



TRUTH TRACKER

WATCHING OUT FOR PAKISTAN



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Anti Terror Laws to hunt journalists in Pakistan!

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Magazine By:





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Editorial

Pakistan's Media: Dancing to many tunes

"Journalists should ensure that they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcomes of a political conflict," writes Professor Julianne Schultz, describing the role and duties of journalists in democratic states. Professor Schultz, founding editor of Griffith Review, an Australian journal for current affairs, describes in her book 'Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and Media' the professional obligation of newsmen to downplay views of extremists whose ideas threaten democracy.

Perhaps Pakistan's media, which has a long history of struggle for a democratic system, is still doubtful about the fact that Pakistan is a democracy. Media, deviating from its role of a watchdog, has adopted roles like lobbyist, propagandist, mouthpiece and soldier of fortune.

This is not a minor point. The decaying state of media is decomposing the democratic system of Pakistan too.

During Pakistan Peoples' Party's 2008-2013 rule, the people of Pakistan clearly observed extreme 'media activism' and 'judicial activism' against the elected government. Almost every second day, television anchors on various television news channels would predict that the elected government would be toppled by the military establishment, supported by the judicial establishment (Supreme Court of Pakistan). Supreme Court did disqualify the elected prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani. Somehow, the PPP managed to complete its tenure, which was a historic moment in the history of democracy in Pakistan.

When PML-N formed its elected government in 2013, the media started treating the new elected government in the same way it had treated the PPP's governments.

Nobody can deny the fact that there has been always been tacit friction between the elected governments and military establishment, but media portrayed both as the conflicting groups, and to some extent, succeeded in strengthening the impression. It is not the media's job to take sides or presume an outcome.

There are several reasons for the media's professional and ethical downfall. Mushrooming growth of media is a healthy sign in Pakistan; but poor editorial control, a flood of unprofessional anchors and analysts, recruitment of journalists without merit and compromises by the owners stained the reputation of Pakistan's media.

Another important point Schultz mentioned was downplaying the extremists. Pakistan's media might be the only media in any democracy where activists and apologists for the extremist groups hold key positions.

Under National Action Plan against terrorism and extremism, glorification of terrorists and extremists is prohibited—but only on papers. Recently, former Spokesman of Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Ihsanullah Ihsan surrendered before the security forces. A couple of TV anchors interviewed him in custody and several columnists and analysts sparked off a debate that he should be given amnesty.

The newsmen supporting amnesty for Ihsan clearly don't care about the future of democracy. So why should they single him out? They might as well go ahead and demand amnesty for all terrorists, robbers, killers and criminals who are ready to surrender. Why not openly embrace complete societal chaos? That would be more honest than the charade of journalists who claim to stand for the interests of their audience.

Mubasher Bukhari

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Editor's Note

PML-N plugging the Leaks

The issue of the Dawn Leaks has been 'settled,' leaving quite a bitter aftertaste in the political broth. The sitting government has dealt with the Dawn Leaks commission report through the subsequent rolling of the heads as necessary measures to appease the growing suspense and tension arising from within the cadres of power. Notwithstanding the official verdict stood: rejecting the Leaks as fictional. Though the contents of the report have not been disclosed, and many fear any chances, the matter has embarrassed the civil-military leaders equally.

Some analysts have viewed the demand, establishment and the latter report as eyewash. The fact of the matter is that the first concern since the publication of the notorious expose was raised about the source and not the authenticity. So the political pundits prediction of an effort at face-saving held its water.

The reactionary tweet from military establishment confirmed the civil military acrimony. The tweet flatly questioned the report as tenuous and rejected it. In the ten days ensuing the tweet the opposition parties and analysts, both nationally and across the globe, speculated, holding out their scorecards. Finally after an alleged negotiation the military establishment back-pedaled and among other things, the new official statement deemed the initial statement as 'infructuous.' This is an unprecedented strategy from the military—known for exerting their might—and a discomfiting faux pas.

The balance of power between civil-military elite has been sketchy from the get-go. In time, despite their stained relationships, Pakistan People's Party especially and PML-N have somewhat mastered syntaxes to exist alongside the military regimes. Many a times we have been told civil leadership as corrupt, nonproductive, lacking patriotism. However, it has been rare that the civil leadership would stand at the other side of the stick. This has led to much theorizing about the dawn leaks as been viciously prompted.

However premature, it seems that the report may not have solved the riddle of how exactly and why the news got out. The grueling six-month period of the investigation of the Dawn Leaks Commission findings has been an effort to soften the blow for the parties in question. It is also guesswork if government's investigations have prescribed a set of workable suggestions.

Chaudhry Nisar may see tweets as evil but it is questionable whether the PML-N government's current ploys have been advised by past mistakes. Nawaz Sharif may have averted a crisis but he is still wading in troubled waters. It seems that the Military is exercising prudence in deciding to let democracy run its course, allowing the courts pull the noose. The premier would be wise to know that he remains answerable for the Panama charges and distractions may fail to ensure his political longevity.

Ameerah Javeria

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Accountability

Tug of war in Pakistan's civil-military relations may prolong



Waqar Gillani

Islamabad: A recent inflammatory tweet and its retracting after more than a week's serious civil-military tension indicate a tug-of-war between Pakistan's civil and military establishment with fears it might continue and evolve in different directions owing to the varied political capitalization on the issue.

On April 29, Prime Minister office issued an order to take action against two officials in the line of recommendations of a special probe committee to identify the elements feeding the controversial story that maligned the military establishment. The military had blamed the civilian leadership for feeding controversial content to a mainstream newspaper on third of last October.

The story, with unnamed attributions, claimed concerns of civilian leadership about "growing diplomatic isolation" of Pakistan before the military establishment in a national security meeting in Prime Minister's house. The report claimed concerns were about lack of action against some militant groups.

Following the submissions of the probe committee, PM office issued a directive pronouncing action against two officials deemed responsible. A few minutes after the PM office directive, director general Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Asif Ghafoor issued a tweet stating, "Notification on Dawn- Leak is incomplete

and not in line with recommendations by the Inquiry Board. Notification is rejected." The tweet caused a serious rift between the government and military establishment for many days ultimately ending up in a secretive patch up where government assured army to entertain their concerns regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the probe committee that would lead to withdrawal of the objectionable tweet, almost 10 days after the issue emerged.

"Prime minister is the final authority and his orders [regarding the implementation of the Dawn Leaks inquiry body's recommendations] should be implemented," DG ISPR stated in a presser on May 10 further saying, "What happened is regrettable. The two sides were pitted against one another, which should not have been done." He also assured that army supports the Constitution, democracy and rule of law as much as any Pakistani. In a separate press release, army declared the tweet "withdrawn" and "infructuous."

The situation, propagating army on back foot for constitutional supremacy, seemed managed through secret apologetic meetings by the government. Earlier, the government took stance that PM office issued an incomplete directive to implement the news-leak probe committee report "without bringing into knowledge of prime minister."

"We have to see this issue cautiously rather judging it as a victory and defeat of the sides," columnist and political analyst Wajahat Masood told Truth Tracker,

adding, "though the government has the right to be jubilant for the time being victory of retracting of tweet undermining military supremacy in a democracy but we should not forget this victory has not changed the civil military imbalance." He said civil military imbalance has a history in Pakistan and it cannot be solved until civilian rulers have full control over policies and policymaking. Policymaking and its control still lies with military establishment in Pakistan and democratic regimes are struggling for it inch by inch.

"Also, we should not ignore more such issues and tensions in coming months," Masood views fearing the attempts to weaken this democratic regime by next elections amid civil-military power tussle. He observed it would be very difficult for an army chief to defend this defeat before his force full with ego and belief of supremacy. The coming days actions will further clear the situation of this power game amid political and security environment of the country, he asserted.

In the history of civil-military imbalance in Pakistan, political parties in the opposition have always tried to exploit such differences between the two power corridors. Previously, in Pakistan Peoples party's regime, the Nawaz Sharif who was in opposition at that time used his non-practicing law degree and took the ruling party to the Supreme Court in "Memogate" scandal. The controversy revolved around a 2011 memorandum addressed to Admiral Mike Mullen of United States ostensibly seeking help of the Obama administration in the wake of the Osama bin Laden killing to avert a military

takeover of the civilian government in Pakistan. The then opposition party termed it a conspiracy against military establishment, an allegation which the same party is facing now after coming in power. Now, once again, capitalizing on the civil-military rift, there is pressure on the present regime to make the report public and let people decide the matter too.

Aitzaz Ahsan, senate's parliamentary leader of Pakistan Peoples' Party, has demanded resignation of the army spokesperson after this embarrassing-termed situation for him.

party – Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf – told Truth Tracker, adding, “the government should take a unequivocal position.” He urged the government to make the report public to avoid further propaganda.

“The basic question remains the same as it was some months back as to whether the controversial story was true or false,” Asad Umar, a senior leader of a main opposition



Human Rights

Anti Terror Laws to hunt journalists in Pakistan!



Lala Hassan

Karachi: Though the government of Pakistan has accepted and noted the recommendations of decriminalization of defamation laws in second Universal Period Review (UPR), a United Nations instrument for member countries to ensure compliance on Human Rights, however journalists in Pakistan continue to be convicted and charged under Anti Terror Laws.

The Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) has recently convicted two journalists for seven years each with rigorous imprisonment, making it first ever case of conviction to journalists under Anti Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997 in district Naushahro Feroze of Sindh province. The conviction has not only alarmed but emerging trend of charging journalists under ATA has baffled many when another journalist Izhar Mari of Mehran TV channel was arrested in Shaheed Benazirabad (a district renamed after Ms Benazir Bhutto, former chairperson of Pakistan People's Party) district known as Nawab Shah.

However, ATC conviction has been set

aside by Sindh High Court, Sukkur Bench, on the appeal of the journalists. On 9 May, 2017 both Akhlaque Jokhio and Qurban Gadahi of weekly Sahti Jo Awaz were released from Sukkur Central Prison of north Sindh.

Lala Asad, office bearer of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), who was closely following the case, told Truth Tracker that after the earlier conviction, the trend of charging journalists under ATA has emerged in the area, as an accountant of District Police Office Naushahro Feroze filed an application in Court against journalists Zahid Rajpar of Samaa TV, his wife Rohi Bano, Younis Rajpar of ARY news, Mustafa Tagar of Geo news, Mazhar Khaskheli and Murtaza to be charged under ATA and defamation as they were demanding “Bhatta” (extortion money).

While in Mithiani, a town on the right bank of Indus River in Naushahro Feroze district, Imtiaz Bhatti of Sindh TV, Illahi Bux Bhatti of daily Ibrat, Masroor Chandio, Dr. Barkat Malik and Rana Sarwar have been facing same lawsuits against them in lower courts followed by rift with a police officer on the removal newspapers stall.

Zahid told Truth Tracker that they had actually reported on the illegal

appointment of a constable cum clerk as an Account officer exposing his alleged corruption; consequently the appointee registered false cases against journalists under ATA. In defiance of the charges, many journalists held sit-in in front the office of the Deputy Inspector General Police Shaheed Benazirabad division Farhat Ali Jonejo, who assured them legal action and fair inquiry into the matter.

Advocate Shabir Shar, member Pakistan Bar Council and the counsel for journalists while talking to Truth Tracker raised serious concerns on the conviction and observed that when ATA section was not proved against both journalists, there was no point of conviction under defamation by ATC.

Shar said that while the offense was bailable, it took them three months for the bail and arguments were heard by the court which does not happen in such cases mostly but did because of the complainant exerted political and financial influence.

Section 6 (k) of ATA reads that an extortion of money (bhatta) or property by force will be considered as an act of terrorism and it has been used against journalists; section 7 deals with punishments.

As per reports, three Journalists of Badin district, Sindh Murtaza Memon, Mehruddin Mari and Hajan Khan Lashari were booked under ATA in 2015.

Previously, on November 20, 2013 Police in Southern Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province charged under ATA a journalist Farhan Ahmed Bangash, a reporter of Royal TV for "fanning violence". He was released after 14 days, getting bail from Peshawar High Court.

According to National Press Club Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) police filed a case against a journalist Shabbir Siham, under the anti-terrorism act on the complaint of G-B Information Minister on March 20, 2017 for allegedly publishing 'fake news' and extorting the minister.

Dr. Ashothama, coordinator of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Sindh Task Force observed that use of special courts or Laws against any person, including Journalists, should be discouraged as it does not give appropriate opportunity of defense to the accused. While responding to Truth Tracker's question Ashothama further added that

allegations of blackmailing by journalists and cases under ATA should be thoroughly investigated by both police officials and media unions as well.

Asad, responding to question of Truth Tracker about PFUJ's role in investigating the involvement of some journalists in blackmailing or financial corruption, said that PFUJ has categorically decided to properly investigate such allegations, employing relevant union of journalists or press club and, in case of proof, stern action would be taken.

According to media reports, over seven journalists including Hafiz Hasnain of Okara district of Punjab province and Quetta, Balochistan journalists faced arrests and registration of cases under ATA; while a journalist Ali Raza Rind of Dalbadin, Balochistan's name was put on Fourth Schedule (alleged Terrorists Watch List). Any person whose name is placed in said schedule will have to report at concerned local police station on daily basis and Rind was accused of having contacts with the outlaw Balochistan Liberation Army.

Aamir Sohail, secretary general, Punjab

Union of Journalists (PUJ) expressed concerns on registration of cases against journalists under anti terror laws and stated that PUJ not only held protests demonstrations but engaged with government of Punjab and Police hierarchy to stop such practices and to provide some relief to the journalists.

ATC Mirpurkhas, Sindh had awarded a 17-year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 17, 000 to columnist Ayoub Khoso and the publisher cum owner of the daily Alakh, Zahoor Ansari in a case registered in 1999, under blasphemy and ATA. On October 18, 2002, the verdict was set aside by a division bench of Sindh High Court, Hyderabad circuit, and the case was sent back to the trial courts.

Advocate Shabir Shar while responding to a question by Truth Tracker suggested that aggrieved party can file suit of damages against builder who is lawyer as well and journalists can file reference in Supreme Judicial Council. He regretted that little has been done in lower judiciary and special courts for the eradication of corruption.



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Media Tracker



Media Tracker lists the challenges and achievements of the journalists and media organisations worldwide. Here's a list of journalism at risk stories in the recent month. We would like to thank international media protection organisation and news outlets for their content.

- **Rasheed**, 29, a prominent **blogger** and social media activist advocating for rule of law, human rights and social justice in the Maldives, was found with multiple stab wounds in the stairway of his apartment building at 3am on Sunday, April 23. He succumbed to death soon after due to excessive bleeding. Rasheed was an outspoken critic of the government and religious intolerance in the Maldives, popularly known for his satirical English blog, "**The Daily Panic**". (IFJ)
- A recent order issued by the Home Department of the **Indian government**, directed all Internet service providers to **block users' access to 22 platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and YouTube**. The government said the order was in "the interests of peace and tranquility in the state" and that social media was "misused by anti-national and anti-social elements. The state of Indian Kashmir has been the site of renewed protests since Indian government forces killed a separatist leader last July and earlier this month eight protesters during a by-election. The order followed a spate of videos purportedly showing Indian soldiers committing human rights abuses spread widely on social media i.e., strapping a Kashmiri man to the front of an army jeep as a human shield. According to a 2016 report from the U.S. think-tank the Brookings Institution, India blocked access to the Internet in various regions in an attempt to prevent demonstrations 22 times from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016, more often than did Syria, Pakistan, and Turkey combined. The **Kashmir Reader** was among the publications state authorities censored in July 2016, amid a government-imposed blackout of mobile data services
- **Ahmed Abba**, a Hausa-language reporter for **Radio France Internationale**, was given a ten-year prison sentence by Yaoundé military court on 20 April after a 20-months detention and fined 55 million CFA francs (about 85,000 euros). Abba was arrested on 30 July 2015, tortured and held incommunicado for seven months, in connection with his coverage of attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram in the north of the country. **Cameroon** is ranked 126th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2016 World. (RSF)
- **The Indian Express** daily newspaper risks legal charges from the Indian Supreme Court for defying its order of prior censorship by reporting statements of a whistleblowing Kolkata High Court judge CS Karnan who had, earlier this year, accused senior judges of corruption. The editorial was printed after the Indian Supreme Court banned news media from quoting judge Karnan. CPJ Asia personnel accused the SC for needlessly exercising overly broad measures to silence allegations of significant public interest. **Kumar**, a representative of the newspaper, said, "If that (legal action) happens, they should say that the order is illegal." (CPJ)
- A local photographer who works with **AFP** was seriously wounded in a missile strike on Sunday in southwest Yemen. According to a media source, **Saleh al-Obeidi** was in an armoured car with a pro-government officer when their vehicle was hit by a heat-guided missile near the government-controlled Red Sea town of **Mokha, Yemen**. Obeidi suffered severe burns to his face and hands. It was not immediately possible to identify the source of the missile. At least eight journalists were killed in Yemen in 2016, according to the International Federation of Journalists. (IFJ)
- **Rama Reddy**, a **TV reporter** and a **freelance journalist** from Eluru district of Andhra Pradesh state in **India**, was attacked in apparent retaliation for his reporting on illegal sand mining. He was questioned about his reports and the assailants reportedly tortured him and his mother with iron rods. (CPJ)

Human Rights

Intelligentsia concerned over the rising tide of extremism in education institutions



Izhar Yusafzai

Peshawar: With the number of blasphemy related mob attacks making regular headlines in news, the intelligentsia is of the view that the protracted war against terrorism, conflict and a fundamentalist approach to religious issues has had a radicalizing effect on the society. This is especially true of the youth and the educated middle class sections of the society, say observers, and its impact is visibly felt in the education institutions where extremism is on the rise and tolerance low.

The brutal killing of Mashal Khan in Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM) last month and several more cases of vigilante action against people accused of blasphemy testifies to this trend. "They[mob] not only killed my son but has also zipped up mouths of those talking about reforms [to end abuse of blasphemy law] in the society," Khan's father Iqbal Shaer told Truth Tracker/News Lens Pakistan over phone from Swabi, adding that his son's crime was to push for reforms. "He as a strong critic of the exploitative social and political system."

Mashal Khan was a student of sixth semester in media studies department of AWKUM. Before joining the university he had studied engineering in a university in Moscow. On various occasions, Khan had criticized the social and political system in the country on television interviews and through social media platforms. Mashal Khan was lynched to death by

student mobs, along with employees of the Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan(AWKUM) over blasphemy allegations.

In one of his interviews with a private television network, he criticized the university administration for alleged corruptions and illegal hiring in the university. However, blasphemy allegations against Khan and two of his other friends led to his brutal murder on April 13 when a mob dragged him out from his hostel room and lynched him.

Educationist and political analyst Dr. Khadim Hussain said incidents of violence in education institutions portray that the capacity of the society to absorb diverse views, analysis, opinions and observations in the spirit of scholarly discourse is gradually vanishing.

Hussain told News Lens that there were two basic requirements for physical and intellectual growth.

"Food and shelter for physical development is necessary for both animals and human beings but the second requirement - cognitive development or emotional intelligence - develops a human society to create an environment for collective observations and analysis on issues," said Dr. Hussain. "This helps us arrive at conclusions about things and issues and distribute that knowledge in the society which becomes acceptable to everyone."

Information processes, sharing of knowledge and analysis, observations and to absorb each other views and

beliefs leads to cognitive or intellectual development of the society, says Dr. Hussain, author of 'Rethinking Education-Critical Discourse and Society.'

"When the cognitive development process paralyzes in a society then incidents like the Mardan lynching happens in the community," he said.

Another incident of violence on campus happened in the University of the Punjab where two student federations clashed after attacking a 'cultural' event. A few days after the incident, a student was beaten up by a member of students' wing over allegedly courting a female colleague of his department.

Asked about the reasons why the cognitive development process had paralyzed, Dr. Hussain said an environment for diverse opinion was neither developed nor encouraged in education institutions.

"Students have always been censured for raising questions on topics like the 'mutilated' history of Pakistan's independence," he said. "Teachers warn students from day one in schools not to ask such questions. What is in the book is true is the only approach towards instruction. Naturally it retards thinking, analysis, and observation skills of the students."

Moreover when relations and interaction with others cultures and beliefs in the society is discouraged then some groups - and polices of the state - encourage use of force to impose a specific analysis and observations on the whole society, said Dr Hussain.

He said the Mardan incident was a perfect example of the halting of intellectual processes. "Had the students' capacity for analysis not been paralyzed, they wouldn't have committed such brutality. They would have thought a hundred times before committing it."

As per the law, blasphemy in Pakistan carries a death sentence or life imprisonment. The law was adopted by the former military dictator Zia ul Haq back in the 80s. Now religious and right wing political parties do not want to reform the law.

Maulana Khaliq-ul-Zaman, who saved a person accused of blasphemy by a village mob in the remote Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, told News Lens that as religious leader, his duty was to promote tolerance and peace in the society. "I handed over the person believed to have used blasphemous words to the police and

didn't let the mob to take law in their own hands," he said, adding that Islam didn't permit what happened to Mashal Khan.

In Islam, he says, there is even relaxation for the one who turns apostate by keeping him for three days and convincing them with love and affection to renounce apostasy. He said the cleric's role is important in the society in promoting tolerance.

"Ulema and religious personalities need to preach tolerance, harmony and strive for peace in the society," Zaman says. "The ulemas image have always been portrayed as negative, as icons of intolerance in the media but it's not like that everywhere."

However, leaders of the religious political parties term it a failure of the state that intolerance is rising, particularly in case of blasphemy. Amir of Jamaat Islami in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mushtaq Ahmad Khan said had the government tried those arrested over blasphemy allegations in the past, Mashal's murder wouldn't have happened.

"When the state fail to implement laws in their true spirit, the public is compelled to take law in their hands," said Mushtaq Ahmad Khan. He said the blasphemy law should be strictly implemented and there was no room for reforms in the law.

However, Dr. Hussain said that religious groups and parties were directly connected with promotion of intolerance in the society. "The religious parties and groups don't want a diverse society and promote conservative views. This intolerance will lead to more bloodshed in the country."



Accountability

In KP, thousands of schools without basic facilities



Asad Zia

Peshawar: Nearly 10,000 out of 27000 schools are without basic facilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to shortage of funds affecting thousands of students across the province.

According to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Annual Statistical Report of Government Schools, the total number of functional government schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are 27261 in which 22044 primary (13579 male and 8456 female) and 5217 are secondary schools (3208

male and 2009 female).

The overall enrollment in government schools is 4.2 million with 3.02 million in primary and 1.17 million are enrolled in middle and secondary schools.

The total number of working teachers in these schools are 125265 (81344 male and 43921 female in which 70876 in primary schools, 15207 in middle, 28186 in high and 10996 are in government higher secondary schools.), according to the report.

Every school consisted of three basic things including a building, teaching and non-teaching staff and students. "It is the

responsibility of government to provide other four basic facilities including clean water, toilet, electricity and boundary wall for safety to every school," said the report.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Independent Monitoring Unit which collects data for all key performance indicators for schools on monthly basis says nearly 30 percent schools have no electricity facility, 17 percent schools have no facility of water, 07 percent are without boundary walls while 8 percent have no toilet facility for both staff and students.

The Institute of Social and Policy Sciences comparison report 2016-17 says that in 2014-15, Rs94 billion were allocated for

elementary and secondary education. This amount was increased by five percent during 2015-16, with allocation of Rs99 billion. The report says that with the increase of 5 percent, Rs 104 m were allocated to elementary and secondary education and Rs 8 billion were allocated to provision of missing facilities in schools.

However, education experts say that the allocated amount for provision of missing facilities was very low and Rs 8 billion cannot fulfill the need for facilities.

Talking to The New Lens Pakistan, a child right activist and education expert Imran Takkar said that education was on top priority of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government, however, Rs 8 billion allocated for provision of basic facilities is injustice.

He said that 30 percent schools across the province had no water facility, while around 10 percent were without toilets and 10 percent were without boundary walls. He said that basic facilities not only encouraged students but also their parents to enroll their children in government schools.

"I have seen several girls' schools even in urban districts without toilet and water facilities which discourage female education in our province," Takkar said.

The child right activist shared that around 2.5 million children are out of schools across the province which is alarming for government.

He said that in the Ormar Union Council three girls schools were lying closed from 2005 due to lack of teachers. The local member of provincial assembly had taken no action despite repeated complaints from residents, he said.

He suggested the government take tangible steps for providing basic facilities in schools and restore the old status of government schools across the province.

Sulaman Khan, a resident of Peshawar said that his two children enrolled in a government school came home to relieve themselves. "Education is not a priority for the government and the education department which is why people want their children to go private schools," he said.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) member in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Amina Sardar criticized the PTI government for bringing little change in the education sector. She said the PTI government only made promises and claims when no improvement was seen in the last four years.

The opposition MPA said that several districts had no high schools for girls while majority of girls schools in rural districts were without basic facilities.

She said that in districts of Shangla, Kohistan, Frontier Region Bannu and Lakki Marwat education facilities for girls were thought to be high. "One of the main reasons behind low female education ratio in the province is lack of basic facilities in

schools," she said.

However, the KP Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education Muhammad Atif Khan told Truth Tracker/ New Lens Pakistan that Rs21 billion were allocated for provision of missing facilities in government schools.

The minister shared that from 2008 to 2013 under the ANP government, boundary walls for only 1369 schools were constructed. While the PTI government had constructed boundary walls for 13638 schools.

He said under the ANP government, water facilities were provided to 1987 schools. The PTI government had provided water facilities to 12198 schools so far.

He said that in last five years 16016 group latrines had been constructed while in the ANP years only 2065 latrine were constructed across the province schools.

The minister said that 12031 additional rooms had been constructed in schools while 9856 schools were provided electricity. He said that 5351 solar panels were distributed in rural schools where electricity facility was not available.

He said that the PTI government was working to remove all flaws from the education sector and all basic facilities would be provide to schools in the province.



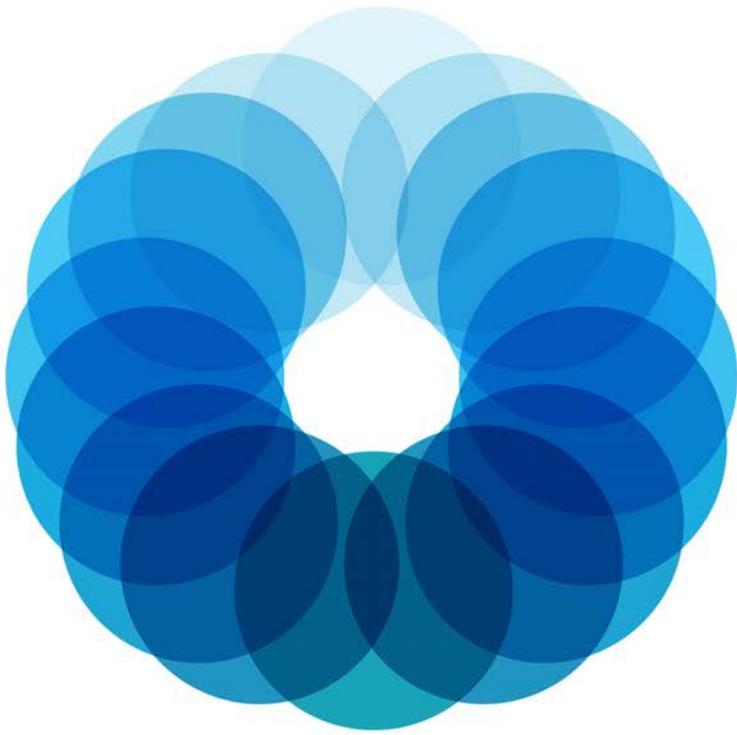
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THE WHOLE JOURNALIST

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Promise Tracking

PML-N's promise to revamp research organisations for increasing productivity stands broken



Durdana Najam

The Promise

Pakistan Muslim League (N) had promised in its 2013 Manifesto that they would revamp the agriculture research organisations to ensure that there is a sustained increase in productivity.

Background

Forty percent of Pakistan's land is arable, yet the country has an underdeveloped agricultural sector. Although agricultural growth is not a prerequisite for a promising economy, the raw materials needed to run factories, especially the textile industry, come from agriculture. Food security is another advantage of having a well-structured agricultural sector.

The agricultural sector of Pakistan constitutes the largest sector of the economy and contributes towards 21 percent of the GDP. This sector can become more productive if the country adopts high-tech agricultural practices.

Lately, the government has taken extraordinary measures to give a boost to the agriculture sector by providing a concession of Rs 15 billion in taxes and duties, by increasing agriculture credit from Rs 336 billion to Rs 600 billion and by providing a tariff reduction for agricultural tube wells. Despite all these incentives to promote agricultural development, an improvement cannot be achieved by offering subsidies and tax concessions alone. These reformatory steps will only become meaningful when combined with science and technology.

Climate change is one of the major factors that could impact the agricultural growth leading to food insecurity. Therefore, it is imperative to study climate change projections and the rapidly changing weather pattern through proper climate change research centres so that a mechanism is developed to protect the agricultural sector from excessive rainfall, melting glaciers, floods and sometimes spells of drought. Similarly, we are in dire need of an integrated pest management technique and a regular monitoring setup for the prevention of pests, diseases and parasites in crops and livestock in Pakistan.

Likewise, since Pakistan experiences floods and droughts alternatively, we should also focus on water resource management besides constructing both large and small dams. It is important for us to replicate common modern irrigation techniques to enhance agricultural productivity, by using sprinklers, drips, and a central pivot irrigation system.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has put Pakistan at the top among developing countries likely to suffer high risk for losses in agriculture and crops, in its 2015 report 'The Impact of Disaster on Agriculture and Food Security.' During the floods in 2010, the loss incurred by the agricultural sector stood at 50 percent of the \$10 billion in total damage and losses. The sector dropped from 3.5 percent to 0.2 percent from 2009 to 2010 while the GDP fell from 2.8 percent to 1.6 percent in the same year.

The impact of such disasters affects different areas of life. It causes unemployment, a decline in wages and a reduction in the income of the farmers and farm labourers. It lowers the availability of food in local markets, leading to food inflation. The impact of these factors results in reduced household purchasing power, restricted access to food and a depletion in savings. All these ultimately affect the outlook and morale of the household, and the negative effects manifest themselves in the form of health issues, low literacy rates, unproductive youth, intolerant



behaviour and rogue attitudes towards society. In the 2010 floods, 2.4 million workers were directly affected, of which two-third were employed in the agricultural sector, and over 70 percent of farmers lost more than half of their expected income.

The cotton crop has faced the worst climate effects over the years. According to official sources, the total sowing area of cotton in Punjab was 5,813,000 acres, out of which the flood of 2014 had damaged 211,677 acres. The situation became so bad that Pakistan had to import goods worth \$4 billion last year.

Director General Pakistan Meteorology Department, Dr Ghulam Rasul, said that we might lose crops like sugarcane and rice in the future due to water scarcity and rising temperatures. "Sugarcane and rice need lots of water, and since our water management system is in jeopardy, I am afraid we might lose both these crops despite having ideal sand soil conditions for growth," He said. He further added that Pakistan had become a water stressed country due to poor water management and a non-serious attitude towards water shortage.

In general, rising temperatures might shorten the growing season in Punjab.

As per the report by the International Monetary Fund, Pakistan is among the top 36 countries facing water scarcity. The situation could get worse by 2050, ranking Pakistan at 20th position. The per capita water availability in Pakistan has dropped from 5,600 cubic meters at independence to the current level of 1,017 cubic meters and is projected to decline.

Pakistan's irrigation system was once one of the best irrigation systems in the world. Today it has become nearly outdated. The manual used to follow irrigation practices was written in 1943, and it contains insufficient information with no reference to flood management.

The government has established a number large of federal and provincial agricultural institutes for research over the years, but their output has failed to develop a new mechanism of cultivation or a new water management technique. The research, experts believe, has not been need-based, nor geared towards economic benefits.

Tracking

Talking to Truth Tracker about the situation of research and the development of the agricultural sector, the Federal Minister for National Food Security, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, said, "The

country needs to invest more in this area.” Although he did not admit that the government has been unable to keep its promise of establishing a well-structured research and development system to boost the agriculture sector, Bosan, however, said that the application of new technologies was imperative to promote the farming sector.

Parliamentary Secretary for Finance, Rana Mohammad Afzal Khan, while in the Parliament on February 1st, 2017, said that the reason for the decline in agricultural production was due to reduced research and development. Khan belongs to PML-N.

The government had to face an embarrassing situation when their own MNAs in the National Assembly; Sheikh Fayyazuddin of Rahim Yar Khan and Kasur lawmakers Rana Mohammad Hayat Khan and Rasheed Ahmed Khan criticized the government’s lending policies for farmers. They said that the Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL) was charging them over 16pc markup, as opposed to the 5.75pc given to banks by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Afzal Khan also blamed ZTBL for its problematic lending structure. He said that only 20 percent of agricultural loans were released by them. “Eighty percent of the agricultural credit,” he said, “still lay with commercial banks.”

Sheikh Fayyazuddin explained: “Your hostile agricultural policies are the only reason that our agricultural exports have fallen.” He further added, “You treat us not as rivals, but as sworn enemies.”

Asad Omer, Member of National Assembly and a PTI leader, while talking about the agriculture sector said: “The farmers of Pakistan have been caught between the decline in prices of their end product, increasing input costs and stagnant yields, and in the

case of cotton, sharply reduced output. As a result, the agriculture economy of Pakistan has suffered badly, and the small farmer has borne the brunt of this deterioration.” He blamed the government for neglecting research and also for not paying attention to what the research institutes are producing.

Independent Viewpoint

University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Iqbal Ahmad Khan, said that the government still has a long way to go in developing the agriculture sector. He said that by promoting drill sowing and quality seeds, especially for wheat and cotton, we could enhance the growth rate up to 4 percent. Talking about the cultivation of maize and potatoes in Okara he said that it had lowered the soil fertility. To improve the situation, he stated that we needed to introduce the soybean as a third crop. He urged the government to establish a soybean centre for research and development purposes.

“We are losing the grains and fruits from 20 to 40 percent in the post-harvest losses for which we have to promote the modern post-harvest practices.” He further added, “Amidst the situation of climate change, we have to invest in some breeding to develop climate resilient varieties.”

Ruling

From the above discussion, it could be clearly seen that the PML-N government has been unable to revamp agricultural research organizations in the country, thus failing to uphold their promise.



Promise Tracking

PTI’s promise of reduction in government expenditures stands broken.



Rehmat Mehsud

The Promise

While canvassing for the election, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman, Imran Khan, had promised a 50 percent reduction in government expenditures but unfortunately, it is the PTI that has the biggest provincial cabinet.

Background

During the 2013 election campaign, the PTI had vowed to introduce several measures, including a 50% reduction in government expenditures. However, the PTI has the biggest provincial cabinet, which tends to multiply government expenses, thus doing the exact opposite of what they promised.

The induction of 15 lawmakers as advisors, special assistants and parliamentary secretaries, who continue to get perks and privileges of a minister despite the fact that the party had promised to form a short cabinet.

Tracking

In an attempt to track the status of the promise, Truth Tracker approached Arif Yousaf, Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Law, who talked about PTI’s promised cut in government expenditure: “According to my perception and knowledge, the government expenditures have been reduced to even less than 50 percent.”

He said that most of the officials’ security had been withdrawn and official guesthouses were closed down to cut down the



expenditures.

“In addition to all that, the culture of serving tea and green tea in government offices has ceased to exist and now ministers are bound to offer tea and other refreshments from their own pocket,” Yousaf noted.

“Similarly, there has been a visible reduction in official protocol and now I have one security guard after surrendering three guards,” he added. He said that the effect of the reduction in expenses would be felt with the passage of time because the outcome of any change takes time.

Yousaf went on to say that efforts are being made to curtail and stop unnecessary expenditures in an apparent attempt to divert

resources to other sectors of public interest.

“All possible measures,” he said, “are being employed to put all sectors on the right track for a better tomorrow.”

When asked whether the PTI-led government in KP has brought a 50% reduction in government expenditure, Zahid Khan, spokesman of Awami National Party (ANP), questioned, “County you tell me about a single promise that the PTI chairman has managed to materialise?”

He said that the PTI has been claiming big, positive changes in the health and education sectors of KP. “Tell me about single university or college being built during the PTI tenure in the province,” he inquired.

“Since assuming office in KP, the PTI has been talking of ushering an era of change but judging by their progress so far, what kind of change has the PTI brought?” he remarked.

He suggested the nation should refrain from taking Khan’s promises seriously, because he is more of a cricketer than a politician. “Talking about change and development is an easy task but materializing your promises is always a challenging job,” he noted.

“Corruption in KP is at its peak, and the leveling of embezzlement allegations by PTI Members Provincial Assembly (MPAs) against each other is ample proof of that,” he remarked.

When contacted for comment on whether the KP government expenditures have been reduced, Malik Riaz, a lawmaker from Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam- Fazl (JUI-F), said: “According to my perception and understanding, the PTI government expenditures have increased manifold instead.”

He said that there is a wide gap between the promises made by the PTI and the ground realities. “They (PTI) are saying one thing and doing another,” he observed. He said that politicians can no longer play with the sentiments of the voters, as people have become politically mature.

Sardar Aurangzeb, a lawmaker from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), said that Khan’s promise of reduction in government expenditure is nothing more than white lies.

“Khan had promised to turn KP Chief Minister’s house into a university, which did not happen,” he recalled. In addition to that, the PTI leader had said that they would not use helicopters but now, even the Chief Minister travels in a helicopter.

“The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have lost confidence in PTI to resolve their problems,” he remarked. “The Chief Minister uses the helicopter like a van,” Aurangzeb added.

He said it is extremely difficult, even impossible for the PTI to restore the lost confidence of KP voters in the next ballot.

Independent Viewpoint

When contacted for comments on the PTI’s promise of cutting down on government expenditures, Riaz Khan, an independent analyst and senior journalist, told Truth Tracker that the PTI government in KP had promised to convert the chief minister and governor houses into universities but the situation seems unchanged and the status quo within the system persists.

“Indubitably, the masses of the province cast their votes in favour of the PTI in order to bring about durable and positive change for a bright future, but things continued to deteriorate even further over the past couple of years,” he observed.

“Secondly, the PTI had said that are actively vigilant with the revenue department regarding corruption by Patwaris (local area officials collecting revenue),” he said.

“In previous governments people used to offer Rs. 1,000 to Patwaris to clear their legitimate issue but now the same could be done by offering Rs. 7,000 to 8,000. Now, the issue is that the same Patwaris do not refuse to resolve the complainant’s issue but they resort to delaying tactics in order to get bribed,” he added.

People had opted to vote for PTI because they had taken the party as the best available option over PML-N and PPP, but what kind of democracy is PTI promoting when Imran Khan fired his party election commissioner Justice (Retd) Wajihuddin, who wrote a contradictory note.

“A one-man show does not signify democracy,” he reiterated. However, he said that people continue to have high hopes from Imran Khan because of the fact that he is the ‘crowd pooling personality.’

“But what really matters is how he (Imran Khan) is materializing his promises, and I don’t think he can do it effectively because he has the same people in his party that have been affiliated with other political parties in the past,” he added.

Ruling

After getting the views and observations of ruling, opposition lawmakers and independent analysts, Truth Tracker rules that the PTI has broken yet another promise of a 50% cut in government expenditures.



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Promise Tracking

PPP's promise to treat education as national emergency stands broken



Durdana Najam

The Promise

PPP had ensured in its 2013 manifesto that when it came to power, it would treat education as a national emergency through effective planning.

Background

Before going into the history of the state of education in Sindh, which is as horrid as one could expect, it seems pertinent to discuss the recent incidents of cheating in Sindh on the occasion of Matric and Intermediate examinations. No heads were turned, nobody was suspended, and nobody had cared to resign over what has been called the uncontrollable intrusion of a cheating mafia in the current examination season. WhatsApp is being blamed for facilitating cheating. At the time when this piece was written, almost 25 cases of cheating had been reported during the Matric exams in Karachi alone. The question is, why were the students allowed to bring cellphones in the examination centres to begin with? Does it mean the students have been taking cellphones to classes as well? What had made the invigilators so lenient that they would go as far as overlooking blatant cheating, as was shown on different new channels? It is not the first time that cheating has been reported in Sindh examinations. The cheating Mafia, like many other mafias running wild in Karachi, had never been apprehended. It is improbable to think that cheating on such a large scale could have taken place without the assistance of the concerned education board. Why would students indulge in cheating if the education system was productive and discouraged any such practice?

The sixth edition of the Annual State of Education Report (ASER), released last year presented shocking statistics about the education sector of Sindh.

In the year 2015-16, almost 24 percent of Sindh's children aged between 6 and 16 were out of school. Of the remaining 76 per cent, 55 percent of Class-V students could not read Class II level Urdu text and only 24 percent could comprehend written English.

On the infrastructural side, the situation was just as bleak. Fifty-two percent public and forty percent private primary schools of rural Sindh did not have functional bathrooms. Forty-one percent of government primary school did not have boundary walls.

The ratio of out-of-school children stood at 27 percent, while 18 percent children had never been to school, and the dropout rate was six per cent.

The survey indicated that students in private schools were performing better than those studying in public schools.

Education, unfortunately, was never given its rightful place in Pakistan by the leaders in power. In a 1950 census, the total literacy rate of India was 20 percent, and Pakistan's was 14 percent. However, in 1912, the literacy rate of India reached 75 percent while in Pakistan it could barely reach 50 percent.

The 2015 Education Funding Agency Development Index ranks Pakistan at 106 out of 113 countries.

In Sindh, Thatta is said to be the worst performing district, mainly due to a low retention rate.

There are over 40,000 ghost teachers and 5,229 ghost schools in Sindh, despite the fact that the government had allocated Rs 145.02 billion for education in 2016.

In another survey conducted by Alif Ailaan, it was reported that



out of 12 million children, between the age of 5 and 6, 6.7 million are out of school in Sindh. Over 52% of out-of-school children were girls. Fifty percent of women in Sindh, according to the report, had never been to school.

One of the reasons given for this alarming dropout in net enrolment was the dearth of government schools at the middle and high school level. Out of 46, 039 government schools in Sindh, 91 percent were primary schools and only four percent were high schools. Twenty-seven percent schools had only one classroom. Thirteen percent teachers never attended school to teach, while 47 percent government primary schools were single teacher schools.

Tracking

Sindh Education Minister Jam Mehtab Hussain Dehar had the usual answer, "We are doing our best," to Truth Tracker's query about PPP's effort to restore and revamp the education sector of Sindh. When his attention was turned to the cheating mafia functioning without restraint in Sindh, he said that his government would do everything possible to curb the use of unfair means in exams.

Nusrat Sahar Abbasi, Member of Sindh Assembly from PML-F, told Truth Tracker that the entire education sector of Sindh is deteriorating. Referring to cheating in the Matric and Intermediate exams in Sindh she said that from Karachi to Kashmore, cheating happens in every city, district, and Taluka.

"It is a recurring phenomenon. Every year, the cheating mafia gets active, the entire state machinery from police to commissioner to the top officials of education boards to the bureaucracy, all are participants in this heinous crime," Abbasi said.

She said that the Zardari-led government in Sindh was only capable of corruption in the name of governance. She lamented that our future generation is being deliberately ruined.

"Blaming India for cheating is perhaps the most ludicrous statement coming from the Sindh Education and Literacy Minister Jam Mehtab Hussain Dahar," Abbasi said.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader, Faisal Vawda, was equally frustrated with the situation of education in Sindh and said that the government had decided to ruin the new generation. He told Truth Tracker that one of the principals of a college had run away after gathering examination fees from the students. "The poor students were unable to sit for their exams," he said. He further added that after the 18th Amendment it seems each province

has become a separate state. "The federal government," he argued, "did not intervene in the governance issues confronting provinces."

"Four things are imperative for a nation to survive: Justice, governance, education and health care system. A country lacking any of these would end up in a mess just as we are heading for one," Vawda said.

Independent Viewpoint

Yasmeen Aftab, lawyer, academic and political analyst, gave a detailed analysis of Pakistan's education system. She said:

"Where is the enforcement of Article 25-A of Constitution of Pakistan for the provision of free and compulsory education for children aged 5 to 16-year-old children?"

She said that education had never been the priority of any government. "With the arrival of private schools," she added, "the government became more complacent." Further elaborating, she said that the education sector faced various challenges such as

lack of experts, institutional capacity, lack of national cohesion, the absence of standards for textbook development and quality assurance.

"It may not be possible for the government at the moment to implement a uniform education system in the country, but a uniform curriculum can be introduced in educational institutes. This will provide equal opportunity to the students of rural areas to compete with students from urban areas in the job market."

She concluded her discussion by saying: "All other points stated above need focused attention, correction, and implementation."

Ruling

From the above analysis and discourse, it is fairly visible that the PPP government has failed in saving the education system from crumbling under the weight of its bad governance and lack of political will.



Promise Tracking

PTI breaks promise of establishing a university in each of the KP districts



Izhar Yusafzai

The Promise

Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Pervez Khattak in December 2015, promised, while addressing an event held at Shuhada-e-APS Memorial Library in higher education department Peshawar, that KP government would establish a university campus in each of the provincial districts.

The Plan

The establishment of public university in each district has been mentioned in the 2013 general elections manifesto of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). According to PTI's elections manifesto, they promised KP residents, if voted into power will establish public university in each district in collaboration with private sector.

This was part of 'Education for All' component of the manifesto to provide standardised education to the society. The manifesto stated that quality of higher education had deteriorated with the exodus of qualified professionals, facing continuous decline in the absence of professional capacity of faculty members.

Furthermore it read: "Applied research is almost non-existent. For a country of 160 million, there are only 85 universities with approved charters, of which only 8 in the public sector and 18 in the private sector are degree-awarding institutions.

"The PTI is determined to launch a national education movement based on equity to achieve increased access and improved quality of education at all levels," the manifesto read.

Tracking

While talking to Truth Tracker, the Awami National Party (ANP)'s Central leader Bushra Gauhar sees PTI's government as an engineered plan by certain 'actors' to make every sector worst including education.

She said the promise of establishing universities in each district wasn't fulfilled for their incompetency. She accused PTI for allocating funds for seminaries and therefore extending an open support for 'militants' but failing to invest in the education sector.

ANP, in the past tenure in KP, has established total of 10



universities in the province. The campuses includes up-gradation of Islamia College Peshawar to University, establishments of Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM), University of Swabi, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Upper Dir, University of Haripur, Khushal Khattak University Karak, Women University of Swabi, sub campus of AWKUM in Lower Dir and Chitral.

"This [establishment of university campuses portray clear vision of ANP for promotion of education which we have achieved rather than offering hollow promises," Gauhar said, adding that those having agenda of promoting extremism couldn't invest in education sector.

When asked about lack of resources, she said after 18th amendments it was responsibility of the provinces to increase resources and provide education to the people at their doorsteps.

"Establishment of fully functional campuses in districts have vital role in increasing provincial literacy and higher education rates particularly of females who are reluctant to join universities in metropolitan for varieties of reasons."

According to the budget documents of 2016-17, funds have been allocated to establishment of various campuses in Mardan, Swabi, Buner, Upper Dir and Chitral.

This includes establishment of Women University campus in

Swabi with an allocation of Rs900 million, and that of Women University at Mardan, for which Rs100 million have been earmarked.

Furthermore, for strengthening of AWKUM Buner campus, total of Rs50 million have been allocated but it's not the establishment of new campus. For establishment of sub campus of Peshawar's engineering university has been reflected in the Annual Development Program (ADP) but no funds have been allocated for it.

Similarly up gradation of Chitral university has been mentioned in the ADP, but no funds have earmarked for its establishment.

Talking to the Truth Tracker, Advisor to Chief Minister for Information and Higher Education Mushtaq Ghani said the promises made by PTI were in the stage of fulfillment.

He said already Swabi's Women University has been established while full pledge universities at Lakki Marwat, Chitral, and Buner districts are in process while sub campuses of universities will be established at Batagram, Shangla, Hangu and Tank will be established in near future.

When asked if it could be completed in PTI tenure, he said all projects are expected to be completed in the current tenure of PTI in the province. "All the projects are in the process of completion and will be functional till end of tenure of PTI government."

Ghani said University of Technology at Nowshera and Abbottabad University of science and technology have already been established by the incumbent government.

When asked about PTI promise of establishing campuses in each

district which is 25, he said when the on-going projects become completed, this would be campus in each district but he didn't clarify what would be happen of the rest of the districts including Tor Ghar, Swat, D.I. Khan, Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Lower Dir, and Bannu.

However, some experts believe quantity is more important than quality when it comes to opening campuses in the districts. Speaking to Truth Tracker, Nasir Jamal Khattak, Chairman Department of English and Applied linguistics, who also served at Kohat University as vice chancellor, said that the developed countries are more focused on quality rather than quantity.

"I personally believe the intellectual capacity in KP and in the whole of Pakistan wouldn't be sufficient to run campuses properly in all 25 districts of KP," he commented, adding, "in the developed countries students are expected to spend at least a semester in foreign countries for strengthening their understanding for cultures of others alongside academia."

When asked if campuses were important particularly for females, he said there is no need of segregation on the basis of sex, cast or gender and everyone should be allowed to get education from anywhere in the country.

Ruling

Keeping in views of officials and independent observers, Truth Tracker rules that PTI has failed to establish university campuses in each district of the KP in over four years of its government in the province.



Promise Tracking

PTI's promise to promote austerity stands compromised.



Rehmat Mehsud

The Promise

Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) its claimed in their manifesto that Chief Minister Pervez Khattak would stay at his own house to promote austerity but the ground realities indicate a different picture.

Background

The PTI, in its election manifesto, had said that the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would stay at his own house to promote austerity, but opposition lawmakers have been demanding that the government should explain the money spent on the renovation of the houses allotted to chief the minister, ministers, government employees and officers.

Chief Minister Pervez Khattak had announced that he would stay at his own house at Hayatabad Township to promote austerity.

The opposition had said that the expenditure violates austerity promises but the PTI-led government had said that expenditures incurred were maintenance costs.

Tracking

Truth Tracker contacted Abdul Karim, Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Commerce and Industry, who said that the status quo that has persisted over the past 65 years could not be changed overnight.

"But yes things are moving with tandem towards the right direction amidst visible change to curtail protocol formalities for



ministers and lawmakers," he added.

"One day, we (MPAs) were offered tea at the Chief Minister's house when one of our colleagues refused to have simple tea, asking whether the chief minister house was low on funds, as they were offered nothing but tea," Karim recalled, saying that that depicted austerity drive is moving but at a snail's pace.

He said that Pervez Khattak is the only Chief Minister who travels with only three protocol vehicles. "The provincial government has taken multiple decisions, which would have a far-reaching, positive impact on the political culture of the province in the future," he added.

"You can talk to the Chinese investors who have investments

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and ask them about the approach and dealing of KP lawmakers and officials,” he said in reference to the PTI-led government austerity drive.

Malik Riaz, Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUI-F), said that Khan failed to honor 98% of the promises made to his voters, and the austerity drive promise is no different.

“Imran Khan is not a person who honors his word, rather he is just talking and making false promises,” Riaz noted. “The people of the province,” he said, “are virtually fed-up with these kinds of politics.”

He said that the problems of the voters in this province have multiplied in the tenure of PTI and voters have virtually lost all their confidence.

“We cannot say that a single sector in the KP is thriving under the PTI rule,” he remarked. He does not think that the people of the province would repeat the same mistake by voting for PTI in the next general elections.

Sardar Aurangzeb, a lawmaker from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), said that the PTI leaders had repeatedly touted to promote austerity to control expenditures. “But you observed the KP chief minister travelled to China in a special flight along with his entourage, is this austerity?” he questioned.

He said that the provincial government did not measure up on the expectations of the voters, and the ruling party would face a humiliating defeat in the next ballot.

He recalled that PTI Chairman Imran Khan came to his constituency in a helicopter to plant a sapling to promote his Billion Tree Tsunami campaign.

“The total worth of that sapling was Rs. 6 for which Imran Khan and KP Chief Minister came in two separate helicopters. Is this austerity?” he noted.

He further explained that a provincial minister moves with eight to ten protocol motorcade at a time, despite the PTI leaders claiming that they would promote austerity.

“Because of PTI leaders’ lavish lifestyle, the province is experiencing the worst financial crisis, forcing the PTI-led government to borrow Rs. 17 billion from GP fund/ pension fund of employees to keep development work on track,” he noted.

Zahid Khan, a stalwart and spokesman of Awami National Party (ANP), said that PTI Chairman Imran Khan is sitting at his sprawling residence in Bani Gala while his right hand men such as Jahangir Tareen and Asad Umar are awarding contracts to people

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“Obviously, Imran Khan has shares in those contracts,” he noted. Referring to PTI’s promise of austerity, he said that they are nothing more than a ‘pack of lies’ and none of the promises have been honored in letter or in spirit.

“Forget about austerity,” he said, “the education and health sectors of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are in shambles.” “The problem is that the country’s electronic media supports Imran Khan because he is giving them (media) money,” he observed.

Independent Viewpoint

Truth Track approached Safullah Gul, a Peshawar based senior journalist and an independent analyst, for comments regarding PTI’s austerity measures, he said that official protocol has been reduced but only slightly.

“We have not observed any significant change because large government functions continue to take place in the same old fashion,” he observed.

He said that he cannot recall the exact figure, but the chief minister house has a huge entertainment allowance. “It means that things are going ahead in the same old manner without any reduction in expenses,” he noted.

“PTI chairman Imran Khan, Chief Minister Pervez Khattak and other senior PTI ministers move with full protocol, which keeps the kitty under pressure,” he added.

“I do not think that the PTI has succeeded to promote the austerity drive earnestly,” Gul remarked.

Riaz Khan, another independent analyst, said that the PTI had failed to put an end to unnecessary expenditures and nothing has been done.

According to him, the unelected personalities in KP travel with police protocol, which is an additional burden on the government exchequer, thus signifying the irony of their promise.

Ruling

In light of comments and views by the ruling, opposition lawmakers and independent analysts, Truth Tracker rules that the PTI’s promise to promote austerity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands compromised.



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Commentary

Rising Iranian-Pakistani tensions render Pakistani policy unsustainable



Dr. James M. Dorsey

An Iranian warning that it may attack militant bases in the troubled province of Balochistan threatens to bring Pakistan's house of cards crashing down.

Pakistan's tenuous house is built on a torturous effort to balance relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran amid rising tension between the two regional rivals, prevent Pakistan from becoming an operational base for possible Saudi and US efforts to destabilize the Islamic republic, and employ militant groups as proxies in achieving its geopolitical objectives.

The Iranian warning was the latest indication that Pakistani policies may be unsustainable. It targeted Pakistan's long-standing policy of turning a blind eye to the operations of Saudi-backed militants, including Sipah-e-Sahaba, a virulently anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian group that since being banned has rebranded itself as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, as well as its various offshoots that target Iran.

The warning followed last month's killing of ten Iranian border guards by Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), one of Sipah's offshoots.

The attack further exacerbated Iranian-Pakistani relations that have become increasingly strained after Pakistan allowed recently retired chief of staff of its military, General Raheel Sharif, to become commander of a Saudi-led, 41-nation military alliance that Iran sees as a Sunni Muslim force established to confront the

Islamic republic.

General Shareef had barely taken command when Iran also issued a stark warning to Saudi Arabia. Iran was responding to a statement by the kingdom's powerful deputy crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, that Saudis would not sit and wait for war but would "work so that it becomes a battle for them in Iran and not in Saudi Arabia."

Speaking to Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah's Al Manar TV, Iranian Defense Minister General Hossein Dehghan said that if Saudi Arabia engaged in "such a stupidity" nothing would be "left in Saudi Arabia except Mecca and Medina," Islam's two holiest cities.

The war of words between Saudi Arabia and Iran would be enough to make it all but impossible for Pakistan to remain neutral. It would also be sufficient to make it impossible for General Sharif to walk a tightrope between the two regional powers.

The problem for Pakistan and General Sharif is that the escalating conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran is unlikely to stop there.

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia and the United States may seek to pressure Iran by supporting potential unrest among Iranian ethnic minorities, including Balochis who straddle both sides of the Iranian-Pakistan border.

Militants in Pakistan and sources close to them assert that Saudi funds are pouring

into religious seminaries in Balochistan that are operated by Sipah and its affiliates.

Saudi Arabia's Okaz newspaper reported moreover that US President Donald J. Trump would focus in talks with the kingdom's leaders as well as those of the five other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman – on further isolating Iran.

Iranian attacks on militant targets in Balochistan would leave Pakistan with one of two choices: crack down on anti-Iranian militants operating from its territory, a move it has long resisted and that would put it at odds with Saudi Arabia, or get dragged into a tit-for-tat with Iran that would push it even closer to the kingdom.

A stepped-up US-Saudi campaign against Iran raises the stakes for Pakistan far beyond its balancing act in the Gulf. Balochistan is the lynchpin of China's \$56 billion One Belt, One Road investment in Pakistani infrastructure and energy. Chinese projects in the province, including the crucial deep sea port of Gwadar, are already troubled as a result of low-level ethnic violence.

A Saudi-Iranian proxy war fought among others in Balochistan would not only drag Pakistan into the conflict but would also put it add odds with China, which privately has expressed concern about Pakistani support of militant groups.

To be fair, China has not been consistent in its criticism. Earlier this year, China,

at the behest of Pakistan, prevented the United Nations from listing Masood Azhar, a prominent Pakistani militant who is believed to have close ties to Pakistani intelligence and the military, as a globally designated terrorist.

US backing of activist ethnic minority groups in Iran would likely prove to be a doubled-edged sword for Pakistan. On the one hand, it could help legitimize Pakistani support for militants in Washington's books. On the other hand, that would risk putting Pakistan at odds with China that like Pakistan is trying to walk a thin line between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but would see its interests in Balochistan threatened.

Pakistan may have tighten its noose a notch with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's acceptance of a Saudi invitation to attend the summit in Riyadh with Mr. Trump. The question for Pakistan is: how long can it play both ends against the middle? The risk is that Pakistan will find it increasingly difficult to claim neutrality in the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran given the position of General Sharif and the recent dispatch of Pakistani troops to the kingdom. Pakistan's fate would be sealed if Balochistan becomes one of the dispute's battlegrounds.

Pakistan could see a silver lining in playing

along with a potential US-Saudi playbook that seeks to capitalize on possible ethnic unrest in Iran. Cooperation with the United States could possibly ensure that US policy in South Asia does not exclusively focus on India. That however would likely expose it to severe pressure from China, which Pakistan sees as the salvation for its multiple geopolitical, domestic and economic problems.

At the bottom line, the odds are that Pakistan rather than balancing on a tightrope may see its house of cards collapsing.

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