

Foreign policy challenges ahead

By **Maleeha Lodhi**

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN
FIVE key areas will be the main focus of Pakistan's foreign policy in the year ahead. Relations with China and the US while navigating the Sino-US confrontation, dealing with Afghanistan's uncertainties, managing the adversarial relationship with India and balancing ties between strategic ally Saudi Arabia and neighbour Iran.

Pakistan has to pursue its diplomatic goals in an unsettled global and regional environment marked by several key features. They include rising East-West tensions, increasing preoccupation of big powers with domestic challenges, ongoing trade and technology wars overlying the strategic competition between China and the US, a fraying rules-based international order and attempts by regional and other powers to reshape the rules of the game in their neighbourhood.

Understanding the dynamics of an unpredictable world is important especially as unilateral actions by big powers and populist leaders, which mark their foreign policy, have implications for Pakistan's diplomacy. In evolving its foreign policy strategy Pakistan has to match its goals to its diplomatic resources and capital. No strategy is effective unless ends and means are aligned.

Pakistan's relations with China will remain its overriding priority. While a solid economic dimension has been added to long-standing strategic ties, it needs sustained high-level engagement and consultation to keep relations on a positive trajectory. CPEC is on track, but there are issues to address in its second phase. They include simplifying cumbersome bureaucratic approval procedures for investors, resolving the issue of deferred payments to IPPs and promoting more business-to-business cooperation. Chinese concerns about security of their personnel working in Pakistan also need to be addressed. As the pivot of China's belt and road initiative — the 21st century's most ambitious economic enterprise — CPEC's timely progress is crucial to re-inforce Beijing's interest in strengthening Pakistan, economically and strategically. Close coordination with Beijing on key issues remains important.

Pakistan wants to improve ties with the US. But relations will inevitably be affected by Washington's ongoing confrontation with Beijing, which American officials declare has an adversarial dimension while China attributes a cold war mindset to the US. Islamabad

seeks to avoid being sucked into this big power rivalry. But this is easier said than done. So long as US-China relations remain unsteady it will have a direct bearing on Pakistan's effort to reset ties with the US especially as containing China is a top American priority.

US withdrawal from Afghanistan has diminished Pakistan's importance for Washington for now, at a time when many in the US blame Islamabad for its military debacle in Afghanistan. For almost two decades Afghanistan was the principal basis for engagement in their frequently turbulent ties, marked by both cooperation and mistrust. As Pakistan tries to turn a new page with the US the challenge is to find a new basis for a relationship largely shorn of substantive bilateral content. Islamabad's desire to expand trade ties is in any case contingent on building a stronger export base.

Complicating this is Washington's growing strategic and economic relations with India, its partner of choice in the region in its strategy to project India as a counterweight to China. The implications for Pakistan of US-India entente are more than evident from Washington turning a blind eye to the grim situation in occupied Kashmir and its strengthening of India's military and strategic capabilities. Closer US-India ties will intensify the strategic imbalance in the region magnifying Pakistan's security challenge.

Multiple dimensions of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan will preoccupy Islamabad, which spent much of 2021 engaged with tumultuous developments there. While Pakistan will continue to help Afghanistan avert a humanitarian and economic collapse it should not underestimate the problems that may arise with an erstwhile ally. For one, the TTP continues to be based in Afghanistan and conduct attacks from there. The border fencing issue is another source of unsettled discord. Careful calibration of ties will be needed — assisting Afghanistan but avoiding overstretch, and acknowledging that the interests of the Taliban and Pakistan are far from identical. Moreover, in efforts to mobilise international help for Afghanistan, Islamabad must not exhaust its diplomatic capital, which is finite and Pakistan has other foreign policy goals to pursue.

Managing relations with India will be a difficult challenge especially as the Modi government is continuing its repressive policy in occupied Kashmir and pressing ahead with demographic changes there, rejecting Pakistan's protests. The hope in establishment circles that last year's backchannel between the two countries would yield a thaw or even rapprochement, turned to disappointment when no headway was made on any front beyond the re-commitment by both neighbours to observe a ceasefire on the Line of Control.

Working level diplomatic engagement will continue on practical issues such as release of civilian prisoners. But prospects of formal dialogue resuming are slim in view of Delhi's refusal to discuss Kashmir. This is unlikely to change unless Islamabad raises the diplomatic costs for Delhi of its intransigent policy. Islamabad's focus on Afghanistan last year meant its diplomatic campaign on Kashmir sagged and was limited to issuing tough statements. Unless Islamabad renews and sustains its international efforts with commitment and imagination, India will feel no pressure on an issue that remains among Pakistan's core foreign policy goals.

With normalisation of ties a remote possibility, quiet diplomacy by the two countries is expected to focus on managing tensions to prevent them from spinning out of control. Given the impasse on Kashmir, an uneasy state of no war, no peace is likely to continue warranting Pakistan's sustained attention.

In balancing ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan should consider how to leverage possible easing of tensions between the long-standing rivals — of which there are some tentative signs. With Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman keen to use economic power to expand his country's diplomatic clout by making strategic overseas investments, Pakistan should use its political ties with Riyadh to attract Saudi investment through a coherent strategy. Relations with Iran too should be strengthened with close consultation on regional issues especially Afghanistan. The recent barter agreement is a step in the right direction.

In an increasingly multipolar world, Pakistan also needs to raise its diplomatic game by vigorous outreach to other key countries and actors beyond governments to secure its foreign policy goals.

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Redefining national security

By: **Zahid Hussain**

LAST month the civil and military leadership approved what is being described as the country's first integrated National Security Policy. The document that is yet to be made public reportedly sets overarching priorities for state and human security. A comprehensive policy beyond traditional military security was long overdue.

It's indeed a positive development that the civil and military leadership has agreed to redefine the state security paradigm. But the real issue is to build a broader national consensus on a strategy to implement the policy. It's not only important to get it approved by parliament but to also encourage a public debate on the policy. It should not be seen as a policy of a particular government but of the state. One would only know the contours of the NSP once it's made public.

For almost seven decades since its inception, Pakistan has remained a national security state defined exclusively by its military defence. There has not been any concept of human security. It's geostrategic situation and the country's involvement in regional conflicts strengthened the military dimension of state security at the cost of security of the population.

Consequently, the country is left far behind in all aspects of human security. A weak economy dependent on foreign assistance has left the country's sovereignty extremely vulnerable. With little investment in people, the country is at the lowest rung of all human development indicators. We may boast of being a nuclear power and one of the strongest regional military forces, yet the country remains insecure with growing internal instability both on the political and economic fronts.

We are unable to feed and provide employment to an increasing population. The swelling ranks of uneducated youth with bleak future prospects have rendered the situation untenable. The rise of violent religious extremism poses a bigger threat to the country's security than any external force. All that has lent greater urgency to the need for redefining our security paradigm and priorities. But it requires more than earnest proclamations.

Most important is the political will to take the hard decisions needed to change the entire policy direction and build a national understanding of the internal and external security

threats, and formulate a strategy that would guide the state in providing human security. A national security policy should reflect not only the point of view of the current government and a few state institutions, but also other sections of the society through public consultation.

It requires a thorough analysis of all threats to state and human security based on the input of all security-relevant government agencies and civil society groups in order to set realistic goals for the state to achieve over a specific period of time. A shared vision of national security would provide consistency in decision-making and setting the right priorities.

It was under the former PML-N government in 2014 when work began on an integrated national security policy. Over the next three years some progress was made in shaping an outline. But there was still no clarity on the broader concept of national security. The current policy has been prepared by the National Security Division.

It is claimed that the NSP covers all aspects of internal and external security and outlines “the challenges and opportunities facing Pakistan in the coming years”. Economic security and national cohesion are assigned top priorities.

While the national security adviser maintains that the document has been prepared with the consultation of stakeholders in different fields, no political party — not even the PTI’s allies, let alone those in the opposition — has been consulted. It is not enough to say that the military leadership is on board. The parliamentary committee on national security was briefed on the policy just before it was presented for approval by the national security committee. The opposition members boycotted the briefing.

It was the primary responsibility of the prime minister to develop a political consensus on the extremely important national policy. There is still time to introduce it in parliament for debate in order to fashion a truly national policy. Lack of consensus will make it extremely difficult for the state to achieve the objectives underscored in the document.

Indeed, the country’s security does depend on economic security. But the main issue is whether the government has a clear strategy to achieve economic independence and self-sufficiency. For that the country needs an economic charter for long-term planning. It would not be possible without a national consensus. Given the existing political polarisation and weakened democratic institutions in the country, it would be hard to develop a long-term strategy for sustainable economic development. Structural reforms are required to achieve macroeconomic stability. For that it is imperative to have the main

political forces on board. But the government's confrontationist policy remains the biggest stumbling block in achieving that objective.

National security is directly linked to governance, transparency and rule of law. A failed system and political instability remain major problems for effective implementation of the target set in the NSP. Some of the policies of the PTI government are inconsistent with the measures needed for internal security. The government's own policy of encouraging religiosity and appeasement of extremist, faith-based groups would undermine any effort to deal with violent extremism, a phenomenon that poses the most serious threat to national security.

Moreover, a confused and chaotic foreign policy has complicated Pakistan's external security challenges amid fast-changing regional geopolitical developments. The exit of the United States and return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan have compounded our external security concerns. Yet there is no clarity in our foreign policy on how to deal with the emerging challenges.

Most importantly, we need political stability to ensure the country's security. It's imperative to have a consultative national security policymaking process and initiate a national dialogue involving different professional and civil society groups. Such public discussions would help achieve consensus on the core values of state security provision, management and oversight. A transparent and participatory approach would enhance public confidence. It remains to be seen whether the government has the political will to bring about a fundamental shift in the national security paradigm.

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Saudi Vision 2030

By: Zafar Aziz Chaudhry

Saudis are the chief custodians of the major oil wealth of the world and have a more prestigious world trade route than Dubai.

Saudi culture is essentially Islamic, as Islam had taken birth in this region. Because of its Islamic heritage and its historical role as an ancient trade centre, its Bedouin traditions had a strong impact on history through the ages.

The Arabs shared a traditional and conservative culture based on a strong moral code and cultural values, such as hospitality, loyalty, and a sense of duty to support their community.

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab society was divided into small tribes engaged in internecine warfare. Though Islam completely revolutionised their thinking and beliefs, internally Arabs remained just as politically divided into tribes. In the arid desert, there was little agriculture to make animal fodder, and their main income came from Haj immigration and off-shore fishing rights.

In 1938, an American company drilled oil from Dammam, Saudi Arabia, which started its sale to foreign countries in 1945. Later in 1950, it came to be identified as the largest source of petroleum in the world.

Saudi Arabia, being the chairman of the OPEC group of countries, imposed an embargo on oil sale in 1973, which precipitated a massive fuel crisis in the US and other parts of the industrial world, which led the Saudis to acquire total control of the company, now known as Saudi Aramco. The very next year, the kingdom's oil revenues reached a bogging \$118 billion.

Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the youthful Crown Prince of Saudi Kingdom, on his way to becoming its de facto ruler, had two great desires. First, he wanted to bring widespread cultural changes in the primitive Arab society-from their age-old lethargy and poverty-, bringing them into a new light of knowledge and technology by allowing their women greater emancipation of movement and thought. To show his mind, he has already allowed women to drive on the roads. To achieve these goals, he wanted to earmark an area in his country where not only reformation of society on these lines could be

undertaken, but also new investors and industrialists could also be invited for introducing their trade and skills in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It should be introduced to the world as a new international city with all facilities of science and technology. He dreaded opposition from the conservative Wahhabis, who were violently against modernism in any form. The Prince thinks that reformative measures should be introduced gradually and slowly and in areas where opposition should be little or mild. Saudis cannot face wide-scale reprisals when society's centuries-old ways of life are changed. He had in mind the example of Dubai, which had, only four decades earlier, encouraged the foreign investors by promising them all facilities for their trade. This converted the arid desert of Dubai into a flowering international city, which is the hub of several tourist resorts, hotels, shopping malls, numerous beaches, and recreation spots that are found nowhere else in the world and where tired tourists take refuge to refurbish their energies. The Prince knows that earlier, Dubai had no wealth or attraction, but it still became the most visited resort in the world. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a sanctuary of Muslims who are more than one-third of the world population. Saudis are the chief custodians of the major oil wealth of the world, with immense resources, and have a more prestigious world trade route in the Red Sea. Thus, they are far better placed to rule the world today.

The Prince had fixed three goals to achieve by this enterprise: a vital society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. His society was based on these three pillars. On these, he wanted to base his conception of Saudi Arabia's Vision of 2030. He had announced his Vision in 2014, and since then, he is periodically taking meetings with his Cultural and Education Council regularly to review the progress of this project.

The growth in Dubai was necessitated by tourism, investment in infrastructure, political stability, and trade liberalization. The crown prince is an agent of change on a very big scale, and the conferences he holds indicates a very big signal about how rapid is the pace of change. Daniel Yergin, a prominent energy strategist who attended the conference, wrote in an email. "This is driven by the recognition that an economic model based largely on oil, which worked for four decades, is no longer sufficient when 70 per cent of the population is 30 years or younger, oil prices are volatile and the world is going digital. He is hoping to transform the kingdom from a petro-state into a diverse, productive economy. But the obstacles to economic changes are many, starting with a culture that often discourages risk-taking and innovation."

To accomplish his Vision of 2030, a city Neom (a \$500 billion cross-border large tract of land on the shore of the Red Sea) has been earmarked; set to join smart city technologies and work as a tourist destination.

The Prince, considering it as a gigantic task, wants to have enough finances from the Oil. He has realised that nearly two years after the start of the collapse in global oil prices, Saudi Arabia's economy has clearly deteriorated and the outlook remains uncertain. The country's fiscal deficit hit almost \$100 billion or 15 per cent of the GDP last year. Saudi Arabia also recorded a deficit in the current account balance, which for the first time since 1999 reached \$41 billion, or 6.4 per cent of GDP in 2015. This deficit is expected to rise in 2016 to more than \$63 billion, or 10.2 per cent of GDP.

Prince Mohammad bin Salman is by temperament a Western-educated liberal having a modern outlook and is in favour of women's emancipation. After seeing his dwindling oil economy, he formulated a council of cultural and educational reforms in 2016 and regular meetings are being held to review its progress.

Added to these complications and due to security risks from Iran, Yemen, and Syria, Saudi Arabia's huge defence spending is her huge liability. Meanwhile, Saudi foreign reserves are declining at an alarming rate. Another threat to stability and growth in Saudi Arabia has emerged as pressure on the long-standing riyal's peg to the US dollar.

Undeterred by this development, Prince Salman invited more than 3,500 private-equity investors, corporate chief executives, heads of global organizations, and government officials from dozens of countries; making Riyadh a hustling and bustling market of international business leaders studying the kingdom's moneymaking prospects.

Above all, Saudi Arabia's oil dependence has also led to structural inefficiencies such as rising unemployment among Saudi citizens and a heavily subsidized welfare system.

The hallmark of Prince Mohammad's Vision is to expand Saudi Arabia's economy away from oil through many social and economic transformations.

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National Security Policy

By: **Dr Tehmina Aslam Ranjha**

On 27 December, 2021, at the occasion of the 36th meeting of the National Security Council headed by the Prime Minister, members of the council approved the first National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26, presented by National Security Advisor Dr Moeed Yusuf, who also announced that the document was a product of consultative efforts that had been done earnestly with both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders since 2014, after the establishment of the National Security Division (NSD).

As per the news, the NSP was designed to “leverage the symbiotic relationship between human security, economic security and military security with the prosperity and safety of citizens as its principal focus.” Though the public version of the document is yet to be released, the news offers a three-pronged insight into the NSP.

First, the NSP is citizen-oriented. The foremost idea embedded in the policy is to shift Pakistan’s focus from an individualised sector-based agenda to a comprehensive national security framework the ultimate objective of which is to ensure the safety and security of citizens. The policy has acknowledged that without the economic prosperity of a common citizen, the country’s security cannot yield the desired fruit. This is why the policy promotes a citizen-centric approach to security in general, with economic security at the core.

The policy is unique in the sense that it treasures Pakistan’s citizens, the safety, security, dignity, welfare and prosperity of whom is considered vital to and inextricably linked to the country’s security. Interestingly, the policy has been rolled out at a time when the country is beset with economic hurdles to the smooth running of its affairs. Inflation is soaring, prices are skyrocketing, and savings are plummeting. The prevalent economic slump is the first major challenge to the policy the moment the policy starts seeing daylight. With distressed and disgruntled citizenry, the NSP evades its mainstay.

Second, the NSP emphasises economy, or in a broader way, geo-economics. Certainly, a robust economy is required to generate additional resources which could be doled out to the masses equally and judicially to embolden human and military security. Further, it is expected that prioritising economic security would expand the national resource share for greater investments in human and military security.

Since 1991, Pakistan has taken about three decades to value the relevance of geo-economics substituting geo-politics. In the past, Pakistan overemphasised its geo-strategic position more in terms of geo-politics than geo-economics. One of the drawbacks to such an approach had been to Pakistan, which never considered seriously any prospects to enter into trade with neighbouring countries, especially India. Though constrained by the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement of 1993 and the South Asian Free Trade Area (an agreement reached in Islamabad on 6 January 2004) at the platform of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Pakistan remained reluctant to open its trade with India. Nevertheless, transnational projects such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor have made Pakistan realise the untapped potential for using its geo-strategy under the rubric of geo-economics. The related challenges are that Pakistan's economy is still short of being export-oriented and that Pakistan is disinclined to do trade in the region.

One of the major objections to the 18th Constitutional Amendment is that the share of the Centre has been decreasing, thereby putting the Centre under pressure to service debt, bear the expanses of the armed forces and meet the expenditures of the capital, Islamabad. One solution was sought in reversing the amendment by either judicial activation or incumbent parliament. Neither of them could work. The second solution lies in expanding the national resource base to generate a bigger economy that could sustain the ever-growing expenses of the four provinces and dwindling but otherwise vital expenses of the Center. The NSP seems to be a step in this direction.

Third, the NSP policy elucidates a framework to handle external and internal security challenges. External adversaries, such as India, may offer a threat, as India is bent on mimicking the US in adopting the strategy of pre-emptive strikes. Nevertheless, external foes are known but internal detractors are amorously rearing their heads in several forms.

One can take refuge in the argument that internal threat is vaguely posed by amorphous groups resorting to the menace of terrorism. Nevertheless, the challenge is that religious extremists are in abundance inside the country. Mainstreaming religious elements, who are inclined to enter politics, might be one strategy, but this strategy is flawed with the weaponization of politics. The NSP is silent on this aspect. Moreover, it is not only the Taliban-type militia that poses a threat to internal security, the mob ready to lynch anyone and burn the victim's corpse on mere allegations of blasphemy also offers a matching insuperable threat to internal security. The NSP keeps mum on this facet too. The added problem emanates from the unchecked population growth rate, which has been around

two per cent in Pakistan, compared to around one per cent population growth rate of Bangladesh in 2020-21. The untoward consequences of overpopulation are both fathomable and foreseeable. The NSP stands short of addressing this feature as well.

At the meeting, though the NSD was tasked to review the progress on the policy every year to keep the policy updated as per the emerging global environment, it is yet to be seen if the policy is merely to do window dressing of issues or reach the core of the problems such as illiteracy, poverty, extremism and overpopulation ravaging the country. Similarly, at the meeting, members from the opposition parties remained conspicuous by their absence. This is where the problem lies: any next government comprising today's opposition parties may put a damper on all the excitement invoked in redirecting Pakistan. It would have been both expedient and propitious if the government had taken the opposition into confidence and persuaded it to send its representative to the meeting – to envision the new bright future of Pakistan together.

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Security policy vs real security

By: Najm us Saqib

The last week of 2021 witnessed the National Security Committee approving Pakistan's first ever National Security Policy (NSP) that will be reviewed annually and last for five years. Guidelines and principles in all four important areas of decision-making, defence, foreign affairs and economy have been incorporated in the draft that puts economic stability at its core. Citizens have been informed that the policy preparing process was started in 2014 and the formatted version of the final document would be made public soon after completing certain legal formalities. As it is a 'comprehensive' and 'inclusive' document, one would expect it to contain not only the goals set in all important areas but also dilating on how to achieve the desired objectives during a period that involves a general election at home and a pandemic driven overwrought geo-strategic environment.

NSP is neither a law enumerating how a nation should behave nor is it a scripture stipulating some divine philosophy. Such a document is expected to set out certain basic principles and guidelines for a state's machinery to aim at providing security to its subjects in all spheres of life. As the appropriate and timely 'implementation' remains the litmus test of any policy, the state machinery has no other option but to keep applying the principles of good governance from start to end. In an ideal political environment, a policy is usually followed by a strategy to spell out its contours after ascertaining the strengths and weaknesses, resources and resource-constraints of both the state and its subjects with utmost precision. The ensuing strategy is then translated into numerous tactical components clearly indicating the involved actions under the specified parameters. Hopefully, due process was followed through building domestic consensus by ensuring participation and responsiveness besides encompassing the principles of good governance including the rule of law, accountability, efficiency and transparency.

In case any of these elements are missing from the scene, there is no point in taking credit for finalising the NSP. If the policy talks about good governance while overlooking its eternal absence from the national panorama, it would just be another non-implementable idealist document for the archives. Indigenous 'good-governors' are not good enough to have any policy implemented in letter and spirit. You need to have local 'good-governed' populace as well to reap the fruits of any decision-making. Otherwise, the only purpose any policy could possibly serve is the mention of its title in any yearly report on any

government's performance sheet. Except for the related government officials and candidates of competitive exams, no one reads the yearly reports.

Hence, the smart move is to keep the unforeseen events or follies of any government under check by inserting a number of provisos here and there in the draft. Another smart move would be to allow such a policy to be revisited from time to time thereby avoiding any future criticism. Yet another smart move is to ensure everyone that the policy is 'individual-centric' and certainly is by the people, of the people and for the people. The last bit would be to create a perception that the credit-worthy government has honestly fulfilled its responsibility towards all its subjects by 'drafting' and 'finalising' the NSP in the best interest of everyone. In other words, regardless of its implementation or even its release for the people to know what it entails, the final document itself tantamount to actually 'providing' security to all and sundry. This would certainly be the smartest move.

Main points of National Security Policy comes to light

It would indeed be interesting to see something innovating and novel in the NSP particularly in its approach as the indications so far received about its main contours point towards the same old security challenges that Pakistan has been facing such as economy, food, water, military security, terrorism, population growth and Islamabad's dealings with the world especially the major powers. One is eagerly waiting to see what geo-economics means exactly in practical terms and how geo-strategic and geo-political objectives could either be sidelined or ignored at the cost of boosting economic prospects. Hopefully, the NSP was able to create a co-related balance between an unstable political environment and robust economy or how Pakistan could withdraw on some of its 'principled' stands in the realm of geo-political matters to create some space for certain economic and trade related ventures without harming the concept of its very existence.

It would also be interesting to see if any concept like 'Enlightened Moderation' has been introduced. Indeed, such catchy jargons help the Foreign Office in drafting admirable speeches to be delivered at important world forums. However, a concept on paper means absolutely nothing if the government of the day could not translate it into reality in practical terms. A clarification is required here. Such policies are prepared during the tenure of one or two governments but the ownership rests with the state. In other words, the NSP will remain the state of Pakistan's property and responsibility even if the successive governments make any number of amendments therein. The whole-of-government approach reportedly envisaged in the NSP, therefore, needs to be followed by the incumbent and all successive governments in a manner that suits a welfare State.

In the context of nuclear disarmament and security, the Big Five of the world have expressed their desire last week to work with all states to create a 'security' environment to eventually achieving 'undiminished security.' Hopefully, besides seeking to leverage the symbiotic linkages among economic security, human security and military security with safety and prosperity of citizens, the NSP also spells out the safety of Pakistan's 'strategic assets' particularly in dealing with the NSG, IEAE and other such nuclear monitors. It is also hoped that ways and means are specified in the NSP to monitor the enemy's nefarious designs in time and initiate timely countermeasures rather than waiting for another EU DisinfoLab disclosure.

Lastly, for a policy to effectively meet its stated objectives, eternal vigilance is not enough. The honesty of purpose must be there as the paramount guiding principle.

The writer is a former Ambassador of Pakistan and author of seven books in three languages.

NSP is neither a law enumerating how a nation should behave nor is it a scripture stipulating some divine philosophy.

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Feminism in Pakistan

By: **Aadil Ahmad**

Blinded by the ravages of cultural radicalism, it seemed as though that, forsaking the rights of women in Pakistan became additionally widespread as a discrepancy between the two genders was formed. Since the formation of the country, a sense of societal normality has led to women being forced into a secondary position within homes, men obtaining more privileges and women being dominated by men. The situation for women in our country is far from the equality that we set out to achieve with the formation of Pakistan and currently in the status-quo women face a myriad of issues that have led them to become repressed and unable to fight against these injustices on a person-to-person basis.

Since independence in 1947, there has been a dire need for legislation and awareness regarding the condition of women in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, a staggering 32 percent of women have experienced physical violence in Pakistan and 40 percent of ever-married women have suffered from spousal abuse at some point in their life. The nation has suffered from one of the highest overall hourly average (mean) gender pay gap, at 34 percent, according to the ILO's Global Wage Report 2018-19; this is more than double the global average. Pakistani women account for almost 90 percent of the bottom one percent of wage earners. The importance of education for women has been constantly overlooked and disregarded. Thirty-two percent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan, compared to 21 percent of boys. By grade six, 59 percent of girls are out of school, versus 49 percent of boys.

The mentality of most Pakistani men represents the words "toxic masculinity" and "misogyny". It refers to a way of thinking that men are superior to women and that women are their accessories, and they can do what they want with them. This way of thinking has not only led to social inequalities but also a culture of systematic discrimination and in the extreme rape culture. When men think like this, they are bound to make insensitive jokes that trivialise assault, molestation, catcalling and harassment. This mindset is often rooted from young boys not being taught how to respect and behave with women and due to this these same boys make dirty jokes with their friends and sexualise women.

The mind of a child is often like a sponge—the involuntary absorption of information takes place, and a child often imitates the practices of whom he sees as a role model. This psychology can perhaps best be seen through another example of when a young boy sees his father treat his mother coldly, ignoring her and referring to her as property. This way of thinking is passed on from generation to generation and is instilled in boys from a young age, but due to the ever-increasing wave of social enlightenment the situation can be looked upon optimistically.

In recent years, a wave of feminism has sprung up within Pakistan and the movement acts as a joint effort to support women in the country to overcome such obstacles and to organise to fight for the rights of women politically, socially, and economically. Feminism means equality and sameness and treatment that is exclusive of gender. It fights for women to not be killed in the name of honour, to not be treated like objects, to not be harassed, to not be exploited, to not be looked down on, to be treated fairly, the abolishment of gender roles that stereotype people, equal pay, same rights and other things that encompass an end to social injustices. The movement as of now has made waves by organising mass movements like the Aurat March and by carrying out educational activities for the population of Pakistan. The feminist movement has become a banner for unity and organisation for demanding a change in the way of thinking of the masses.

As of now, the feminist movement within Pakistan has done a lot of good, and it continues to enlighten women about their rights and enlighten men on how to act as allies. It acts as a support system for women under oppression and as a voice for women. The movement has also inspired the emergence of several Non-Governmental Organisations which work towards the aim of gender equality within Pakistan. The rise of feminism has also paved the way for passing of legislation such as the Punjab Bill of 2016 and the Prevention Act of 2020. Both these acts set out imprisonment and fines of up to PKR 50,000. Furthermore, the definition of gender-based violence which extends to emotions has also been established. Let us hope that this movement continues to live on and flourish and all of us should play our part in helping humanity grow.

The writer is a student of A levels. He is interested in international relations and politics