

HORIZON

May 2023



RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT
PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE - NAWAZ

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

Pakistan is witnessing a situation it has not seen in its entire history. The way the followers of a political leader reacted when he was arrested, by attacking public property, including military installations, gives an impression of a cult, rather than a political party.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan was arrested by paramilitary force Rangers outside Islamabad High Court on 9 May on corruption charges in the Al Qadir Trust case. In the days leading to his arrest, he had lobbed accusations and insults at certain military officers and had incited his followers to challenge the military in case of his arrest.

As soon as the news of his arrest spread, second-tier PTI leaders led violent mobs to cantonments throughout the country. According to news reports, in Lahore, a gang of PTI followers led by Dr Yasmin Rashid forced its way into Jinnah House, the residence of Corps Commander Lahore, where it ransacked the house, vandalised property and vehicles present on the premises and set room after room to fire to burn what they could not take with them. In Islamabad, a mob gathered in front of the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters and forced its way through one of its gates.

In addition, PTI supporters damaged several other properties, including Radio Pakistan building in Peshawar, metro buses and stations in Islamabad, police vans in various cities, an Edhi ambulance and several KMC tankers in Karachi, a Frontier Corps public school in Dir, Swat interchange and even a cattle market that burnt over 100 animals alive. PTI leaders made Goebbels proud by claiming that violent activities were carried out by government and military operatives to malign their party.

History will never forgive Imran Khan for poisoning young minds and inciting them against the government and state institutions in pursuit of personal gain. He has done what Pakistan's enemies couldn't do in 75 years – drive a wedge between the people and the army. People cannot be fooled into thinking that this is a battle for power and not some high ideals of civilian supremacy or democracy. PTI 'revolutionaries' are not calling for reform. They have a single agenda, which is to free Imran Khan and install him back into power, no matter how corrupt he is.

It was utterly disappointing, but not surprising, that the Supreme Court (SC) declared Imran Khan's arrest illegal after Islamabad High Court had deemed the arrest legal and an accountability court sent him on an eight-day physical remand. This is in line with the conduct of SC in a series of cases in which Imran Khan was let off the hook easily and the excesses of his followers were overlooked, while other political leaders were kept behind bars for months without a shred of evidence against them. SC has lost all semblance of impartiality and credibility.

If Imran Khan is innocent, then he should face the law and prove his innocence. If he is indeed a political leader, then he must condemn the violent activities of his followers. Otherwise, history will remember him as a cult leader who led his followers to destroy the country.

Saira Bano
Editor-in-Chief

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Saira Bano, Attaullah Tarar, Badar Shahbaz



MEDDLING IN PUNJAB

RANA ASADULLAH KHAN

“The jurisdiction of a court is determined by the constitution and law not by caprice and convenience of the judges. And, it is the nature of the controversy that determines the jurisdiction of a court and not the magnitude of the interests involved. When caprice and convenience of the judges takes over, we enter the era of an ‘imperial Supreme Court’.” Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah warned the other members of the bench on the initiation of suo motu proceedings in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) elections case. He further observed that the Supreme Court should act “with circumspection” only in “exceptional cases” of public importance for the enforcement of fundamental rights. Being the “first and final arbiter” due care and caution should be taken while invoking the jurisdiction under article 184(3) of the constitution. There is no provision for appeal against the order passed by the Supreme Court in this capacity.

Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail also concurred with the view taken by Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah after finally deciding the matter. Prior to the detailed judgment on the election in two provinces, the other two members of the bench, Justice Athar Minallah and Justice Yahya Afridi categorically declared that the Supreme Court should show restraint by not

involving itself in a political matter.

The suo motu proceedings started out of the blue during the hearing of a case regarding the transfer of Capital City Policy Officer (CCPO) Lahore Ghulam Muhammad Dogar by a two-member bench consisting of Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan and Justice Syed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi. The bench asked the Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial to initiate suo motu proceedings on apprehension of delay in the election of Punjab and KP assemblies. The two assemblies had been dissolved on the advice of their respective chief ministers on the direction of Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran Khan. The speakers of both the dissolved assemblies instantly filed their applications to become part of the proceedings before a nine-member bench, constituted by the chief justice to hear the matter.

There were a few twists in the proceedings. First, two members of the bench were compelled to recuse themselves after objections from political parties, bringing the strength of the bench to seven. Later, when two members Justice Yahya Afridi and Justice Athar Minallah dismissed the suo motu proceeding and constitutional petitions at the outset, the chief

“

THE SUPREME COURT, BEING THE GUARDIAN OF THE CONSTITUTION AND PROTECTOR OF THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS, SHOULD NOT BECOME PART OF A POLITICAL BATTLE. INSTEAD, IT SHOULD MAINTAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE, IMPARTIALITY AND SUPREMACY OF LAW.

”

justice was left with no other option but to proceed with five members in the bench. The five-member bench decided the matter with a 3-2 majority and directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold elections in both provinces through its order dated 28 February 2023. It directed the ECP to announce the election date for Punjab in consultation with the president and do the same for KP in consultation with the governor of KP. However, the decision ignited a new controversy when Justice Shah clarified that the matter was dismissed with a majority of 4-3. This resulted in a new legal argument on the authenticity of the judgment passed by the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court, while announcing its verdict by 3-2 instead of 4-3, completely ignored the stance taken in the Panama Case when two members of the bench expressed their view about disqualification of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif without a formal inquiry at the initial stage of the proceeding and their observations were made part of the detailed judgment. But in the judgment given on 28 February, the court did not make observations of Justice Minallah and Justice Afridi part of the judgment.

Moreover, the decision shows deviation from constitutional provisions by the Supreme Court, which directed the president of Pakistan to decide the date of the Punjab Assembly election after consultation with the ECP, ignoring that it is the sole prerogative of the governor of the province and no role of the president is provided in the constitution. However, in the matter of the KP election, it followed the constitutional scheme and directed the governor to issue the date of

the election.

During this constitutional feud, the ECP announced 8 October 2023 as the date of the general elections in the country, intending to hold elections of all assemblies on the same date. The Supreme Court again formed a five-member bench to look into the legality of the notification of the ECP by invoking its suo motu powers on 27 March. Again two members of the bench Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail recused themselves for having a different view on the question of invoking suo motu powers by the chief justice of Pakistan. Finally, a three-member bench of ‘likeminded judges’ announced its verdict on 3 April 2023, directing the ECP to hold an election only in Punjab on 14 May 2023. It did not dilate upon the election in KP by genially accepting the request of the counsels of the parties and sending the matter to the respective provincial high court.

The Supreme Court has made several errors. Adopting different approaches to the election of the two provincial assemblies, the Supreme Court has unnecessarily brought itself under fire from the lawyers’ bodies and political parties. It was not appropriate for Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan to sit on the bench as earlier he had recused himself from hearing the election matter on the objection of the political parties. By becoming part of a bench that was deliberating on the same question, he has stained the credibility of the institution. The chief justice, after a difference of opinion with his four brother judges, should have constituted a larger bench or full court to uphold the impartiality and neutrality of the court instead of forming a new five member bench including Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan.

The Supreme Court has also left an important question unanswered. After the election of two provincial assemblies, how would the elected governments ensure free and fair elections of the National Assembly in their respective provinces without any involvement or influence? The law and the judgments are expected to keep an eye on the future, but the court has ignored the future implication of its judgment. Holding elections in Punjab and KP three months before the election of Sindh, Balochistan

and National Assemblies would negatively impact the political scene. The election results of the two provincial assemblies would work as a trendsetter for Sindh and Balochistan which already complain of deprivation and partiality. It would further aggravate the mistrust and discontentment in smaller provinces. The Supreme Court, without any constitutional mandate, directed the State Bank of Pakistan to release Rs21 billion for elections in two provinces, ignoring the fact that the country is going through the worst economic crisis, aggravated by last year's floods. The direction has invited strong reaction from Parliament which rejected the bill presented by the government to release funds for the election. Instead, it passed a resolution against the judiciary over its attempts to "usurp the authority of the Parliament to legislate and interfere in its constitutional jurisdiction."

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the Parliament has decided to stand up to the judiciary. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has given a clear message to the judiciary that he would follow the will of the Parliament and not release funds. The announcement by the prime minister was strongly supported by another senior member of the Pakistan Democratic -Movement (PDM) Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman through his hard-hitting press conference warning of a mass movement if the Supreme Court insisted on holding the election on 14 May. Senior Vice President and Chief Organiser of PML-N Maryam Nawaz also criticised the role of the judiciary and said that the "new judicial establishment" is active to support Imran Khan. The criticism by political leaders has strengthened the view taken by Justice Athar Minallah that Supreme Court must not involve itself in the political fray.

The Supreme Court claimed to uphold the constitution by announcing the election date of 14 May but in reality, defied the same as the constitution demands election to be held within 90 days period which already elapsed on 14 April. The Supreme Court, without any lawful justification, assumed the powers of the ECP and extended the date of the election, ignoring the fact that it is the sole prerogative of the ECP.

There is no justification for not adjudicating the

issue of the KP provincial election on the request of the counsels to approach the 'appropriate forum'. It could have turned down the request of the counsels as it has done many a time in past on the principle that the command of the law has to be followed, not the will of the parties. By showing leniency on the KP election and adopting an unflinching stance on the Punjab election, the Supreme Court has unfortunately undermined its credibility. The constitution must be applied invariably, without any exception.

It has been established in the Benazir Bhutto vs the Federation of Pakistan case that, in a matter of concurrent jurisdiction of courts, the lower forum should be given preference, limiting the jurisdiction of the higher forum. The Supreme Court has categorically held that it can only assume jurisdiction in exceptional circumstances. In the current case, there were no such circumstances, as the appeal of the ECP is already pending before the relevant high court. The Supreme Court has never invoked its constitutional jurisdiction under 184(3) in such a situation and has adopted a consistent view over time that the court must restrain itself from taking cognisance of matters already pending adjudication before the relevant high court. It is akin to undermining the authority of the relevant court and also deprives the parties of their right to appeal, which is against the spirit of the law and the constitution.

The Supreme Court, being the guardian of the constitution and protector of the fundamental rights of individuals, should not become part of a political battle. Instead, it should maintain its independence, impartiality and supremacy of law. The judicial history is marred with many controversial decisions as a result of deviation from upholding the canons of law, bringing disgrace and derision to the institution. The court has also not considered that the census in Punjab is not complete yet. By holding the election on 14 May, it would deprive a considerable number of voters of their right to elect their representatives. To resolve all these constitutional and legal issues, the chief justice should constitute a full bench to restore public confidence in the institution which is considered to be the final hope by the entire society ■

The writer is an advocate of the Supreme Court.



THE FIRST PAKISTANI SIKH LEGISLATOR

RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

Team Horizon had the honour to interview Ambassador-At-Large for Kartarpur and Member of Punjab Assembly Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora at PML-N Party Secretariat 180-H Model Town, Lahore. We are pleased to share this cordial conversation with our readers.

Horizon: Welcome and thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview.

Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora (SRSA): Pleasure is all mine. I have been reading Horizon since its launch and I am honoured to be interviewed for the official publication of our party. I also take this opportunity to extend felicitations on Eid-ul-Fitar to the whole Pakistani nation and especially our Muslim brethren.

Horizon: Please tell us about yourself, where you were born and how was your childhood?

SRSA: Originally, my family belongs to Faisalabad (Lyallpur) but it moved to Nankana Sahib in 1965. I was born on 11 October 1974 in Nankana Sahib and spent my childhood there. I consider myself lucky that I was born in the same city as the founder of our religion Baba Guru Nanak Sahib, which is the wish of all the Sikhs of the world. My early education is also from Nankana Sahib. My school was the famous Government Guru Nanak High School, Nankana Sahib, which is a pre-partition school and has notable alumni on both sides of the border, who contributed to society, economy and development. Then, I came to Lahore and did B.Com from Punjab University, Lahore.

My parents wanted me to become an engineer, but I didn't have a passion for engineering. Later, I



developed a liking for journalism and worked in a Punjabi newspaper, 'Bhulekha' for some time as a volunteer.

Horizon: Your profile says that you are a development sector expert. Tell us something about that.

SRSA: After my graduation, I had three job offers from MCB Bank in Lahore, Save the Children in Sialkot and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP). My first preference was to join the bank, my second was Save the Children, and my third preference was NRSP but on guidance, rather strict instructions from my mentor Dr Riaz Ahmad Khan, I joined NRSP in Vehari. This was my start in the development sector. I would also like to share that this job was offered to me on the birthday of Baba Guru Nanak Sahib. Later, I joined the Ministry of Finance, but soon I realised that a government job wasn't suitable for me so I decided to quit.

Then, in 2007, I got an opportunity to get international seed funding through Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund to establish my own organisation. Its only condition was that the programme must be established in an area where the majority is rural population. I chose the area of Kartarpur, as this is where Baba Guru Nanak Sahib spent the last 18 years of his life. This is how Mojaz Foundation was set up, with a head office in Narowal. Gurudawara Kartarpur Sahib

was first opened for devotees by the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif *sahib* in 1999 and the honour of head granthi (custodian of Guru Granth Sahib) went to my elder brother. We worked in micro-finance and education.

I relocated to Kartarpur Sahib and developed a rapport with PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal. I used to seek his guidance on various matters related to our organisational work. Then came the 2013 elections. Ahsan Iqbal encouraged me to join politics and recommended my name to the party for a reserved seat for minorities in the Punjab Assembly. I was introduced to Mian Nawaz Sharif and the rest is history.

Horizon: You were the first Sikh legislator in the history of Pakistan. How do you describe it?

SRSA: Sikh community in Pakistan is only between 20,000 to 25,000 people scattered in different areas like Nankana Sahib, Peshawar, Sawat and Buner. Our community is non-political and I give all the credit to PML-N leadership Mian Nawaz Sharif *sahib* and Mian Shehbaz Sharif *sahib* for putting their trust in me. I would also say that my nomination was not only based on my being a Sikh, but they made this nomination on merit seeing my work in the development sector.

I want to convey to the readers that Sikhism's

INTERVIEW

relationship with Pakistan is that of nail and flesh, which can never be separated. Every Sikh, no matter where in the world, be it the UK, Canada, Australia, Pakistan and even India, prays for peace and prosperity of Pakistan because a majority of our holiest sites are in this country.

The PML-N decided to give representation to the Sikh community in parliament, work on establishing the Kartarpur Corridor, and also bring a development professional to the team by nominating me.

Horizon: How do you describe your role as a legislator?

SRSA: I have been a very active legislator. I always participate in debates in the assembly. As a legislator, I have done extensive work on malnutrition, stunted growth and minority rights. We passed several resolutions to recognise the services of minority members and establish the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev as a public holiday.

A landmark achievement of that time was the passing of the Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act 2018, which was passed unanimously in the Punjab Assembly, with the opposition joining in. I would

especially like to thank Shehbaz Sharif, who was then chief minister, for expediting this process. You would be pleased to know that Pakistan was the first and the only country in the world which passed a separate law to govern Sikh marriages. Not even India, where the majority of the world's Sikhs reside, has such a law.

Unfortunately, the succeeding PTI government did not make the rules of business to implement this law. In comparison, Hamza Shahbaz immediately ordered relevant quarters to start the process when he became chief minister for a few days.

Horizon: You are also ambassador-at-large for Kartarpur Corridor and special assistant to the prime minister on it. How important is this role?

SRSA: Our leadership has entrusted me with this monumental task for which I am thankful to them. This role has given me a unique position to communicate with the authorities of both India and Pakistan, foreign ambassadors and the global Sikh leadership. I will leave no stone unturned to use this position to promote peace and harmony in the region and prosperity for the people living in the area.

Kartarpur is not just a building but has tremendous



soft power. I have proposed to the prime minister that visiting hours of the shrine should be extended to 24 hours. We are trying to attract the Sikh diaspora from around the world to visit this corridor. I have also proposed to give fee exemptions to senior devotees.

Pakistan's Foreign Office can play a leading role by conducting Sikh pilgrimage road shows at the Pakistani embassies abroad and introducing a liberal visa policy for Sikh pilgrims. We also need to develop local infrastructure to offer various tour packages to visiting pilgrims. Evacuee Trust Pakistan Board and Sikh Gurdawara Parpandhak Committee also need to restructure and mobilise to capitalise on the soft component and take advantage of digital media.

Horizon: Do you feel safe when you are in public?

SRSA: In Pakistan, the Sikh community is a privileged minority. They receive so much respect, love, hospitality and cooperation from Pakistanis that whenever Sikh Indian pilgrims return to their country after travelling to Pakistan, they shout, "Long live Pakistan." Whenever I am in a queue, people allow me to proceed ahead out of respect. I am grateful to the state, government and especially the people of Pakistan for making us feel at home and safe.

Horizon: Thank you very much for your time, Ramesh, now some lighter questions. How was your childhood? Were you naughty?

SRSA: (Laughing) There is no childhood without mischief. I was very naughty and along with my elder brother, I was always climbing trees and swimming in the pool of Gurudawara Nankana Sahib.

Horizon: Do you play any sports?

SRSA: Like the majority of Pakistanis, I used to play cricket in my youth. Though I am still young, I don't get time to play anymore.

Horizon: Any closing remark or message for our readers?

SRSA: I would like to take this opportunity to set the



historical record straight. The idea of the Kartarpur Corridor was first floated by Mian Nawaz Sharif *sahib*. You can check the archives, I, in a TV interview in July 2013 with renowned journalist Hamid Mir, had given the complete details of Mian *sahib*'s and Ahsan Iqbal *sahib*'s vision about the corridor. Mian *sahib* used to say that he would create this corridor to facilitate our Sikh brethren to worship at their holy site with ease. Once I asked him for government support; instead, he offered Rs300 million from his pocket to serve the Gurdawara. Unfortunately, a gross injustice was done to him when he was removed from office. He is such a great man that when I went to see him in an accountability court after the opening of the corridor, he said, "Congratulations Ramesh, the corridor is open now!"

All Sikhs pray for his health and wish him back at the helm of affairs.

Horizon: Thank you very much brother Ramesh.

SRSA: Thank you team Horizon ■



TRAPPED IN FORCED LABOUR

SYEDA GHULAM FATIMA

The national economy of Pakistan is on the verge of default. The government is striving to address the economic challenges and save the country from default. However, in these extensive efforts for the restoration of the economy, an essential component of labour and employment has been widely ignored for the vested interest of businessmen, landlords, and elites. There is a need to understand how the economy of a developing country can be sustained with a poor, unsatisfied and unhealthy labour class because the matter has never been discussed on the floor of assemblies or in prime-time media debates. Therefore, the working class calls upon governments to fulfil their basic needs of food, health, education and social protection.

The burden of inflation and price hikes is borne by workers or, sometimes, the government which provides subsidies on food and fuel items. But employers are not asked to share this burden by adding

inflation rates in salaries. Article 38 of the constitution of Pakistan clearly states that the state shall ensure equal adjustment of resources between employees and employers. Thus, on one hand, the government alone has to face an economic crisis instead of sharing this burden with employers. On the other hand, millions of workers, particularly the victims of forced labour, remain out of the mainstream and unable to contribute to the national economy.

The brick kiln industry is a prime example of forced labour in Pakistan. This industry does business worth more than Rs3000 million per month but doesn't pay GST, social security contribution, EOBI and income tax. Thus, this industry is totally out of the ambit of the state economy. The same is the case with many other formal and informal sectors. Labourers working in these sectors are dependent on the state for education, health and other facilities, including subsidised commodities. These undocumented and unregulated



sectors are causing a direct loss to the national economy and indirect loss by keeping workers under unlivable wages and poor working conditions.

It is unfortunate that instead of regulating and controlling the labour market, the state has left the workers at the mercy of their employers. The absence of good governance and an efficient justice system makes the situation worse. There is no one to check the shrinking formal labour sector and growing informal labour sector that is over 75 per cent in rural areas and 68 per cent in urban areas, besides the huge labour-intensive sector of agriculture.

In informal sectors, workers have no access to labour courts, inspections, labour welfare and social security. That makes workers more vulnerable. Even those industries which come under the ambit of the Factories Act, 1934 and had formal labour systems in past now have shifted their major portions to informal bases by outsourcing human resources. Tetrapack is one of the classic examples where three different types of labour are working on different salaries and facilities, under one roof and one employer.

Unfair working conditions in the formal and informal

sectors are forcing workers to get engaged in labour without their free will and choice. That, by definition, is forced labour. In Pakistan, 65 per cent of factories are not providing minimum wages at notified rates; in 90 per cent of industries, workers are not provided employment letters to prevent them from demanding their rights. Furthermore, the majority of industries engage 95 per cent of workers through subcontractors who do not allow any sick or casual leave, maternity leave, social security, old age benefit or any other labour right ensured under the Factories Act, 1934. Therefore, these industrial and factory workers should be treated as forced labour. The situation is even worse in the glass bangle industry, coal mines and stone quarries, fisheries, domestic labour, agriculture and brick kilns. In these industries, workers are deprived of their fundamental human rights. Sexual harassment, rape, underage and forced marriages, and trafficking of minor girls are common practices. The Supreme Court of Pakistan in its landmark decision in Darshan Masih Case in 1990 mentioned that brick-making is hazardous work and it is not suitable for women. Supreme Court issued directions to governments to eradicate forced labour and make laws more stringent. Over thirty years have passed since the Supreme Court decision, but the situation

“

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT INSTEAD OF REGULATING AND CONTROLLING THE LABOUR MARKET, THE STATE HAS LEFT THE WORKERS AT THE MERCY OF THEIR EMPLOYERS. THE ABSENCE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND AN EFFICIENT JUSTICE SYSTEM MAKES THE SITUATION WORSE.

”

of forced labour has not changed except for some progress in Punjab. In 2021, then-Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court Athar Minallah remarked in a case of forced labour that the state presently has failed to abolish it.

It is also worth mentioning here that after an extensive campaign by Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF) Pakistan, the Government of Punjab took serious initiatives for the abolition of child labour and bonded labour at brick kilns in 2015. Then Chief Minister Punjab Shehbaz Sharif personally visited brick kilns and instructed the administration and police to eradicate forced labour. Furthermore, at that time the Government of Punjab also allocated an amount of Rs500 million under the Elimination of Child and Bonded Labour Project (Integrated Project for Promotion of Decent Work for Vulnerable Workers in Punjab Province). Unfortunately, this project could not be properly implemented due to the political crisis being faced by the country at that time.

Here, I would like to briefly share some salient features of the forced labour system prevailing in Pakistan.

The forced labour system is based on offering advance loans called peshgi locally. These debts become accumulated over time through dishonesty and corrupt accounting practices of employers. The practice of extending advance loans is overwhelmingly prevalent in the brick kiln and agriculture sectors, which has resulted in the sector-wide prevalence of the bonded labour systems, in violation of the Abolition Act, 1992.

A majority of the brick kilns and other production and manufacturing units are not registered either with the labour department, social security institutions, or any other relevant government authority. Even those who are registered massively underreport the number of their workers.

In bonded labour system, wages are not paid on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Instead, a complex accounting system is in vogue which is beyond the understanding of the illiterate and ignorant bonded labourers, wherein merely petty amounts are paid every Thursday to buy only bread but no butter. The major part of earned wages is adjusted against the repayment of loans and fines, if any. The labourers get only a meagre subsistence allowance to survive the succeeding week.

Most of the bonded labour live on the premises of brick kilns along with their families, who are encouraged to informally work with the heads of the families as a family unit, instead of as individual labourers. This practice violates many of the labour rights of women and children, as they do not have the right to minimum wages, maternity leave, or sick leave and are not protected under the relevant labour laws. The presence of women and children along with their valuables like motorcycles, animals etc serves as collateral for advance loans.

A majority of labourers working at brick kilns do not have any identification documents such as ID cards and B forms for children issued by NADRA. Lack of any effective citizenship documents results in problems for these workers while seeking medical attention in public health facilities as well as exploitation at the hands of the police; this makes them uniquely vulnerable to debt bondage.

Working conditions at brick kilns, coal mines, glass bangle-making factories and stone quarries are hazardous. There are no toilets at the workplace, clean drinking water, canteen and no daycare facilities for children of working women. The labourers are not provided with any protective equipment while performing hazardous tasks like igniting coal and picking bricks from the brick kilns, etc. Workers are

“ UNFAIR WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS ARE FORCING WORKERS TO GET ENGAGED IN LABOUR WITHOUT THEIR FREE WILL AND CHOICE. THAT, BY DEFINITION, IS FORCED LABOUR. ”



provided rudimentary accommodation near the brick kilns with inadequate sanitation facilities.

In 2016, the Punjab government passed the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act 2016, with which the author is not in agreement. It allowed advance loans up to Rs50,000 which has opened the window for the continuation of debt slavery in Punjab. Although it has provided for registration of the contract which is provided in a form appended with the law, the terms of the contract overwhelmingly tilt in favour of the brick kilns owners.

Besides the strict action of the criminal justice system following are the reformative recommendations that can contribute to abolishing the bonded labour system in Pakistan.

The Labour Department should ensure the registration of all brick kilns and other factories under the Factories Act, 1934. The Labour Department should also ensure execution of employment contracts and the maintenance of prescribed registers, under the relevant labour laws.

The mines departments should also ensure labour contracts, social protection and safety measures.

Workers should be provided opportunities for self-registration with the Social Security Department.

NADRA should be directed to ensure issuance of CNICs to brick kiln workers, and registration of their families/children by sending special teams to brick kilns in collaboration with the Labour Department and the brick kiln owners.

No family should be made or allowed to work as a

single unit. Instead, each member of a family should be free to work under a separate contract with all the associated labour rights available to him/her under labour laws. The minimum age of 18 years should be enforced to work at any brick kiln.

The Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019 should be replicated in all four provinces and Islamabad.

The Directorate of Education of all provinces and Islamabad should be directed to ensure arrangements for the enrolment of workers' children in schools and the establishment of literacy centres.

The prime minister is urged to once again launch the Integrated Project for Promotion of Decent Work for Vulnerable Workers with the same zeal and zest that he showed in 2015 and 2016 when he was the chief minister of Punjab.

The most important recommendation is the promotion of fair labour unions and civil society, to overcome the maltreatment of workers and also strengthen the economy and democracy. We expect the present government would stand up for workers' rights ■

The writer is the General Secretary of Bonded Labour Liberation Front Pakistan and a recipient of Clinton Global Citizen Award 2015.



ENSURING FOOD SECURITY

HAMMAD RAZA

Pakistan's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, with the sector contributing around 24 per cent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing about 42 per cent of the country's workforce. The total consumption of wheat is approximately 29 million tonnes; whereas the production of wheat is about 22 million tonnes. In Punjab, wheat is grown on nearly 16 million acres. Agriculture in Pakistan is characterised by a diverse range of crops, including wheat, rice, sugarcane, cotton, maize, and fruits and vegetables. However, the consumption patterns show that wheat is a dominant staple crop grown on arable lands.

The agriculture sector faces various challenges such as low productivity, water scarcity, insufficient mechanisation, lack of diversity in growth patterns and modern farming techniques. As a result, Pakistan has been unable to fully exploit its agricultural potential, leading to a low rate of agricultural growth and a high level of poverty in rural areas.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) governments in the past took several initiatives to improve the agriculture sector's productivity and competitiveness. These include investments in irrigation systems, the development of high-yield varieties of crops, the provision of credit facilities to farmers, and the establishment of research and training institutes. Moreover, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), launched under PML-N, also created new opportunities for the agriculture sector by promoting the construction of new highways, railways, and ports, which could facilitate the transportation of agricultural products to global markets. Unfortunately, the inept government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) slowed work on CPEC, the benefits of which could not be accrued to the agricultural sector in the last four years.

Pakistan's agriculture sector still faces significant challenges. Climate change, locust attacks, and the COVID-19 pandemic have all adversely affected

“

THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR HAS A DUAL ADVANTAGE; IT CAN ENSURE FOOD SECURITY AND ITS PRODUCTS ARE EXPORTABLE AND CAN BOOST FOREIGN RESERVES.

”

the sector. However, the government and the private sector are working to overcome these challenges and unlock the sector's full potential. Agriculture productivity in the country has been relatively low compared to other countries, despite the sector's significant contribution to the economy. According to the World Bank, Pakistan's agricultural productivity growth rate has been around 1.9 per cent per annum over the past decade, which is lower than the average for other developing countries.

Several factors contribute to low agricultural productivity in Pakistan. One of the primary reasons is the lack of modern farming techniques, including insufficient mechanisation and limited use of technology, together with the lack of training for small and medium-sized farmers. As a result, farmers still rely on traditional farming practices, which limit their ability to increase yields and improve quality. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness among consumers about the diversification of their diet by adding to it grains like maize, millet and oat. This consumption trend puts an extra burden on wheat, which is a high-carb and high-gluten grain, but its yield per acre is far below the yield of other grains. Over-consumption of carbohydrates and gluten is resulting in many chronic diseases like diabetes, liver inflammation and cardiac diseases. Hence, the diversification of the agriculture sector is exigent to ensure not only food security but also the health of people.

Another major challenge is water scarcity, which is a severe constraint on agricultural productivity in Pakistan. The country has limited water resources, and much of the water used for agriculture comes from underground aquifers, which are depleting fast.



Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, including poor road networks, lack of storage facilities, and insufficient access to credit and markets, also limits productivity growth in the sector. Around two to three per cent of arable land is being reduced annually for agricultural usage due to an increase in population and new housing needs. These challenges have hindered the development of a competitive and efficient agricultural sector in Pakistan. Resultantly, the country has to import wheat every year despite being an agrarian state.

In the wake of disastrous floods in 2022, the government led by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif announced Kissan Package worth Rs200 billion. The objective of this package is to provide relief and support to farmers facing various challenges, including low crop yield, water scarcity, and natural disasters. Under the Kissan Package, small farmers are provided with direct financial assistance in the form of cash grants, subsidised loans, and insurance coverage. The package also includes measures to improve access to markets, credit facilities, and agricultural inputs like fertilisers and seeds. Additionally, the government has



taken several steps to support the farming community, including the provision of free medical care and education for farmers' families, the establishment of new agricultural research and training centres, and the construction of new water reservoirs and irrigation systems.

The Kissan Package has had a significant impact on the agriculture sector in Pakistan, particularly on small-scale farmers in the wake of the floods of 2022. The package has provided much-needed financial and other forms of support to farmers who were struggling to make ends meet due to various challenges. Direct cash transfers to small and medium-sized farmers helped them overcome the negative impacts of the floods of 2022.

Despite these efforts, food insecurity remains a significant challenge for the country. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), around 40 per cent of Pakistan's population is food insecure, and malnutrition is prevalent, particularly among women and children. The government needs to continue investing in the agriculture sector, improving infrastructure, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to ensure long-term food security in the country.

Agriculture-allied sectors, such as horticulture, dairy, livestock, poultry, and fisheries also have

tremendous potential for growth. When talking about agriculture, livestock is often overlooked, but it is a significant source of income and employment for many rural households. Unfortunately, lack of modern infrastructure, disease outbreaks, poor animal nutrition, lack of access to credit, limited research and innovation, climate change and general apathy towards animal welfare are some of the main issues facing this sector. During its tenure, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government in Punjab (2008-2018) took several initiatives to modernise the livestock sector. This was an important step towards establishing institutions for the development of this sector and improving the productivity and profitability of livestock farmers.

To make Pakistan a food-secure and export-led economy, it cannot ignore the agriculture and livestock sectors as most of the raw materials used in these sectors can be supplied from domestic markets. Adaptations to international standards of agriculture and livestock sectors can increase the export of the produce which is not only sustainable but also feasible for Pakistan. Hence, for Pakistan, the agriculture sector has a dual advantage; it can ensure food security and its products are exportable and can boost foreign reserves. A combination of 'green modernisation' and 'white revolution' has the potential to transform Pakistan's economy ■

BLOOD DONATION CAMP

RESEARCH AND POLICY PLANNING UNIT

PML-N Secretary General Lahore and former Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare Punjab Khawaja Imran Nazir organised a blood donation camp in collaboration with Fatimid Foundation and PML-N's Research and Policy Planning Unit in his constituency PP-153 Lahore-X.

Fatimid Foundation has been recognised for its work in providing reliable blood transfusion services to patients suffering from blood disorders such as Thalassaemia, Haemophilia, etc. It receives blood through voluntary donations and provides thousands of bags of fully screened blood to deserving patients. PML-N's Lahore chapter has, in the past, collaborated with the foundation to set up blood donation camps several times.

Former Health Minister Khawaja Imran Nazir has been very active in social welfare work in his constituency. When Fatimid Foundation requested, he organised this camp right after Ramazan to make up for the decline in blood donations during the holy month of fasting. A large number of people turned up to donate blood, including Khawaja Imran Nazir himself.

In addition to Fatimid Foundation, the PML-N Lahore chapter collaborates with Sundas Foundation, which also provides blood transfusion services for patients suffering from blood disorders, to set up such camps



PICTURE GALLERY



PRIME MINISTER SHAHBAZ SHARIF MEETS KING CHARLES III OF BRITAIN AT THE MEETING OF THE LEADERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES IN LONDON. 5 MAY 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF MEETS BRITISH PRIME MINISTER RISHI SUNAK ON THE SIDELINES OF A MEETING OF THE LEADERS OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES IN LONDON. 5 MAY 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESSES A SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AFTER GETTING A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. 27 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF IN A GROUP PHOTO WITH AMBASSADORS OF BROTHERLY ISLAMIC COUNTRIES TO PAKISTAN ON THE OCCASION OF AN IFTAR DINNER HOSTED DURING RAMAZAN. 17 APRIL 2023



PML-N CHIEF ORGANISER AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MARYAM NAWAZ ADDRESSING PARTY WORKERS ON LABOUR DAY IN LAHORE. 1 MAY 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF LAUNCHING CONSTITUTION MOBILE APP IN ISLAMABAD AS PART OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION OF PAKISTAN. 20 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF RECEIVES BRIEFING REGARDING CONSTRUCTION OF IMAMIA COLONY RAILWAY CROSSING FLYOVER, SHAHDARA, LAHORE. 15 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF RECEIVES BRIEFING REGARDING UNDER-CONSTRUCTION LAHORE BRIDGE. 16 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF DISTRIBUTING GIFT HAMPERS AMONG THE STAFF AND PRISONERS ON THE OCCASION OF EID UL FITR AT CENTRAL JAIL, KOT LAKHPAT, LAHORE. 22 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER MUHAMMAD SHEHBAZ SHARIF TALKING TO THE MEDIA AT INSTITUTE OF UROLOGY AND TRANSPLANTATION RAWALPINDI. 18 APRIL 2023



PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF VISITS THE DIALYSIS CENTRE AT THE RAWALPINDI INSTITUTE OF UROLOGY AND TRANSPLANTATION. 18 APRIL, 2023



MIAN MUHAMMAD NAWAZ SHARIF AND MARYAM NAWAZ PERFORMING UMRAH IN MAKKAH, SAUDI ARABIA. 14 APRIL 2023





PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF AND FOREIGN MINISTER BILAWAL BHUTTO ZARDARI JOINTLY INAUGURATING 330 MEGA WATTS THALNOVA THAR COAL POWER PROJECT IN THARPARKAR. 22 MARCH 2023




HORIZON

Research and Policy Planning Unit
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

 HorizonEdition

 HorizonEdition

 HorizonEdition

 www.horizedition.com

 info@horizedition.com