



COVER STORY

**Page 1**  
The one-sided moral lesson is just hypocrisy — Gianni Infantino

**6,214**  
missing persons cases have been disposed by the COIOED

**CULTURE & SOCIETY**  
**Page 3**  
Balochistan issue can only be resolved through political process — Lt Gen Asif Ghafoor

**ENVIRONMENT**  
**Page 8**  
The poor have always had to fight — Rafique Loond



# IT'S SPORTS BEFORE POLITICS, UNTIL IT ISN'T

**There has been a lot of hue and cry about Qatar hosting this year's edition of football's premier competition. Conspicuously, the same scrutiny appears missing when the rights are awarded to a select group of nations**

BY ABDUL MAJID

They say the world of politics and sports should not intermingle. One should always be kept away from the other to maintain harmony. But if 'they' are the ones shaping and forging the narrative of the world, then 'they' are certainly displaying bigoted tendencies, when the world is in Qatar to celebrate one of the biggest sporting events in the world, the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

It has been 12 years since the World Cup hosting rights were awarded to Qatar, along with Russia for the 2018 World Cup, and since then the world has witnessed one of the biggest "propaganda" campaigns against the gas-rich Middle Eastern country.

Now, history is the best teacher in all cases, so only a historical view of why Qatar was and is still being touted as a pariah in the 'modern world' by 'them' can help us fathom the current wave of protests against the World Cup hosts.

**Double standards**

First and foremost, Qatar's human rights record was brought into question when the World Cup hosting rights were awarded to the country. The comical side of accusations against Qatar was that no one ever dared to question the US about its human rights record when they awarded the same rights for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The unapologetic tone of the Western media – the 'they' mentioned before – when they praised the

As the World Cup moves forward and the world sees an Islamic country welcoming all cultures, religions and orientations in a single place watching the most 'beautiful game' on the planet, the message sent across would be pretty clear – sports unites us all

No one dared to ask a single question regarding police violence against people of colour to the person in-charge of the bid when the US won the hosting rights along with Canada and Mexico

US, the co-hosts for the 2026 World Cup, was hypocritical to say the least.

No one dared to ask a single question regarding police violence against people of colour to the person in-charge of the bid when the US won the hosting rights along with Canada and Mexico. Also, not even one person discussed anything other than football, where instead they could've talked about the US invasions, cloaked as the 'fights for democracy'. Not one.

The second accusation on Qatar was that they didn't provide the migrant workers, who built mammoth structures for the World Cup, with enough safety through efficient legislation. Qatar came forward in this regard, apologized to the families of the workers who died during the building of infrastructure and promised viable and verifiable action. No one remembers the last time a country from the West came forward and apologized sincerely for the '3,000 years' of injustices that they did. Not one.

Lastly, the question of Qatar not recognizing the LGBTQ community, since it is against Islam which translates to their culture at large, was raised. It is as simple to understand as the 'burqa ban' by the French government, but 'they' think that the former is wrong to formulate their own set of rules in their own country, while the latter can do whatever they want on the piece of land they call France. Not one person asked the 2018 World Cup winners a question about their views on the 'burqa ban', but

everyone made sure they asked them if they'll wear the 'One Love' armband to support the LGBTQ community. Such hypocrisy!

**Bought or won?**

The FIFA Executive Committee, later converted into the FIFA Council, saw its downfall in 2015 when the US Department of Justice disclosed a 47-count, 164-page criminal indictment charging seven FIFA executives.

Later, the then FIFA president Sepp Blatter wasn't caught in any case. However, he was later charged for corruption in another case and suspended from the football world governing body.

The FIFA corruption scandal opened the Pandora's box of how millions were paid to not one, but many to buy the hosting rights of the FIFA World Cup.

Qatar still denies that they paid anyone money, specifically bribe, to get the World Cup. FIFA also doesn't admit that money was a factor in awarding the World Cup to Russia for 2018 and Qatar for 2022. However, the corruption charges and the whistleblower accounts are clear that no one World Cup has been hosted by a country without the use of illegal means or without an ulterior motive.

However, questioning only Qatar like they're the country which started this trend is absolutely partial and imperfect observation. If Qatar is being questioned, then all the World Cups which happened before and all the World Cups which will happen afterwards should be put under the same microscope to check if there was foul play involved in awarding the hosting rights.

**Political drama or football World Cup?**

For 12 long years, Qatar has stood steadfast in its bid to successfully host one of the biggest sporting spectacles in the world – the FIFA World Cup.

However, as the days to kick-off football's marquee events came closer, the conversation kept nudging towards politics rather than the 'beautiful game'.

Before the event, everything was wrong with and in Qatar as per the Western media. But FIFA president Gianni Infantino's press conference, just a day before the World Cup kicked-off, was ballistic.

Infantino came out all guns blazing in front of

hundreds of journalists, saying, "I'm European. For what we Europeans have been doing around the world in the last 3,000 years, we should be apologising for the next 3,000 years before starting to give moral lessons to people."

Infantino, son of migrant workers from Italy, said Qatar has "made progress" in improving the rights of migrant workers, also blasting everyone for their "hypocrisy".

"I came here six years ago and addressed the matter of migrant workers straight on, in my very first meeting. How many of these European or Western business companies, who earned millions and millions from Qatar and other countries in the region – billions every year – how many of them addressed the rights of migrant workers with the authorities? I have the answer for you. None of them," the FIFA

Infantino came out all guns blazing in front of hundreds of journalists, saying, "I'm European. For what we Europeans have been doing around the world in the last 3,000 years, we should be apologising for the next 3,000 years before starting to give moral lessons to people

president said, adding "the one-sided moral lesson is just hypocrisy."

He then took on the question of alcohol ban in stadiums in Qatar and gave everyone a lesson in history and geography.

"Every decision that is taken in this World Cup, it is a joint decision between Qatar and FIFA. Every decision is discussed, debated and taken jointly. There will be, I don't know how many, fan zones – eight, 10, big fan zones, over 200 places where you can buy alcohol.





# MANIFESTING DREAMS ON A PUSHCART



He arrived in Karachi 30 years ago with a will to change the fortune of his future generations. The success this gol-gappa seller's children have gone on to secure is the stuff dreams are made of

By YUSRA SALIM

With big dreams and a will to change the lives of his next generation, Liaqat Ali came to Karachi in 1988. At that time, he could not imagine that one day his children would be university graduates and working in good organizations. Today, thirty-two years later, one of Ali's daughters is working in the Airport Security Force, one son has completed his master's in computer science, and the youngest is in class ten.

Ali, now fifty, set up a gol-gappa cart near Teen Talwar in 1990. He worked on a roadside in scorching heat and blinding humidity. "I used to set up my cart right in front of the Gulf Shopping Center. When they renovated a few years ago, I was asked to shift so now I set up my cart here, daily from 1 pm to 10 pm, and sometimes even later than that," Ali tells me while making a plate of gol-gappa for the guard of a nearby private bank.

Born and brought up in Chishtian, Punjab, Ali decided to come to Karachi to earn a living



when the economic situation in his hometown started deteriorating. His family had barely enough to feed themselves. Unmarried at that time, Ali asked a few of his friends to help him to find work, and one of his cousins was already working in Karachi. "When I came to Karachi, I didn't even have money to buy a bus ticket to get to my friend's house. It was the first time I had ever left Chishtian. I stayed with my friend in his one-room house, and he helped me find a job in a steel factory where they required labourers," Ali narrates his story while cleaning bowl and plates in which he serves gol-gappa.

For two years, Ali worked in the factory, but the limited salary wasn't enough to sort out the problems he had in his home-

town. One of his friends who used to sell gol-gappa suggested that Ali started a gol-gappa cart too. "My friend involved me in his work; I helped him daily with his cart while learning how to make everything. After working with him for a year, I set up my own cart, and since that day, this has been my sole profession and source of income."

Ali strongly believes that he could have never done this on his own if it was not for his friends who not just helped him to learn and work in Karachi but also provided him with a place to live when he came to a new city in 1988. "I live here alone in a one-room apartment in Bath Island Gizri, and the rest of my family is in different places." One of his daughters is married; another one, after postgraduation, lives in Lahore and works for the Airports Security Force; and one of his sons, after completing his postgraduation, is teaching in Bahawalpur to make money for his monthly expenses while looking for a long-term job. Ali's wife and his youngest son lives in his ancestral home in Chishtian. "I visit home every four months for fifteen days, but I can't wrap up my work here and return



Back in 1990 when I first started the business, chana used to be four rupee per kg; now it is Rs 320 per kg, and even then, the quality is not the same. That has impacted the prices; I used to sell a plate of eight gol-gappa for three rupees, and now the price is Rs 120 per plate



in plastic bags.

When it comes to quality, Ali says he doesn't compromise, and that is the reason he has been surviving with just a cart for the last thirty-two years. He says that in terms of prices there are several qualities available in market, but he always buys the top-quality stuff, which is of course expensive. Oil used in frying and semolina used in dough are of very good quality, which is why the taste of his gol-gappa is excellent. "With this quality, I hardly earn Rs 300 on every thousand rupees that I

invest in here," he says, showing me a gol-gappa and crushing it to ensure its crispiness.

Technology has made the process of sending money and communicating with his family so much easier for Ali. "Back in the '90s, I used to send money through a regular post office, and sometimes, it would take fifteen-thirty days for the money to reach home. But now I usually money send through easypaisa and Mobicash, or a wire transfer," he says.

In these trying times, to make ends meet, Ali also markets his stall and takes orders for weddings, parties, and school functions for which he charges a lump sum. "Such events are helpful as it takes less time to sell, it's good money, and I don't have to stand in heat the whole day," he says.

To get the work going, carts have to be regularly maintained. Every four months, Ali changes the plates and bowls in which he serves gol-gappa and containers for raita, chutney, and tamarind water. Ali tells me, "I buy this stuff from the Bolton Market from the same seller I bought it thirty-two years ago; I trust him for a good price and quality. Without keeping a check on hygiene, you can't survive a food-related business. Most of my customers are from Clifton so I can't risk anything when it comes to cleanliness and taste."



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"If for three hours a day you cannot drink a beer, you will survive," Infantino said, adding that "drinking inside football stadiums is banned in major European nations such as France, Spain, Portugal and Scotland."

Lastly, he told everyone to focus on football rather than anything and everything else and for some time it did happen too.

The upset win by Saudi Arabia over Argentina brought football into the limelight. Messi's team were considered one of the favourites to win the tournament as it was the talisman's last World Cup, but they couldn't fire at the right time and were off-side too often.

However, politics once again jumped in when a FIFA ban on wearing the 'One Love' armband saw US Secretary of State Antony Blinken blurt out scathing criticism.

"One of the most powerful things about football, about soccer, is potential to bring the world together," Blinken told reporters in Doha, alongside top Qatari officials.

"It's always concerning from my perspective when we see any restrictions on freedom of expression. It's especially so when the expression is for diversity and for inclusion. And in my judgment, at least, no one on the football pitch should be forced to choose between supporting these values and playing



Germany found a new way to protest as they lined up for a team photograph with their mouths covered, showing that they were being silenced by the ban on the 'One Love' armband

for their team," Blinken added.

Germany found a new way to protest as they lined up for a team photograph with their mouths covered, showing that they were being silenced by the ban on the 'One Love' armband. However, after 90-plus minutes

of play, they were seen covering their faces after a humiliating 2-1 defeat at the hands of a resurgent Japan. Germany went out of the 2018 World Cup in the group stages and they risk the same fate since they have to beat Spain and Costa Rica to enter the

last 16.

Another political protest was seen by the Iranian footballers as they refused to sing the national anthem when they played their first game against England. They lost the match 6-2, but won the hearts of their people in Iran.

**The big question!**

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar will conclude on December 18 with the final scheduled to take place at the Lusail Stadium. The 12-year journey of the host nation, from being awarded the rights to host the game's biggest extravaganza to actually welcoming the world in their country, will be written in history with two colours.

Firstly, the West will say that Qatar used its riches to sportswash its image, same as they accuse Saudi Arabia. Even if Qatar pulls off one of the most organised World Cups in the history of football, their rhetoric will still not focus on what Qatar did, but on what Qatar should've done.

On the contrary, as the World Cup moves forward and the world sees an Islamic country welcoming all cultures, religions and orientations in a single place watching the most 'beautiful game' on the planet, the message sent across would be pretty clear - sports unites us all, let it do that instead of turning every sporting event into a political telenovela.





# BALUCHISTAN NEEDS A HEALING TOUCH

**Lt Gen Asif Ghafoor, Commander XII Corps, believes a non-kinetic approach could offer durable solution to festering problems of Baluchistan**

By NAVEED HUSSAIN



Baluchistan has been in the throes of a strange mix of violence for decades. Partly, this violence has been fuelled by religious and sectarian extremism, and partly by a chronic sense of deprivation among its impoverished population exploited by the hostile agencies to keep the province in turmoil in their attempts to destabilise Pakistan. The military effort to stamp out this potpourri of violence has cost the nation dearly – both in men and treasure. But the worst sufferers have been the people of Baluchistan.

Violent groups cashed in on the situation to peddle an anti-state narrative and enlist recruits for a bloody insurgency, which has waned and waxed over the years. In the murk of this insurgency, Baluch youths started disappearing in what is now known as ‘enforced disappearances’. An accusatory finger was pointed at the state’s

**The people of Baluchistan have lived under the shadow of the gun for too long. I want to take them out of the shadow of the gun**

impunity’ regarding the practice. The figures may be a little exaggerated.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances set up by the Pakistan government in 2011 has confirmed 8,500 missing persons since its inception. Of them, one-third (3,285) have returned home, the Commission stated in a report submitted in the Islamabad High Court in March 2022. The Commission has disposed of 6,214 cases, while 2,249 are still under investigation.

**More than meets the eye**  
But not every missing person is



**Zaheer was in fact detained in Iran when he, along with fellow would-be economic migrants, crossed over from Pakistan en route to Europe**

counterinsurgency operations. The issue of ‘enforced disappearances’ has haunted every government, riled up Baluch nationalists and rights campaigners, and provided grist to the propaganda mill of the insurgents who used it to sully Pakistan’s global image.

The state has long been in denial. But you cannot shut your eyes to the reality.

The state needs to be forthcoming, at least in order to blunt the propaganda.

“My heart beats with the missing persons and their families,” says Lt Gen Asif Ghafoor, Commander Baluchistan Corps. “I will make sure no one is picked up without rhyme and reason,” he says. “I’ll make sure that if there is evidence [of supporting and abetting insurgency] against someone, they are detained through the proper legal procedure,” he says as he assures full support to the families of the missing persons. “I stand with them.”

**What is ‘enforced disappearance’?**

According to the Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner, “an enforced disappearance is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.”

The International Commission for Jurists claims that “hundreds, if not thousands, of people continue to be ‘missing’ in Pakistan following their apparent arrest or abduction by or with complicity of the state. The UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearance has described a ‘culture of entrenched

attributable to the state. Some might have joined the Baluch insurgents, or crossed over to hide in Afghanistan or join the TTP, or might have died fighting alongside either of the two.

And we have reason to believe that.

In July 2022, five terrorists of the banned Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) were killed in a security operation to rescue hostages in Ziarat. Among the dead were those listed as ‘missing’ by activists and families, including Saleem Baluch and Shahzad Baluch. A BLA propaganda video shot before but released after Saleem’s death showed him attacking security forces along with other terrorists. And Shahzad turned out to be an urban commander of BLA who recruited for the group in colleges and universities.

Another man came forward to claim one of those identified

as dead “BLA terrorists” was actually his “missing” cousin, Engineer Zaheer Ahmed. But his claim was debunked when Zaheer resurfaced and appeared before the media to tell his real story. Zaheer was in fact detained in Iran when he, along with fellow would-be economic migrants, crossed over from Pakistan en route to Europe.

Similarly, top BLA commanders Aslam Baluch, alias Achhu, Mir Abdul Nabi Bangulzai, and Raziq Madani, alias Engineer, were killed in attacks in southern and northeastern Afghanistan in 2018, 2021, and 2022, respectively. Gulzar Imam, alias Shamby, one of the founders of Baluch Nationalist Army, was listed as “missing” until earlier this month when his group confirmed that he was arrested in an intelligence-based operation by the security forces.

**Non-kinetic approach**

Every “missing” person cannot be attributable to the state. But those in the state custody should



lated, mountainous, desert region, is rich in mineral resources, but remains dirt-poor and least developed of all the provinces of Pakistan. How little of Baluchistan’s wealth of copper, gold, gas and coal deposits comes their way has been fueling Baluch resentment.

Lt Gen Ghafoor believes that the people of Baluchistan need a

checkpoints to police,” corps commander says. The people of Baluchistan have lived under the shadow of the gun for too long. “I want to take them out of the shadow of the gun,” he says while sharing his vision of a normal, peaceful Baluchistan.

According to local journalists, until recently it used to be quite a hassle to travel on

operate away from population centres out of their hideouts in the mountains.

This may not be easy, but the corps commander is confident that he can turn around things and change entrenched perception about Baluchistan. “The people of Baluchistan will feel the difference, Inshallah,” he adds. “They will feel that the FC and army are there for their security, and not to cause any trouble.”

Although terrorists have targeted communities indiscriminately, the ethnic Hazaras have been hit the hardest. Hundreds of Hazaras, a minority Shia community of Afghan origin, have been killed in terrorist attacks perpetrated mainly by sectarian terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Khorasan franchise of Islamic State.

The fear led to ghettoization of the community. Hazara Town, or Hazarganji, is a lower- to middle-income area on the western outskirts of Quetta with a population of over 2 million, of which an estimated two-thirds are Hazaras. They weren’t safe there either as sectarian terrorists unleashed some of the deadliest attacks on the community in Hazarganji. They lived in fear for a long time, but the situation appears to have changed considerably.

Lt Gen Ghafoor got a police post set up at Hazara Town — something the community had long sought for their security. The post, manned by around a dozen personnel, including an inspector, will function until a permanent police station is established. “Steps are being taken together with the provincial government and administration to improve the Hazara community’s security,” he says.

He also promises to facilitate Shia pilgrims travelling to Iran and Iraq for religious pilgrimages through Taftan border. In particular, he pledges to further strengthen the security of convoys of pilgrims and addressing their accommodation issues at the border.

Quetta’s roads. Not anymore. Now, people don’t have to suffer the inconvenience of stopping at ubiquitous security checkpoints to prove their identity. The roads that were earlier off-limit to civilians have now been reopened for their convenience. Entry into Quetta garrison has also been made easy for everyone. All you need to do now to enter the garrison is show your national identity card.

Lt Gen Ghafoor believes it’s a war of narratives which has to be won through a non-kinetic approach, by deoxygenating the insurgents’ narrative.

He vows no mercy for the enemies of the state. However, he says the military force would be used sparingly in a targeted manner, against those who challenge the state writ, undermine peace, and perpetrate terrorism in the province. Insurgents are fringe elements. They

healing touch. They need love, respect, and mollification to mitigate their sense of deprivation and alienation. They must be given their rights and an opportunity to progress socially and economically for durable peace and national harmony in the province. “The state has to provide education and job opportunities to the Baluch youth,” he says.

Quetta was peppered with military and paramilitary checkpoints and heavily-armed security personnel manning them would only instill fear among young schoolchildren driving past them while commuting to school and back home. Lt Gen Ghafoor wants to change this atmosphere of fear. And that, he believes, is only possible by making the people feel they live in normalcy.

“We have already handed over 50 per cent of military



**Steps are being taken together with the provincial government and administration to improve the Hazara community’s security**





# HIGHLIGHTS FROM IDEAS 2022

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

DESIGN BY : IBRAHIM YAHYA

The 11th edition of the biennial defence expo came after a four-year wait. In terms of participation, however, organisers said the event surpassed all previous milestones



KARACHI

The military planners of most nations would look upon a vibrant and sustainable indigenous defence industry with envy. But for nations like Pakistan, hemmed as they are by persistent external and internal security challenges and with limited options to meet their defence needs, such an industrial capacity becomes all the more vital.

Since the year 2000, the International Defence Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS) held in Karachi has provided Pakistan's military and private defence contractors a biennial showcase to demonstrate their industrial prowess. Attracting vendors, contractors and delegates from several friendly nations, the forum has also provided valuable opportunities to Pakistan's defence stakeholders for technological collaboration as well as export of indigenously developed military hardware and capabilities.

Outside of industry experts and stakeholders, each edition of IDEAS has attracted observers of Pakistan's defence industry and capability along with a wider pool of enthusiasts. With the latest of Pakistani defence products on display alongside those foreign defence firms, the exhibition has served as an important indicator of how our country's defence production capabilities fare in contrast to other nations.

This year's edition of IDEAS, the 11th since the forum's inception, came after a rather long wait. Held last week at Karachi's Expo Centre, the exhibition

By far the largest foreign presence at IDEAS 2022 was accounted by Türkiye and China, two of Pakistan's closest defence suppliers and partners

tinational vendors, more than 260 delegates from 64 countries took part in the four-day expo, official statements indicated.

Alongside local military and private sector defence contractors, manufacturers from Türkiye, China, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa showcased their products at the 11th edition of the fair, according to Maj Gen Mohammad Arif Malik, the head of the authority tasked with promoting Pakistan's defence exports.

Both the US and Russia were among exhibitors in the 2022 edition, like previous years, despite the tensions between the two nations, revealed IDEAS 2022 Coordination Director Brigadier Naveed Azam Cheema ahead of the event. From Europe, three countries – Austria, Romania and Hungary – participated in the defence exhibition for the first time, showing “how successful the exhibition

UAV systems, and cyber security.

At the STM kiosk, the firm displayed the Istif (I)-Class Frigate, its Pakistan Navy Fleet Tanker (PNFT), and its STM500 – a small-sized submarine designed using national resources – to visitors. “With its indigenous engineering solutions, STM is engaged in collaborative projects, technology transfer, and business development activities in more than 20 countries, from South America to the Far East,” Güleriyüz said in a statement. Commenting on the company's participation in the event, he said: “While equipping the Turkish Navy and Turkish security forces with innovative and national systems, we share our experience and engineering capability with friendly and allied nations.”

STM, together with ASFAT, has been involved in a number of key projects over the years. It built and delivered PNFT MOAWIN, a Navy Fleet Tanker designed for the Pakistani Navy in Karachi in 2018 as part of a project aimed at building a military ship with the biggest tonnage abroad. “In addition, we are continuing with the modernisation of Pakistan's Agosta-Class 90B subma-



took place after a gap of four years as the novel coronavirus pandemic scuppered the planned IDEAS 2020. According to the organisers, however, IDEAS 2022 surpassed all previous milestones in terms of space, booking, exhibitors and delegates in attendance, proving that the gap did little to dent enthusiasm for the fair.

Foreign presence

In the run up to IDEAS 2022, official statements emphasised that this year's exhibition would focus on the exchange and promotion of technology with a view to strengthen Pakistan's strategic ties with the world community and achieve shared goals of global peace, stability and balance.

In service of that vision, over 500 international defence manufacturers set up stalls and kiosks at Karachi's Expo Centre last week, highlighting IDEAS place as a leading international defence fair in the region. In addition to many mul-

has remained in the past,” said Cheema.

But by far the largest foreign presence at IDEAS 2022 was accounted by Türkiye and China, two of Pakistan's closest defence suppliers and partners. Some 28 leading defence manufacturers from Türkiye, ranging from aviation and naval sectors to firms specialising in military electronics, AI and firearms participated in the event. The top Turkish defence companies present included names such as TAI, Aselsan, state-run STM and ASFAT, and showcased products ranging from military hardware to modern drones to tactical mini-UAV systems and cyber security solutions.

The STM-Savunma Teknolojileri Mühendislik ve Ticaret AS has naval platforms and tactical mini-UAV systems for the exhibition, the company's general manager Özgür Güleriyüz revealed. The company, which is already involved in modernising Pakistan Navy's warfare fleet, including submarines, also offers critical solutions in various segments, including naval platforms, tactical mini-

rines,” Güleriyüz said, adding the company has already delivered the first submarine under the said project, while the modernisation of two remaining submarines is continuing. This is STM's first time acting as the prime contractor in a submarine modernisation project being conducted in a foreign country. Currently, the STM is taking part in a project for the production of four Ada-Class Corvettes for Pakistan.

AI and drones in spotlight

Recent conflicts, from Azerbaijan and Armenia to the ongoing war in Ukraine have revealed how vital drones and other automated or remotely operated weapons systems have become to the art of modern warfare. With new developments in the realm of aerial drones and artificial intelligence (AI) demonstrated day after day, the 2022 edition of IDEAS too focused on the two emerging technologies in the context of defence and security.

At the seminar titled ‘Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Defence Market: A Paradigm Shift in Military Strategy and National Security’, organised as part of IDEAS 2022,





“Recent conflicts, from Armenia to the ongoing war in Ukraine have revealed how vital drones and other automated weapons systems have become. IDEAS 2022 too focused on drones and AI in defence context

discussion centred on the need to transform Pakistan into a global hub for AI, data science, Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality and other emerging technologies. Emphasising research and development, speakers acknowledged that universities can play a key role, combining the expertise of different stakeholders.

“The country can become a global hub for AI, data science, cloud-native computing, edge computing, blockchain, augmented reality, and IoT by reshaping and revolutionising education, businesses and research through the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and AI-driven applications,” noted Federal Minister for Defence Production Muhammad Israr Tareen. “Developments in AI have also changed the dynamics of modern warfare... the concept of security has widened beyond traditional understanding,” he said.

On the subject of drones, Pakistan’s indigenously developed Shahpar II unmanned combat aerial vehicle was displayed the Global Industrial and Defence Solutions (GIDS) stall at IDEAS 2022 alongside the Barq laser guided air-to-surface missile it can be used to launch. GIDS is a state-owned organisation operating under the patronage of Joint Staff Headquarters mandated for the exports of defence products in the international market.

Pakistan’s first indigenous anti-ship cruise missile Harbah-NG was also displayed at the GIDS stall with an eye towards exports. GIDS officials also said they have invented an Integrated Electronic Warfare System which helps forces to sense, protect and communicate within a radius of 30-35 kilometres. “We have produced the system at the one-fourth cost against what Pakistan used to pay to import it earlier,” a GIDS official said. The communication system works on radio signals. It improves the capabilities of the forces in combating against enemy’s aggression.

In addition to the Shahpar II, companies from China and Türkiye displayed their own drone models, ranging from tactical mini-UAVs to larger more heavily armed types. STM, which produces leading and competitive platforms in the tactical mini-UAV system market segment, introduced the KARGU, Türkiye’s first mini-attack UAV; the TOGAN surveillance UAV system; and the ALPAGU fixed-wing attack UAV system, to the South Asian market.

“We have never seen (military) drones from such a close range before. They are simply impressive,” Arif Jameel, a retired government official who visited the Turkish pavilion with family, told Anadolu Agency. “And I have never seen such huge drones before,” his wife, attired in a black gown and matching scarf, said in a lighter tone as an STM official briefed a group of Pakistan Army officers on the technology and operation of drones.

From the civil sector, Woot Tech, a Pakistani aerospace company that designs and manufactures innovative and customised drone technology solutions and provides services for a broad spectrum of applications for industrial-



stan showcased its latest main battle tank called Haider, “which is capable of firing a laser-guided missile with an effective hitting target range of 5 kilometres,” said an HIT official. The Haider MBT was introduced in the recent past and inducted into the Pakistan Army fleet. “This has improved the capability of Pakistani forces on battlefields,” the HIT official said. “This is the most advanced battle tank introduced after the Al-Khalid tank.” The tank is also capable of going into hiding by generating smoke when it senses a counterthreat. This is an auto gear tank with the steering to move it right and left, replacing the old technology of sticks to do so, he said.

Alongside HIT, a Pakistani private sector firm displayed its own series of armoured vehicles aimed at the military, security and law enforcement market. A bombproof armoured vehicle was among the main attractions at the expo and a Middle Eastern country was said to have placed orders for the purchase of the vehicle which, according to the manufacturer, can withstand an explosive device of up to two kilograms.

The armoured vehicle is also equipped with a high-definition 360-degree camera. “We have supplied 24 bombproof vehicles to the armed forces within a year while more vehicles are on the assembly line,” Khalid Yousuf, CEO of the private manufacturing company, told The Express Tribune.

In addition to static displays at the Karachi Expo Centre, a spectacular demonstration of Pakistani forces’ skill was arranged at city’s Sea View beach as part of IDEAS 2022. The skies echoed with the roar of the fighter jets and helicopters as contingents of Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Navy, and Pakistan Army took part in an airshow, beach landing, anti-terrorism mock exercise and other displays of tactical prowess.

During the show Pakistan Navy’s amphibious force, marines, and Special Services Group of Pakistan Army presented a special anti-terrorism demonstration signifying their professional training. A joint counter-terrorism demo was also made comprising fly past and free fall jump by soldiers of the three armed forces. Forces personnel performed beach landing speedboats and hovercraft. During the demonstration, commandos rappelled down to the beach from Sea King helicopters.

The next generation of Pakistani firearms

While the ‘big guns’ like the JF-17 Thunder jet, the



mainstay firearm, representing an original design that could be produced using existing infrastructure used for manufacturing C3 rifles. The BW-20 also appears to follow a simplified design and is believed to consist of 125 parts as opposed to the original C3’s 200 parts.

In addition to POF, other Pakistani firearm manufacturers presented their wares as well, including an M4-type rifle developed by a private sector firm and an indigenously designed multi-barrel grenade launcher.

Integrating public and private sectors

As he inaugurated IDEAS 2022 as chief guest, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari stressed that Pakistan offered enormous opportunities for profitable investments, joint ventures and trade

“Pakistan also showcased its latest main battle tank called Haider, which is capable of firing a laser-guided missile with an effective range of 5km, according to officials



strength commercial use, displayed its own series of indigenously designed drones.

Attractions old and new

Without a doubt, the most striking static displays greeted visitors immediately upon entering the IDEAS 2022 venue. Outside the halls housing stalls for local and foreign military contractors, were displayed some of Pakistan’s flagship defence products, including the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet and the Al-Khalid I main battle tank.

With work underway to induct the most advanced Block 3 version of the JF-17, the Pakistan Air Force put on display the Block 2 model which was part of the fleet that downed two Indian aircraft in retaliation to New Delhi’s aggression in February 2019.

Inside, at the Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT) stall, Paki-

Al Khalid and Haider tanks, and the wide range of indigenously developed armoured personnel carriers and other vehicles grab headlines, equally attractive to visitors are the various displays of modern firearms from both local and foreign defence manufacturers.

At IDEAS 2022, the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) displayed its latest family of automatic rifles, which could perhaps eventually replace the venerable C3 in service in Pakistan’s military and security forces. The BW-20 battle rifle and the related CW-56 assault rifle were displayed in various versions aimed at filling several battlefield niches, from snipers and marksmen to grenadiers.

According to firearms experts and industry observers, the BW-20 rifle and the similar CW-56 employ the same mechanism as the C3 rifle. However, the weapons appear to be more than a simple upgrade the Pakistan military’s

in all sectors, including the defence industry. He added that though Pakistan was exporting high-tech defence products to more than 60 countries, the volume of exports did not commensurate with the country’s actual potential because of the limited involvement of the private sector and lack of attention to academia interface.

“In order to achieve this goal, I will stress the integration of the private and public sectors to achieve maximum results,” the foreign minister told the participants. On the occasion, he urged the small and medium industries to “join hands” with the defence industry.

Bilawal emphasised the vital role played by technologies in confronting modern-day security challenges. “Its responsible use can make the world a better and safer place,” he stressed. “Pak-

istan, being a responsible state, is always committed to play its role for international peace, stability and order,” he said.

In the regional context, he maintained that the transformation of the South Asian geo-strategic environment had further accentuated the importance of the region in the world affairs. “Resultantly, regional cooperation and active engagement with regional and global players has become imperative,” he added.

However, he cautioned that with the rapid advancement in technology and proliferation in knowledge “we are facing a physical change in the established security paradigm”, adding that the increasingly complex security environment of the world posed multifaceted threats to national security and the stability of the country.





# FROM BOOK TALK TO BOOKTOK

Reading books is now the hottest pastime, thanks to a flourishing community of BookTokers on TikTok who are shaping up a socio-literary renaissance through their reactions, reviews and recommendations of the books they love

By **NABIL TAHIR**

Relaxation and leisure has different meanings for everyone. While some of us become couch potatoes and watch TV, others glue their eyes to their smartphones and float into their world of newsfeeds, CandyCrush, and Game of Drones. Then there are those who open a big, fat book and drift into their chosen escape from reality. Reading is a big part of book lovers' lives and something that they love to do at bed-time, on vacation and simply wherever and whenever they find the time.

Defying common belief that social media killed our love for books, just the way Video killed the radio star [remember the 1980 song by The Buggles], the emergence of communities such as Bookstagram on Instagram in 2014, and Booktube in 2010 on Youtube tells a different story. Of course, people had more leisure time during the pandemic, but in 2021 when the pandemic was waning, over 825 million print books were sold in the US (an annual increase of 9%).

This winter's hottest pastime is reading, thanks to BookTok, a subculture on TikTok, the popular social media platform for entertainment enthusiasts. Globally launched in 2016, it has more than 1.2 billion active users, despite the flak it gets for its 'cringe' factor, including complaints such as 'The audience is too young', 'TikTok is just for lip-synching and dancing', 'it is a fad' and 'it is not serious'. Quite popular in Pakistan, TikTok often makes news headlines for some interesting as well as some unsavoury reasons, mostly to do with its content or users.

But people who find it difficult to

believe that millennials read or that TikTok, a social media platform for short and light-heart videos can actually encourage an activity like reading which requires deep concentration, are in for a big surprise.

TikTok's BookTok community was formed in 2020 and the trend has exploded with a growing number of readers who post book reviews and engage with authors, while the latter use it to promote their work.

In September, this year on International Literacy Day, TikTok launched their trend #BookTok in Pakistan, with an aim to uplift a growing community of readers and to revive the love of reading, literature and poetry. Since then, the trend has attracted book lovers and publishers, many of whom have showcased their books and promoted authors on this platform.

## BookTok for authors

Reading is a habit we generally pick up as children. When we grow up and as responsibilities set in, other forms of entertainment and mainly social media steals most of our leisure time, so we don't get to read as much.

TikTok's trend #BookTok is a global campaign to encourage the love of reading, learning and literature and has garnered 90.4 billion views worldwide. Since book lovers in Pakistan have a historical affinity for literature and poetry, the local campaign focuses on young adults who share book recommendations, thereby facilitating a cross-pollination of readers, and creating more visibility for this new book community.

According to the data provided by TikTok, #BookTok has created 298,000 videos from readers, publishers,

known and self-published authors, viewed 925 million times since its launch in Pakistan.

Maryam Arif is the youngest self-published author in Pakistan. The 18-year-old uses a variety of social media platforms and advertising sites, including Facebook and Instagram Ads, Amazon Advertising, KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) Select and giveaways, Guest Post and TikTok to market her books. TikTok, Arif believes is one platform where she not only gets free promotion of her books, but can also reach out to more like-minded people.

"I have been making BookToks for a while now," says Arif, whose TikTok handle @itsmaryamarif has an estimated three million views. "TikTok has created BookTok, a popular place for those interested in reading and writing books, and it has helped increase my audience."

Arif's self-help books are among the most viewed on BookTok. "I usually share a couple of things from my books and people love that," she says. "My website is linked to my TikTok account, and the attention and visibility my books get is directly converted into sales," says Arif, who also uses #maryamarif in her videos that have been viewed 2.7 million times, while her hashtag has been viewed 271,000 times.

Initially, she posted for fun and shared her favourite books on TikTok, but she noticed that the views increased steadily. It was during lockdown, when one of her videos got over 10,000 likes in a day that she decided to post content daily.

"How you deliver your content on TikTok matters because that is what ultimately generates sales," she says, discussing marketing strategies for the app. "Many people approach me at my university, simply because they have seen my content on TikTok, through which they found out what my books are about. This is how I discovered that TikTok actually helps to sell books."

Last May, as a panelist on the Digital Marketing Consortium, at the Comsats University, Islamabad, Arif discussed the effectiveness of BookTok and how BookTokers are a growing community online, even though compared to other TikTok trends, fewer people BookTok in South Asia.

## BookTok for readers

Millions of readers post about what they have read and share their reviews, and recommendations on BookTok. When authors promote their books, readers watch their videos and buy books based on their recommendations. TikTok has an option where publishers can add books, readers can discuss the book and add the publisher's book link in their video. This way, a separate



page is created for a specific book that carries its description and readers' reviews.

Nameera Humayun, a 22-year old book enthusiast was casually scrolling TikTok one day, when she came across a girl talking about books. Intrigued, she studied the girl's profile and content only to discover the world of BookTokers. "I discovered millions of BookTokers around the world," says Humayun. "It's crazy how we are all connected through books that we love. And the creativity that BookTokers use to talk about books, through in-app filters, is astounding."

While exploring BookTok, Humayun kept adding books to her 'To Be Read' list. Since her TikTok account was all about book content, she decided to make her own BookToks. "I started reviewing books and made videos for book recommendations, book trends, guessing the book title, etc," she explains with joy and enthusiasm. "I use BookTok to show my love for books, have made many new BookToker friends and I post content daily."

BookTok has something for everyone. Some look for book recommendations and reviews, while others like Humayun like to step out of her comfort zone to explore different book genres.

## New or old, everything is gold on BookTok

"Out of the millions of users on TikTok, someone starts talking about an old and forgotten book, others join in, and it starts trending," says Humayun, explaining how books read in the past and forgotten, outdated books or ones that did not become popular at the time of publishing are also seeing a revival on BookTok.

Sameer Saleem, who heads Liberty Books, agrees. "BookTok has given a new life to books that were published over a decade ago but had not become popular at the time," he says. "People

discover them on BookTok and suddenly they are asking for those books."

Humayun says that some books published ten years ago became popular again because of BookTokers promoting them. "Some publishers had to reprint 10,000 copies a month to meet the sudden demand," she shares. "Authors who promoted their debut novels on BookTok also sold well."

## BookTok for publishers

BookTok trickled down to book stores, taking the shape of specialised #BookTok and #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt booths. As part of the stores' promotional activities for publishers, through these booths, Liberty bookstore not only found a large group of book enthusiasts under one roof, but also got to know their opinions on specific books without having to conduct a survey to find out what genres interest them.

"During the pandemic, we came across BookToks and started making videos of the books available at our stores," says Saleem explaining his company's motivation for the booths. "Soon we started getting book requests from customers and we found out that the books they wanted in stores were TikTok recommendations. It was interesting to note that these book lovers buying books from BookTok shelves are 15 to 27 years old."

The book requests were listed, scrutinised, and included in a special section in-store and online for people to buy. "Other social media platforms are also popular for book recommendations," says Saleem. But TikTok has more traction and the added benefit is that people get to know where to buy books from."

Arif believes that BookTok offers an easier and faster marketing strategy that publishers should opt for in-

stead of organising traditional book launch events. "It is a brilliant way to help people find their next read, because it tells you about recent releases and what the hype is all about on TikTok," she says.

## Future of BookTok in Pakistan

In less than three months after its launch in Pakistan, BookTok is rapidly becoming popular as readers, authors and publishers discover new ways to use the platform.

"Book piracy is a huge issue in our country, and we have been talking about it on many platforms," says Saleem, discussing his company's plan to educate readers about the demerits of book piracy on BookTok. "Hopefully, we will talk to a larger audience here that a pirated book is cheaper, but has missing or swapped chapters, missing text, print errors, and that it damages authors' royalties."

Since BookToks are short and fun, it is an exciting way for readers to pick books. "TikTok provides attention to new and old writers and attention is the new currency," says Arif who plans to create as much TikTok content as possible to help provide value and knowledge to the younger generation that dominates TikTok.

Humayun wants to take BookTok to the next level by testing her potential with it. "I plan to upload BookToks every day, develop a larger audience and connect with them," she says.

Even though, only a few Pakistani publishers are on TikTok. Once they get their books on TikTok, use book links and videos links and create dedicated book lists, it will not only boost their low-selling books, but will also serve as a free marketing tool for those who cannot afford to get their book published and marketed otherwise. The immense potential of this trend is yet to be explored in our country, but BookTok can't stop talking about books, and is here to stay.



## T Magazine's picks



**Binge this week:**  
**Pepsi, where's my jet**

TV Show

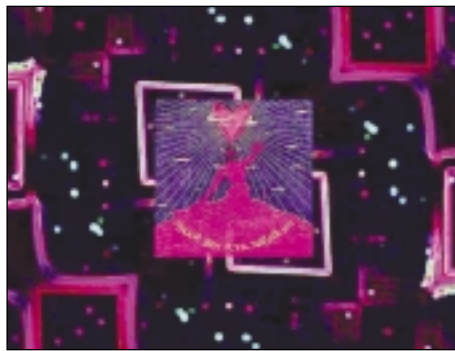


This is a 4-part docuseries about how in 1995, 20-year-old John Leonard and an adventurous investor Todd Hoffman found a loophole in the "Pepsi Stuff" campaign, where people cashed in "Pepsi Points" for merchandise, to cash in 7 million points for a Harrier fighter jet. The filmmakers do a good job of putting the story into perspective which shows how wild, goofy and silly things can get when giant brands such as PepsiCo and their advertising firm don't close loopholes well. Did they get the jet? You can google or watch this to find out.



**Listen this week:**  
**Aik Raat Ki Kahani**

Music



Hot on the heels of his much-loved track Rent Free (with Aima Baig), released earlier year, singer, songwriter, and producer Taha G is back with a brand new track Aik Raat Ki Kahani. With his knack of writing sensitive, catchy, relatable and singable lyrics, his tracks in both the electropop genre and acoustic are always well-produced. In his new release, Taha G is reflecting on whether his relationship is going to fizzle out or is there more to it. If you're wondering that about yours, this could be your track.



**Read this week:**  
**Storyland**

Books



Beginning with Creation and Noah's Flood, through the earliest generation of giants from an age when fallen angels walked the earth, to the birth of Christ, right up to how UK came into being, spanning the Britons, Saxons and Vikings wars and closing at the Normans, Jeffs retells myths of homeland, exile and migration, kinship, loyalty, betrayal, love and loss with narrative flair. Closed with a rich and knowledgeable commentary and exquisite, minimalist black-and-white artworks of giants and devils, heroes and heroines, kings and creatures, Amy Jeffs's new compendium of British mythology is a literary collector's delight.



**Follow this week:**  
**Let's Talk Religion**

Podcast



Through longer detailed videos and some short ones, the channel introduces mainstream faiths as well as religions that are not always in the limelight. Specialising primarily in Islam and Sufism, Filip Holm, the creator has a master's degree in religious studies from Sweden's Södertörn University and aims to increase religious literacy in the world by sharing his academic, fair and unbiased perspective. He believes that improved religious education and literacy can make more room for discussion, tolerance and understanding in today's world that is battered with religious strife.





# ABUSIVE, NOT AMUSING!

**It is ironic that Pakistan's official moral policing begins and ends with hiding truthful stories of gender based complications, incestuous abuse and tabooed love, all of which exist as real issues in families in our society. But why and how is it acceptable to depict repeated abuse of women by men and to glamorise their menacing conduct?**

By **MAHEEN A RASHDI**

Drama as an entertainment genre dates back to the early Greek period in the West and the Sanskrit theatre in the East. It used to be usually tragedies depicting abject misery or comedies/satires full of farcical antics often performed in the streets upon a makeshift stage.

The obvious purpose of the drama/play was to tell a story based on real life, using hyperbolic references to depict issues. And while telling stories, either of the common man or of heroic deeds undertaken by mythological figures, there was always the, 'moral of the story' and good defeated evil most commonly.

Fast forwarding through the literary ages we can see that while dramatic forms experienced several changes from classical narratives of gods and goddesses in the medieval age to the aristocratic comedies of the Restoration period to Shakespeare's plays and romantic comedies in the Elizabethan age to the modern and post-modern realism the essence of 'drama' has remained the same. Entertainment with a moral after-math.

Entertainment may come with its share of cathartic tears, with laugh out loud comedy, through fantasy to erase reality or with stark realism in the telling of simple stories. Whichever form the story telling takes, neither entertainment nor social messaging can be absent from dramatic narratives.

Pakistani dramas have also had a very illustrious journey and Urdu dramas can be traced back more than a 100 years when Agha Hashar Kashmiri began his writing career by adapting Shakespeare's Measure for Measure in the late 1800s. And many still remember that not too far back in the day, Indian viewers used to try tuning into PTV to watch Haseena Moin, Baijiya, Ashfaq Ahmed plays performed to perfection by our thespians of yore. Though the onslaught of Indian saas bahu kahanis did take over cable TV briefly in the first decade of the 2000s when each climactic shot was repeated thrice Pakistani drama producers / directors soon realized that actresses sleeping in full make-up and jewellery and waking up without a hair out of place was just plain stupid.

It's been over ten years now since the Pakistani drama scene started making waves again. Skilled stories, slick directions, and credible acting have won audiences internationally and Pakistanis settled abroad follow Pakistani TV dramas diligently. Consequently, it's not just the production quality of plays that has evolved, but also audience preferences, understanding and competence in measuring the worthiness of a play. The collective intellectual merit of the audience has risen hugely because of information explosion via the internet and a viewer is quick to gauge the merit and worth of a story. The audience has become insightful and even an unlettered domestic worker can add a few pithy comments to a stupid storyline.

Granted that TV watchers comprise a mix of varying social/intellectual layers, and not every play may necessarily be liked by everyone and considered watchable by one and all. A sobbing mother's woes may be of interest to some, while Nabeel Zafar's clowning in Bulbulay or Fawad and Ma-

hera's fragile, misunderstood relationship in Humsafar may hold another's interest. Art and entertainment is free to be like a smorgasbord, catering to a varying palette. And while some may find a play to be sub-standard, boring etc., another might enjoy the same production. It is agreed that art is subjective, and there's really no accounting for tastes.

Nevertheless, artists, especially creators of stories catering to a mass audience have some sort of social responsibility and by this I must add that official moral policing is not what this refers to. This is specifically about glamorising abuse.

Our entertainment industry has done commendable work to depict that as a society, we will not accept or condone any form of abuse. Plays like Udari and Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila, are just a few of the remarkable storylines to our drama industry's recent credit. Enormous amount of effort has been put in by storywriters and directors/producers to address mental darkness and rebuff norms deeming it 'okay' for husbands, wives or even parents to bully in the name of love or family traditions and cultural compulsions.

So when a play like Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi (KTK), which audaciously glamorises abuse, is allowed to air without even a small disclaimer to announce that "we do not condone any kind of violence," as an audience we are duty-bound to question the appropriateness of such a shameless storyline. It is obvious that in the eyes of our censor board smoking or partaking alcohol is much worse as those scenes always carry a disclaimer of 'smoking is injurious to health'. While a woman's life being ruined by a maniacal man is just normal behaviour allowed to happen in a society where a female life is



cheap and bound with traditions and where only she is deemed the keeper of morality.

Who are these people that comprise our censor board and nourish such vile notions and then are quick to condemn the depiction of our realities as 'repugnant'? I don't recall any storyline with landlords committing various murders and girls being hunted down by obsessive lovers ever deemed repugnant!

While there are several dramas on TV where writers/producers/directors still seem to be living in the past when weeping, helpless women were pushed around by husbands and parents, KTK takes violence to another level of disgrace and is one of the most disturbing stories on local TV.

In a country where we have incidents like what happened to Noor Muqaddam, do writers really think that showing such sadistic behaviour towards women is justified for the sake of a drama serial?

The track is beyond redemption. First it shows the horrifying behaviour of the 'anti-hero' (he is

not qualified to be called a hero), and then by giving the girl no way out, her family falls in with the anti-hero's merciless manoeuvres. The way the story has turned, it is even more 'repugnant' to watch with the man's attempts at turning over a new leaf and the girl's family which earlier supported her in running/hiding from him – is now lecturing her on saving her marriage and telling her how much he loves her.

Love? Really? The same love which Khadija Siddiqi's spurned admirer showed by stabbing her 23 times?

Our children daughters and sons need to be taught lessons at a very early age that abuse in any form is wrong. Verbal, physical and even financial. You neither take it nor use it on others.

Television is a very sensitive medium and the audience is far reaching. Writers must realise that stories which depict spurned emotions and violence must also have to have a dire repercussion. What message are we giving otherwise to impressionable, uneducated males, leading them to believe that it is acceptable to use any means to deal with rejected advances, even brute force? It's not just men but even women fail to realise that abusive behaviour comes in many forms.

Our parents were a product of institutionalised bullying where,

still believe it is only the parent's right. Brute force even by parents is objectionable.

Several unrealistic and archaic storylines are even now being aired on the uncountable entertainment channels with the same old storyline of saas-bahu issues or spurned love and the resulting psychotic behaviour of protagonists. Particularly stories of parental abuse abound on TV which comes in insidious ways of guilt tripping their children and ruining lives. But the mental and physical torture glamorised in KTK, which is now turning into a cheesy love story of the abuser and his victim, goes beyond all moral boundaries. This is purely the Stockholm syndrome being excused as a misplaced argument of love conquers all.

It's a sincere wish, nay plea, that viewers take out time to object more on sub-standard drama productions on social media rather than spend time pointing fingers at stars' dress codes in their off screen moments and wondering about other people's married bliss or lack thereof which is no body's business but the couple's.

Sending a message that abusing girls is ok, is a crime which KTK has clearly done against which action should be taken and alleged social workers should stand up. And by standing up it

sive it is to be treated as fools and simpletons by drama producers/directors, we will keep on being dealt out low quality productions with half-baked or psychotic affirmations of criminal ideas.

If you read the PEMRA regulations regarding, 'Prohibition of broadcasts or CTV operation' it says that, "The Authority shall by order, giving reasons in writing for declaring the order, prohibit any broadcaster or CTV operator from broadcasting or re-broadcasting or distributing any programme if it is of the opinion that such particular programme is likely to create hatred among the people or is prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order or likely to disturb public peace and tranquility or endangers national security or is pornographic or is offensive to commonly accepted standards of decency." With such a broad mandate PEMRA can obviously pick and choose whatever it wants to block as per their (i.e. patriarchal) interpretation of morality, decency and religious connotations and the dos and don'ts therein, which are mentioned more than once in the Regulations.

However, giving PEMRA its due, their actions are definitely more lenient (or just plain lazy) and more objective than the Pakistan Censor Board whose members' cerebral reliability is more questionable particularly about what they think is 'repugnant'.

In the case of Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi, the premise should have definitely been questioned by PEMRA under its 'offensive to commonly accepted standards of decency' clause. A heroic and blissful culmination of an abusive and toxic pursuit should have been scrutinised properly. A strong punishment was needed for such a volatile, conceited, chauvinist and heartless stalker of an innocent girl whom he happens to briefly glance during one of his cold-blooded acts of civil disobedience and decides in a heartbeat to menacingly hound her.

What a shame for all victims of abuse that we are trivialising their suffering and creating entertainment based on incidents that have ruined their lives.



"because I say so," was enough to get their offspring – of any age – to bow to their wishes. It is not so anymore and it should not be. Children have a right to make their career choices, their life partner choices which many parents

should be noted that it's not just about joining the bandwagon of a popular cause but to actually want someone held accountable and to say that viewers should be treated with more respect.

If viewers don't show how offen-

*The writer is a former magazine editor, and columnist covering social and geo-political issues and can be reached at [maheenrashdi@gmail.com](mailto:maheenrashdi@gmail.com). All information and facts provided are the sole responsibility of the writer*





# REPLENISHING SINDH’S FOOD BASKET

**Most of Sindh’s farmers on the right bank of Indus are back on their feet and set to sow winter wheat and other crops. But those on the left bank bear the brunt of slow govt response and encroached waterways while keeping fingers crossed to at least catch the far end of the wheat season**



By **SAMEER MANDHRO**

Despite the mental and physical crises he went through after the catastrophic floods earlier this year, Moheb Ali, a farmer from the village of Sobho Khan Loond, in Sindh, is happy that he has started to cultivate his land for winter wheat crop right on time.

In September this year, Ali had lost his mud house, when a breach occurred in Manchhar Lake, inundating scores of villages in Jamshoro and Dadu districts. To save his family, he was forced to leave everything behind, and stay with them in relief camps until two weeks ago when things were safe enough to return back home to his village, some 30km from Sehwan.

“It was a nightmare,” he says, trying to control his tears as he points to the damaged houses nearby. “Even though we have lost everything we had in the rains and floods, at least we will harvest our wheat in the coming months,” Ali smiles as he looks at the green fields.

“The nightmare is not over as yet,” says Raffique Loond, Ali’s relative, as he leaves for the fields. “We have to work hard and fight with the harsh weather. The poor have always had to fight, but this too shall pass. God is Great.”

Ali explains that wheat is the only crop that will save his kids from hunger as the harvest will bring him money.

Devastated by the floods, the villagers of Sobho Khan Loond were uncertain about sowing the winter crop. “We thought we would not be able to sow the winter crop in time because of water standing in the fields,” he says. “But the land is now sufficiently dry and I am hopeful that we will have a good crop this year.”

Except two most affected talukas, Mehar and Khairpur Nathan Shah located on the right bank of the Indus River, the situation has improved in this area. The Sindh government claims that over 90 per cent of agriculture land which remained submerged under rainwater is now ready for wheat and other crops.

Presently, the flood situation in the districts located on the right side of the river seems to have improved. According to the satellite images of Sentinel 2A, flood water reduction in Kashmore district was 98.46 %, in Jacobabad it was 77.38 %, in Shikarpur it was 90.14 %, in Qambar-Shahdadkot it was 89.18 %, in Larkana it was 91.83 %, in Dadu it was 60.11 %, and in Jamshoro, 83.48 %.

“I do not see any improvement,” said Abdul Wahid, a farmer from Gozo Sharif, a village of over 800 families. “It is not receding the way we expected it to. I do not understand how we will have wheat and mustard this season.”

Most of the areas near Wahid’s village are still under water and the villagers are worried about missing the wheat planting sea-

son. “There is about eight feet of water standing on my land, and I doubt it will be drained out easily,” he says.

Since the damaged road from Gozo and adjacent areas to Khairpur Nathan Shah has become visible after water receded, the residents of the nearby areas are trying to commute on their bikes, cars, rickshaws and tractors.

The displaced families who have started returning to their villages are not sure if they will be able to grow this season’s crops.

“The situation in most parts of Sindh has improved except for two talukas of Dadu district,” confirms Sindh’s Irrigation Minister Jam Khan Shoro. “Water will recede, but it will take a few more weeks for dry land to appear that farmers need to sow the next crop. We hope to achieve this tar-



**The government response to floodwater removal was very slow, says Baloch. It was through our own efforts that water was drained out so that it would be possible for us to sow the winter wheat crop**

In districts such as Khairpur Mirs, Naushehro Feroze, Sanghar, Matiari and others, the farmers helped each other to get rid of flood and rainwater through water channels.

Like other famers in the Nawabshah area, Fida Hussain Baloch has also lost the ready-

seeds and fertilisers,” says Abdul Shakoor, a farmer from Matiari district. “But we are still waiting for that promise to materialise. I got seeds from a shop for a much higher price.”

Although the situation on the left side of the River Indus has improved, at least four union councils in Saeedabad taluka of Matiari district are still under rainwater. Several villages, including Malook Khaskheli, Ibrahim Kaka, Bachal Kaka, Ramzan Khaskheli, Mole Dino Hajano, Faiz Mohammad Sehto, Soomar Bremani and adjacent villages of union council Sikandarabad, Baledino Kaka, Zahir Pir, and union council 8 are still under water.

Likewise, most of the villages in Saeedabad taluka along Meh-

ran Highway are still struggling

that the only way is to restore the natural water ways which are occupied.

“In this area, the natural way is the Markh Wah distributary,” Izhar says. “But it has become an encroached bottleneck since years. We are stuck with flood water because we do not have a proper drainage system.” He explains how except this part of the district on the left side of the Indus, all the land that was being cultivated promised prosperity for the communities living here, but the left side is still suffering the impact of the devastating floods.

The rabi or winter season in the upper and lower districts of Sindh varies, from mid-October to mid-December. Hence, the farmers in areas where water has not been drained out keep their fingers crossed that they’ll be able to cultivate later in the year.

Chulam Hussain Shah, a landlord from Shaheed Benazirabad district, says that most of the farmers in this area have cultivated their land and started to sow wheat in time for winter harvest.

“The potency of the land is affected by accumulated rainwater,” Shah explains. “This will affected the yield. The situation is not 100 per cent perfect for all the famers of the province. Water is receding slowly, but in some pockets, it will remain for the next two to three years.”

In Shah’s area located near the left side of the Indus, about 2,500 acres of agriculture land was under rainwater since mid-September. “Instead of rains, my land was impacted by mismanagement,” says Shah. “But at least we got some of our sowing season and that will keep the fear of food insecurity away.”

Majority of the displaced families living in different cities, including Karachi and Hyderabad, have left for their native villages. The process of the rehabilitation such as construction of damaged houses has not started yet, but farmers with the help of landlords have started sowing different crops, including tomatoes and vegetables.

Allah Rakhio Mallah from Badin says that although parts of his district were affected by the floods, the seasonal crops, especially wheat, has not been affected by rainwater.

“Everyone thought that after floods followed by heavy rains, there would be no crop or a late crop this time,” says Mallah whose district is known for four major crops, including tomatoes, wheat, sugarcane and cotton. “Tomatoes from my district appeared first in the market and now we are sure the winter wheat crop will harvest on time,” Mallah says, adding that the seasonal crops will help the poor peasants to overcome most of their financial issues and debts within the next two to three months.



**It is not receding the way we expected it to. I do not understand how we will have wheat and mustard this season**

get soon.”

The right side of the Indus River has mostly been affected by rainwater coming in from Balochistan through Hamal and Keenjhar Lakes, while on the left side of the river, heavy rains devastated public and private properties.

The farmers on both sides of the river lost their cotton crop, a ‘cash crop’ from which that they earn a good income, during August to December, by working as cotton pickers on daily wages.

Commuting on the National Highway from Hyderabad to Sukkur, it is now difficult to imagine that all that land was under at least knee-deep water and the residents were displaced for two months from August to October.

The remains of the damaged cotton crop are visible as are the fruit orchards with bananas, guava, mangoes, dates and other trees, which were also been badly damaged by stagnant water.

to-pick cotton crop that was damaged due to flood water, but he has managed to cultivate the seasonal crops including wheat and mustard on time.

“The government response to floodwater removal was very slow,” says Baloch. “It was through our own efforts that water was drained out so that it would be possible for us to sow the winter wheat crop.”

Akram Khaskheli, who works for the rights of peasants fears food insecurity next year. “Mostly, the peasants or landlords with less than 50 acres of land suffered from the floods and the cotton crop was completely destroyed,”

pleased to be planting the wheat crop on time,” says Khaskheli. “It had seemed almost impossible to have dry land ready for seasonal crops but now more than 80 per cent land has been cultivated. Some peasants are still struggling for the remaining water to drain out, but I am sure we will have 100 per cent wheat crop season this year.”

In most areas, Sindh’s farmers are under debt burden. The government, they say, did not help the calamity hit farmers promptly and the rescue and relief operation was slow.

“The provincial government promised to help farmers with

to drain the rainwater out. “It will take at least one more month to have our land ready for crop,” says Izhar Kaka, a local farmer.

Like Izhar, Aziz Kaka is also upset over stagnant rainwater in the fields which he believes will not be drained out before the end of December. The farmers and landlords, he says, are disappointed with their persistent miserable state of affairs at the hands of government apathy.

“The floods have had a long lasting impact on us,” says Kaka. “No one can compensate or even understand what the farmers have lost because of these heavy rains.”

On the right side of the Indus River, the authorities and local landlords have an option to drain out the rain water either in the Manchhar Lake or the Indus directly.

But, on the left side, the authorities, especially the irrigation department has realised