant media account and its win of the digital media account of Reckitt, while conventional media is parked at Blitz, one of many Z2C-owned companies.

Timely actions by SBP

Amid the SBP measures to block forex outflows, resellers for platforms such as TikTok, Meta, and YouTube have begun to earn from the float as well, prompting the registration of liaison offices (LO).

Emergence for retail media networks

With GroupM being named the media agency for Daraz and Brainchild the media agency for

Foodpanda, proposals have floated in the market suggesting that the concept of a retail media network (RMN) has reached Pakistan.

Amid the ongoing recession, technology companies are seeking new avenues of monetisation and the intent based quality traffic on commercial apps is just the kind of cheap first-party data advertisers are eager to redirect their way.

By doing this, commercial apps are turning their cost center - customer acquisition efforts - into a profit center. Generally priced below traffic acquisition costs, these deals are being sold via large media agencies as exclusive resellers.

With Krave Mart securing Ekaterra on its advertising platform, the chatter has begun for a private marketplace (PMP) for a retail media networks comprised of the media inventory of apps such as Daraz, Krave Mart, Foodpanda, Super Meal, Carrefour, Chikoo, and others. Operating on razor thin commission margins and slow repayment cycles, advertising groups are eyeing AdTech as a means of capturing more of the AdEx they funnel through these RMNs.

In the hopes of capturing 10% of AdEx with agency commissions, 5% as the DSP and SSP, and 2.5% as the data verification service, advertising agency groups are scrambling to create the AdTech upon which the PMP for retail media networks will be built. Industry reports such that Equativ is eyeing the Pakistani market and looking for partners with a strong CPG portfolio.

Had it not been for its second-party marketplace, Brainchild may have been a strong fit for the French AdTech company, amid it beating Mindshare after winning the entire PepsiCo

director of strategy at Blitz Advertising, the sports marketing agency known for launching the Pakistan Super League. "This is perhaps the most important reason to have a PMP where the competition is limited & restricted by design, and the chance of winning is higher at an agreed price."

According to independent studies by the Association of National Advertisers and the Incorporated

While unable to conduct commercial activities, these LOs will be able to lobby for changes in the SBP policy and smoothen out the pending payments. In the interest of pursuing a transparent media supply chain, advertisers are looking to work with a local advertising network to flow funds to publishers and content creators.

Seeking more profound efficiency in digital media spending, marketing executives at digital-first companies are keeping a close eye on PMPs in the AdTech space.

Is the market ready yet?

"PMPs are ecosystems that allow advertisers to target audiences on various platforms through their targeting parameters at an agreed price point between the agency/advertiser and the publisher," said Ali Rehman, a founding team member at Hefazat Technologies, an InsurTech start-up backed by Kash Rehman. "This helps publisher increase their monetization and brands improve efficiency."

He said that if Habib Bank Limited (HBL) wants to target people looking for a new car, the data population is done with OLX and PakWheels, which enters HBL's data management platform. HBL can then target these users outside of PakWheels and OLX in all spaces, wherever they're found on Hamariweb, Cricinfo, Cribuzz, or any other site in the marketplace.

"While normal AdTech allows you to target audiences through an auction, there is a low chance of being able to target as the audience size gets smaller, which increases the chances of losing said auction," said Sundus Shah.

Society of British Advertisers, PMPs are one of four types of programmatic advertising deals, with the others being rife with fraud. The studies show that open auctions, preferred deals, and automated guarantees have nontransparent media supply chains.

"PMPs are the right way to use programmatic, utilizing both your first-party data and buying muscle," said Ghulam Jilani Kothari, the former head of Xaxis at GroupM and the new head of partnerships at Alliancez. "Using your overall advertising to increase the effectiveness of advertising expenditure being made daily. With a PMP, you can retarget audiences on premium publishers at a locked price without paying any premium."

As of this writing, industry sources shared that in light of SBPs measures to restrict the flow of money outside of Pakistan, agency executives have started using programmatic guarantees locally by inventory on a guaranteed mechanism using Google's DV360 and making payments locally to publishers in the market. This, too, has sparked an interest in developing or co-create an advertising technology tool for the local market, akin to Consolidata.

"With PMPs, advertisers gain premium inventory, programmatic efficiency, brand safety, and transparency," said Mehwish Aslam, the chief business officer at bSecure, a one-click checkout solution. "They also get the publishers valuable first party data and the right to first refusal over impressions. Both the advertiser and publisher win."

The way forward

It remains to be seen how these systems are executed and whether media auditors of Pakistan will be able to learn from lessons of the West in order to prevent digital ad fraud to thrive with the rise of AdTech.

In the absence of an effective regulator around the advertising industry, it is recommend that trade bodies such as the Pakistan Advertisers Society, the Marketing Association of Pakistan, and the Pakistan Advertisers Association band together to create the guidelines that allow advertisers and platform developers to be on the same page.

"All contracts across the programmatic and media supply chain must have standardised terms & conditions that are endorsed by industry bodies and digital native marketers," said Sameer Ahmed Khan, the co-founder of Social Champ, a Techstar backed social media management tool. "Data taxonomies, definitions, retention, seats and seat IDs, etc should be consistent for all supply chain participants."

He said that by doing so, the advertising industry can urgently mature and facilitate the data sharing that is a key step towards a more transparent supply chain.

"Advertisers, agencies, adtech, digital publishers, and trade bodies must band together to ensure that the highest reasonable proportion of advertiser spend reaches publishers," said Khan. "There should be no unattributable costs nor instances of unauthorised reselling. These measures will optimise ad spend to reduce CAC and uplift the CLTV in the long-run."