International relations, Pakistan affairs, faith & society, leadership & governance, and science & technology are the major themes at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad. During the recent months, an important focus was the transforming regional situation after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, and India’s illegal annexation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan’s emerging relations with African countries too remained under discussion. Among domestic issues, the ongoing study of the status, contributions, and problems of non-Muslim Pakistanis were deliberated. Pakistan’s transition towards clean energy and better understanding and utilization of its maritime resources continued to be advocated and promoted. Another area of IPS interest is related to the dynamic role of religion and religious circles on various issues. Themes emerging from some key events are summarized below.¹

**Afghanistan under the New Regime: Challenges and Prospects²**

**Struggle for Normalcy**

Afghan warlords and mercenaries were the real beneficiaries of the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, which continued for two decades and brought misery to the people and instability to the region. In wake of the exit of the US forces and the consequent fall of Kabul, the country is now striving for a return to normalcy under the new regime. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan was not only beneficial for Afghans but also for the region at large. Taliban had been able to regain control of the country without much resistance. Their march to power had not caused a civil war in the country, which should be seen as a good omen for regional peace.

The first hand accounts showed that Taliban did not disrupt the routine life immediately after their takeover and things looked ‘normal in Kabul and other main cities’ despite the fears for the contrary. Women – both veiled and unveiled – could be seen in public spaces and economic activities continued at a slower pace.

Afghan nation and the Taliban regime in Kabul was faced with several challenges among which the economic crisis was the most pressing. Avoidance in attending to the basic needs of the Afghan people could lead to a humanitarian disaster. The overall environment entrusted Pakistan with the
responsibility to lend a helping hand to the people of Afghanistan and help avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. The world needs to treat Afghanistan as a sovereign state and strictly avoid favoring or opposing certain factions or stakeholders.

**Pak-Afghan Relations**

Pakistan has always supported peace in Afghanistan and made efforts towards it beyond its capacity. It continues to draw global attention toward measures for safeguarding humanity and bringing stability in the country. It also pursues Taliban government to ensure that the Afghan border with Pakistan remains peaceful and no violent elements get benefit from the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan. Pakistan also needs to build upon the goodwill that it gained in Afghanistan after hosting millions of Afghans for over four decades and work on better people-to-people, business-to-business, and government-to-government contacts.

The current regional scenario offers several opportunities for both the countries to avail and thrive upon. Pakistan remains to be the first choice for Afghan investors. By relaxing visa restrictions, it can not only attract investments but also open doors for better people-to-people contacts, consequently improving bilateral relations between the two neighboring nations. Taliban disapprove of the impression projected by certain elements in the media that suggests Pakistan’s influence over them and Pakistan needs to continue working with Afghan government on the basis of mutual respect to dispel such impressions.

Even for the amelioration of worsening education and health sectors in the war-blighted country, the people-to-people contact offers the most viable option. Easing cross-border movement between Afghanistan and Pakistan through better and effective management can play a vital role in developing friendly sentiments on both sides. Entry and exit should be secure, welcoming, and comforting.

While many in Afghanistan cherish Pakistan’s contribution to their country and its people, there is also a reasonable section of Afghan society that looks at Pakistan with suspicion. The mistrust has largely resulted from the years-long distortion of facts that were influenced by politically motivated agendas. Academics need to work on historical facts and social linkages between the two nations and the lands by identifying lacunae and fallacies of the dividing narrative. Members of academia and civil society should play
their role in setting aside the fiction and fabrication to shape up a joint narrative aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence and respectful bilateral ties.

Among the hybrid threats emanating from Afghanistan is the issue of the Durand Line, which has been promoted as a permanent irritant between the two countries through distorted facts and half-truths. In reality, there is ample historical evidence to show that Durand Line is a settled matter. It was, however, in the interest of spoilers to keep reinforcing it to deeply inculcate it into the false consciousness of the Afghan people to achieve their evil designs. Academics need to popularize the truth and bring it into the discussion to develop a fair narrative for the government, politicians, intelligentsia, and other stakeholders, and to educate the public about it.

Pakistan has made several efforts to develop an environment of mutual trust between the masses of the two countries. Apart from hosting millions of Afghans for over four decades, the country has facilitated and accommodated thousands of Afghan students in their higher education; offered health facilities in Pakistan, and helped in developing vital infrastructure in Afghanistan. It, however, needed to promote and highlight its practical steps through media and other soft means including Pashto poetry and fiction.

Another galvanizing factor may be the common religion of Islam that shaped the common traditions, worldview, and culture. It should be acknowledged that it is the governance crisis in areas bordering Afghanistan, and more so in the former tribal areas that has caused grievances among people who were left in the hands of enemies who could exploit them against the state.

Putting the disputed matters on the back burner in the hope of resolving them would not fetch desired results. Rather, a proactive approach towards clearing the air surrounding disputed historical matters between the two countries as well as the factual reporting of the historical events is the need of the hour. Such seriousness would be developed by the realization that both countries need to live in peaceful coexistence as their survival depends on each other. This narrative, if made part of national discourse across Durand Line can serve for generations to come.

**Pak-Afghan Border Management and the Creation of New Opportunities**

In the wake of growing security concerns on Pak-Afghan border areas and persistent tension over the Durand Line, there is a need to deliberate ideas for
bringing stability along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, protecting the civilian population, enhancing confidence, and bringing about reconciliation between the two neighboring countries. The issues like rule of law, security, institution building, dialogues and grand jirgas, creation of economic and social opportunities, and monitoring of entry/exit gates and routes need attention.

The soft measures to counter anti-Pakistan and Afghanistan sentiments and terrorism could include establishing industrial zones, markets, science and technology hubs, educational cities, hospitals, and sports grounds on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border areas. Such measures will not only produce new employment opportunities for the locals but will also help obtain long-term peace and stability in the region. The rising threat of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in the Pak-Afghan border region is a matter of concern that needs collaborative countermeasures from both sides.

The establishment of specialized gates for patients, students, traders, and other travelers between the two countries will not only facilitate the movement of people from both sides of the border but will also generate goodwill that can help reduce tension. Moreover, holding jirgas among local tribesmen and other stakeholders to discuss different issues faced by the locals and the creation of new opportunities for locals in the border areas.

Rehabilitation of Afghanistan Through Consistent Support from Other Countries

Philanthropists from Pakistan and a few other countries have been working to mitigate the impact of sanctions on Afghanistan and help common Afghans who are actually facing the brunt. There is a need to facilitate such initiatives and help the non-partisan humanitarian organizations assess the prevailing situation in Afghanistan and the problems faced by the masses. Afghans require assistance in the areas of health, education, and infrastructure through humanitarian initiatives.

Post-conflict development of Afghanistan requires consistent support and assistance from neighboring as well as Western countries under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Pakistan should play a proactive role not only in supporting Afghanistan but also in putting things in perspective to help address the resentment and propaganda against Pakistan and other Muslim and regional nations among the people of Afghanistan by the aspirants of a hegemonic status in the region.
The Disputed Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

Qatar's Potential Role in Kashmir Dispute?

Every possible avenue for seeking the rights of the people of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) should be explored—the most important being the right to self-determination under respective United Nations (UN) resolutions. Increased engagement with different stakeholders would help the freedom struggle of the oppressed people of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in gathering support for their legitimate rights. Qatar has recently gained significant economic and diplomatic clout and should be considered a potential channel for facilitating meaningful dialogue among the stakeholders. It is emerging as an important regional player and has gained recognition especially after successfully facilitating the US-Taliban talks. There is also a likelihood that the key stakeholders i.e. Pakistan, India, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir will put their confidence in Qatar.

Since India has persistently avoided the right to self-determination of the Kashmiris and the UN resolutions to that effect and has refused Pakistan’s repeated attempts for bilateral or multilateral engagements, Qatar is among the few countries that can help cultivate an atmosphere of talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbors to clear the prevalent air of antagonism and help resolve the Kashmir dispute.

An initiative for dialogue would require a push by important countries of the world to motivate India for a prudent diplomatic strategy. Traditionally, India has opted to use brute force and illegal means like bringing demographic changes in the occupied territory under the heavy cordon of the media blackout in Kashmir. Even in the past, it did not agree to discuss Kashmir unless the indigenous, legitimate armed struggle of Kashmiris reached a critical level. In the current situation too, any talk or dialogue between India and Pakistan or a mediatory role is likely only after recourse to both the kinetic and non-kinetic options within the J&K region and across the world.

Given the hardened stance over Kashmir by the ruling Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) of India and its disregard for any mediation offer requires the world either to convince India to initiate dialogue to implement the UN resolutions and help achieve a peaceful resolution of the disputed territory or support the legitimate freedom struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The persistent and effective pressure is necessary to help achieve something as ambitious as serious dialogue in Doha.
Enhanced human intervention and deliberate neglect by the Indian government are causing the glaciers in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) to recede fast. This environmental degradation could have dire consequences for the South Asian region, not least for Pakistan whose water resources depend chiefly on the rivers originating from the Himalayan range present within the Indian-held state.

Most of the glaciers in the great Himalayan range - from Harmuk to Drungdrung, including Thajiwas, Kolahoi, Machoie, Kangrez, and Shafat - have significantly receded to around 4,000-5,000 m (13,123-16,404 ft) over the last 50 years. Increased unhindered human activity in the region and unchecked tourism being fostered by the Indian government to promote religious tourism is a major reason behind such swift melting of the glaciers. The policy of connecting religious tourism with politics has played havoc in the Pahalgam region of Kashmir, which serves as the base camp for the Amarnath shrine. As many as 20,000-25,000 pilgrims were allowed to visit the Amarnath cave per day, which lies in the ecologically fragile area of Pahalgam and Sonamarg. This ecological intrusion is posing serious threats to the environment retention of the area.

While the Indian government has taken quite a few steps to protect gigantic glaciers present within its legitimate area, it is sidestepping similar measures to protect the glaciers in the occupied Jammu and Kashmir which feed the Indus River system of Pakistan. The forest cover in Kashmir is also facing the brunt of such neglect. Having receded from 37 percent to 11 percent, the woodlands in the occupied region are another important ecological component that demands immediate attention.

Pakistan should make a case for environmental disaster, unfolding in the Indian-occupied region, a part of its official narrative on Kashmir in a bid to garner the world’s attention to the looming crisis that will not only have consequences for the South Asian countries but well beyond that.

Documenting War Crimes in Kashmir

Admission of a petition by the war crime unit of the Metropolitan Police, the United Kingdom (UK), to investigate and arrest those involved in war crimes in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) has opened up
a new vista of opportunities, for legal experts, in particular, to file such kind of petitions in other European countries as well—including America and Canada—and pursue them vigorously to hold India accountable for atrocities in Kashmir. The petition filed with the Metropolitan Police through the legal firm Stoke White under the principle of universal jurisdiction demands the investigation and prosecution of all those involved, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane, in the war crimes being perpetrated in the held Kashmir. Based on more than 2,000 testimonies taken between 2020 and 2021, the petition also accuses eight unnamed senior Indian military officials of direct involvement in war crimes and torture in Kashmir.

Fool-proof documentation of the war crimes taking place in Kashmir is essentially important to initiate such petitions over other similar issues as well, including violations of the rights of vulnerable people, especially women and children, as well as those who are intentionally being targeted by the Indian forces on the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Kashmir.

Pakistan’s Relations with African Countries

*Learning from China’s Experience in Africa*

Pakistan can learn a lot from China’s successful engagement and robust foreign policy on Africa, which have remained consistent over the years since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chinese policy is aimed at human and infrastructure development in the neglected African continent and has earned China many political, economic, diplomatic, and strategic dividends. Pakistan should also capitalize on its already existing goodwill in Africa owing to its historic role in the decolonization of several African nations and its significant contribution to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions in the conflict-ridden zones of the African continent.

The eastern part of Africa is the most populous comprising 19 countries which are rich in natural resources, minerals, oil and gas, diamonds, gold, and iron ore. However, terrorism, abject poverty, poor governance, conflicts, and uneven models of development have caused multiple challenges in the region.

While Pakistan was considering boosting its relations with African countries, the Chinese experience was relevant because China’s Africa Policy
remained consistent, proactive, and dynamic. President Xi Jinping has further augmented it after assuming the presidency of China in 2013 by increasing Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which had raised from US$ 51.9 million in the 1950s to US$ 57.24 billion in 2013. From 2016 to 2020, investment in infrastructure projects in Africa reached US$200 billion. By 2017, China’s total investment in African seaports amounted to US$ 25.549 billion covering 24 seaports in 20 African countries. Moreover, till 2019 China has further invested in the financing, constructing, and operating of 46 seaports in West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa apart from apportioning preferential loans for them, and pumping money into various sectors including infrastructure, communication, transportation, mining, and extraction.

Under its Engage Africa Initiative, the Government of Pakistan (GOP), approved and announced in 2020 the opening of five new embassies/high commissions in Africa. So far only one embassy has been opened in Rwanda. The ambassadors have been appointed to Djibouti and Ghana but Embassies are yet to be fully made functional. Once new embassies become functional, the total number of embassies in the East African region will increase to nine from the current seven embassies.

No Pakistani prime minister or president has visited any African country nor African leaders have visited Pakistan since the general elections in 2018. Comparatively, the first three foreign visits out of four of President Xi Jinping, after assuming the presidency of China in 2013, were to Africa. To date, President Xi has paid four separate visits to the African countries.

Pakistani leadership needed to proactively pursue leadership diplomacy and formally visit East African countries and invite their counterparts to visit Pakistan. Likewise, apart from meetings of the Chief of Army Staff with his African counterparts at Munich Security Conferences, Pakistan’s defense authorities should invite African defense ministers and senior officials to the International Defense Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS) to further promote already burgeoning defense cooperation. There is a need to augment government-to-government, business-to-business, and people-to-people contacts and parliamentary exchanges. Pakistan should proactively consider opening new missions in countries where its troops had gained goodwill by serving as part of the UN peacekeeping missions.

To strengthen people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and the East African region, allocating more seats for East African students in
Pakistani universities and offering more capacity-building courses to state officials are among the readily available avenues. The GoP should join hands with friendly countries like China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey that have invested heavily in the region to build longstanding bilateral and multilateral relations with African countries.

More importantly, however, the officials and policymakers in Pakistan need to rid themselves of a myopic view of Africa which has kept Pakistan away from reaping the benefits of its existing goodwill in the region.

Faith, Society, and the Current Discourses

Observations on Non-Muslim Pakistanis Discussed

Aimed at understanding the observations of a nationwide study on the conditions, aspirations, and problems of Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other non-Muslim communities in Pakistan, a recent study by a Muslim scholar indicated that perceptions developed of marginalization of religious minorities in Pakistan were inflated out of proportion. Interactions with key figures of various non-Muslim communities across the country were motivated by the urge to unearth the truth behind the popular depiction of maltreatment of non-Muslims in Pakistan and more particularly the allegation that members of these communities are forcibly converted to Islam. The researcher had visited several cities and localities across the country to observe and interact with a cross-section of non-Muslims in Pakistan. The focus of the inquiry remained on their socioeconomic conditions, challenges, and protection of their rights, including the right to profess religion. The interactions with community leaders were video recorded and put on popular video-sharing platforms on the internet.

The study showed that the members of various communities unequivocally expressed their devotion and attachment to Pakistan and were generally satisfied with the treatment they received from their fellow countrymen. They categorically refused any intent to emigrate on any basis involving religion. They face the socioeconomic problems that are similar for the members of the majority community of their socioeconomic class, which need to be addressed as a priority.

The complaints of forcible conversion to Islam even in those communities that are generally stated to be the targets of the alleged crime
were not categorically pronounced by their elders. The community leaders of the Kalash community in Chitral and the Hindu communities in Sindh expressed that they enjoyed additional protection and benefits from the government and cordial relations at the social level. The members of these communities thought that their real issues were being overshadowed by the politically-motivated propaganda that was aimed at maligning Pakistan.

While it is important to verify the narratives being projected through media and other information outlets that have the potential to spread misinformation by undertaking initiatives that are objective, unbiased, and not motivated by any vested interests, it is also important that every such effort is analyzed, critically reviewed, and verified. The fact-based responses to propaganda and their dissemination on the one hand and recording the truths of Pakistani culture and society for the world to know on the other will help the truth to prevail. It should be recognized that deprivation always creates mistrust and shakes confidence, and is more likely to be exploited. It is the responsibility of every citizen to bridge the gaps and develop mutual trust through equal opportunities and genuine respect.

Islam and Humanitarian Action: Human Compassion and Service to People is Central to Islam

Humanitarian actions and services form the very core of Islamic philosophy and principles and this is not only evident from the commandments of Allah and the teachings of the Quran, but also manifested by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) through his actions throughout his life. Various injunctions of the Holy Quran and examples from the lives of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions have ample evidence to show that extending help to the needy in the hour of grief is among the basic tenets of Islam. The Prophet had not only practiced it during every phase of his life but had also emphasized it in his farewell sermon. Religious scholars and leaders are expected not only to convey these teachings to the public and develop the Muslim society based on affection and empathy but also to set personal examples by supporting every victim of oppression without discrimination.

A permanent challenge to the humanitarian actions that has become more obvious recently is the exploitation of humanitarian requirements to achieve strategic goals under the guise of humanitarian services. Such initiatives malign the noble cause and are detrimental to the host societies. They damage the bona fide humanitarian services and put the lives of genuine social workers at stake. Major powers also use the pretext of humanitarian causes to intrude into other countries, bring about regime change, and socially
engineer the communities. Another dilemma related to this is the prioritization of humanitarian actions, which in several cases are driven by political stakes. Ignoring plight of certain communities and attending to even the common needs of certain other is a double standard that needs to be called out.

Islam urges that humanitarian action should be undertaken without expecting payback, thankfulness, or other worldly rewards. Serving humanity and saving the environment is part of a Muslim personality and a sign of God-fearing society. A living example of this could be seen in the form of many humanitarian organizations, which are motivated by Islam and making collective efforts to serve humanity. These social service organizations are serving distressed people without distinction or discrimination of religion in Pakistan and abroad.

Muslim religious seminaries in Pakistan are among the humanitarian organizations which are not only providing religious education to millions of poor, orphaned, and needy students but are also a source of sustenance for them. Muslims need to realize and promote the fact that the solution to the problems being faced by humanity and eradicating depression and anxiety lies in following the path set by the Holy Prophet (PBUH). If non-Muslims living in a Muslim-majority country would feel insecure, the Muslims in that area would be held accountable before Allah and the Prophet has himself promised to be the advocate before Him against the aggressor of non-Muslim citizens of Muslim states. The importance of human compassion in Islam can be seen in Islam’s law of war, the agreements made with the non-Muslims, the implementation of these agreements in letter and spirit, and helping the adversary when their common people suffer.

The humanitarian action needs to be discussed in multiple perspectives, concepts, and traditions to develop the current understanding and models of humanitarian action. Interactions of different faith-based and secular initiatives in the realm of humanitarian services should come together to discuss their frameworks and develop synergies with their shared focus on humanity. Although serving humanity is a means for seeking the pleasure of the Almighty for every Muslim, the currently cherished principles of humanity, impartiality, and neutrality could very much be practiced in a faith-based humanitarian initiative. Various forms of humanitarian services including in the sea, the national and international legislation related to it, and current practices also indicate to the need for a holistic understanding and application of Islamic perspective for a more humane humanitarian approach.
Modern Educational Approaches Being Adopted by Madaris

The Islamic schools (Madaris) in Pakistan are undergoing a transformational change as they are embracing contemporary methodologies and tools while trying their best to reinforce their distinct Islamic character. While this appears to be a good omen for education and the overall development of a progressive society, there is a growing realization among them that they have to carve out a revamped identity that keeps them firmly connected to their academic traditions and societal roots. This not only calls for devising a smart strategy but also accentuates the importance of reinforced unity among them by playing down their perceived divisions or rifts.

Religious education must be aligned with present times and the graduates from such institutions should be able to realize the current and emerging intellectual challenges to articulate the Islamic point of view in contemporary terms. In this regard, it becomes important to look beyond one’s preconceived beliefs and thoughts and to appreciate various contexts, perspectives, and problems. The most important contribution of a madrasa would be preparing the scholars who are well-versed in tradition, abreast with current discourses and equipped with the aptitude for research and effective communication to respond to the dilemmas of their times.

Nowadays, Madrassas are not only progressing in modern education and technology but also making their mark in emerging technologies. Students from a madrassa in Punjab topped the competition in robotics whereas some madrassas have also introduced the Cambridge system of education for their students. Several others are experimenting with innovative ideas within their atmosphere for the personal and professional development of their staff and students. A madrassa in Karachi hosts students from over fifty countries, who are pursuing education in diverse fields and eventually become ambassadors of Pakistan in their respective countries. Some institutions are entering into educational collaboration programs with national and foreign higher education institutions.

The thought of keeping up with the modern societal needs has always prevailed in religious circles but the transition has been slow probably due to their deep-rooted connections with conventions and traditions. Recent changes in curricula and teaching methodologies and improvement in the overall atmosphere of the madaris are the need of the time.

It needs to be recalled that the peculiar existence and role of madaris had developed during colonial times when British rulers deliberately kept the
scholars and students of Islamic learning away from economic and administrative matters. They were reduced to providing only basic learning of Islam. Religious scholars should be a good preacher as well as a dynamic person of the society. The prime objective of religious education has always been to impart knowledge and wisdom aimed at societal training and development. It is, however, important to understand that religious education should not be seen as a means to earn a livelihood. In the current context, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) had also played a big part in determining how the role of religious institutions is seen in the country. Nevertheless, they have mostly seen these institutions from the lens of security instead of looking at them as educational institutions with deep sociocultural roots. The need of the time now is to change this perception through greater harmony between different sects and religious institutions.

Post-Truth Era: Trends in Media

Misinformation and fake news have become a challenge for modern democracies, even the most prominent personalities frequently resorted to misleading statements and fake news for short-term political gains. The recent development of information and communication technologies had spread misinformation and rather institutionalized it through fake news. Fake news should be seen and termed as blatant lies and dealt with accordingly. There is a need to developing a widespread approach that it is not news when it is not based on truth, as it does not serve the basic purpose of ‘the good of the society.’

To avoid a ‘hegemonic’ takeover of communication that leads to disinformation and fake news, there is a need to strengthen empathy in communication, avoid scapegoating and silencing, and provide adequate resources for listening and engaging with different stakeholders affected by the crisis. An interesting observation indicated that February 15, the first day of the conference, reminded of the same date in 2003 when the US decided to invade Iraq on the pretext that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which later turned out to be misinformation fabricated to influence the public opinion.

When fake news transmits from one individual to another, the damage is limited. But when it is institutionalized, and even worse, when it is orchestrated by governments, its impact becomes disastrous. The advent of modern technologies which have multiplied the speed, spread, and scope of such transmissions, these developments have not only increased the
possibilities of causing more damage to human societies but are also beginning to cast serious concerns over democratic and civilizational spirits.

Social media applications have given wheels to the spread of fake news and misinformation in modern times. Journalists today need to equip themselves with sufficient relevant information to know the background of the issue they are raising, discussing, or covering at hand.

**Issues of National Development**

*Grid-Tied Solar PV Systems*

Some solar vendors in Pakistan are installing non-compliant, low quality PV modules which neither conform to international standards, nor adhere to the guidelines provided by the concerning government agencies. These substandard practices not only yield low efficiency and reduce the cost-effectiveness of the module but also raise risks of accidents, ultimately rusting the growth rate of solar PV uptake in the country.

The solar industry in Pakistan is facing serious issues concerning quality compromise in PV manufacturing, inadequate interconnection techniques, and lack of advanced technical resources. Moreover, the root problems such as the import of solar accessories, challenges in the interconnection of the system, and the inertia arising from the power distribution companies need to be dealt with. With these issues, some black sheep in the solar industry are affecting the overall pace, which in turn, shall affect the deployment of renewable distributed generation badly.

The roadmap towards the introduction of the third-party validation process can improve the quality of craftsmanship, solar accessories, and services for prosumers. Third-party inspection can improve and instruct the advanced deployment of solar PV systems in the country, for which all the stakeholders of the power sector are needed to make a general consent.

*Developing Maritime Resources and Coastal Areas Would Reveal Immense Potential*

Local communities as stakeholders are an essential element for the success of a policy as they contribute to national cohesion and economic growth if given ownership and provided the right opportunities. This holds true for the coastal
communities, and Pakistan Navy has taken lead among the public sector in following a humanistic approach in its security strategy as evinced by various development projects based along the country’s coast.

The development potential of Pakistan’s coastline has become critical for the politics and economics of the region. It is important to engage and empower the local population not just along the coast but all over the country for national security.

To realize this, effective policies need to be devised and implemented. Policy formulation is not a mechanical process and cannot be done in isolation to history and background. It must include consultations with stakeholders, as evident from various incidents shared in the book. Amid the current negative narratives about Pakistan, the book depicts a success story that how the successive governments consistently worked for the retrocession of Gwadar to Pakistan from Oman, which was finally achieved in 1958.

Prevailing sea-blindness in the country has impacted the development of coastal and marine resources. Gradual awareness about the issue is beginning to be raised through different steps taken by various research and academic institutions.

The academics and former officials should offer significant inputs in the policy formulation process through research and documentation of their experiences. Solid and sustainable policymaking should be based on reports and books that are factual and works of research and not just built on information gathered in real-time. Realization of the regional disparities and keeping regional equalization as one of the cornerstones for policymaking is vital for the government to ensure national harmony and all-round progress.

Mega projects like the development of Gwadar Port have their economic and strategic advantages but every development initiative has to be people-centric. In order to boost the blue economy, Pakistan on one hand needs to focus on adopting professional and state-of-the-art standards like applying to the International Seabed Authority (ISA) for an exploration license, shipbuilding, port construction, etc. and on the other, realistically gauge the needs and potential of the local population to devise a realistic and beneficial policy.
Urban Forestry through Miyawaki Technique

The inadequate amount of forest space and green cover in Pakistan is a point of serious concern as the lack thereof is not only hazardous for environmental security and sustainability, but also raises survival risks for humans and wildlife alike.

The number of trees globally has reduced from 6 trillion to 3 trillion because of the increase in global mean temperature, which is caused by human activities. The green cover of Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan and its economic capital, is even less than 1 percent according to Husqvarna Urban Green Space Index (HUGSI) and Crowther Lab. The city witnessed a devastating consequence of this phenomenon in form of an extreme heat wave in 2015, which resulted in several deaths alongside material loss.

The events of 2015 necessitated growing more trees and plants through afforestation method for which the model of Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki seems the most suited. It can result in 10 times faster and 30 times denser sustainable growth of natural native vegetation, which effectively leads to the production of 30 times more oxygen (O\textsubscript{2}) and 30 times less carbon dioxide (CO\textsubscript{2}). After successfully growing urban forests in different locations of Karachi, and the involvement of thousands of citizens in plantation, this model is being replicated in different parts of the country. There is a need to incorporate these ideas into the policies on the environment and housing for a better and healthier tomorrow.

Notes

1 Details of each session can viewed at IPS website: https://www.ips.org.pk/category/ips-events/.
2 This writeup covers five sessions held at IPS on Afghanistan, respectively on October 27, 2021, November 26, 2021, December 29, 2021, January 26, 2022, and February 7, 2022.
3 Three sessions were held as part of the regular meetings of the IPS Working Group on Kashmir to deliberate upon various aspects and dimensions of the dispute after the illegal revocation of the special constitutional status of IoJ&K by the BJP-led Delhi regime on August 5, 2019. The sessions were held on December 2, 2021, December 27, 2021, and January 27, 2022.
4 Based on a session held at IPS on December 9, 2021.
5 It is based on three sessions were held at IPS on October 27, 2021, November 24-25, 2021, and December 15, 2021.
6 The videos can be seen here: “Forced Conversions in Pakistan,” last modified February 9, 2022, youtube, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB4utptAVQzZFLyEmVd_Elmgw0fzoeCz.
7 This relates to an international conference in the University of Karachi (UoK), Karachi on November 15-16, 2022 organized by the UoK, Institute oPS, and Greenwich University (GU), Karachi.
8 Three sessions were organized by IPS on the theme on October 27, 2021, February 3, 2022, and February 7, 2022.