

Heartache of Asia

With the Prime Minister approaching all matters as family matters, very little room is left for the right expertise to make a contribution to effective policy making



By:  Andleeb Abbas 11-Dec-16 2250 2250

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Call it a snub or a slap, but Heart of Asia conference has given quite a few heartaches to many self-respecting Pakistanis. It was painful to see a man of the stature of Sartaj Aziz struggling not just to put his point of view across in the conference. But stuttering to justify the fiasco in Amritsar. No doubt the conference is of an important nature, and the issue of terrorism cannot be resolved without a common regional strategy, nor Pakistan wants to be isolated. There is no doubt that dialogue is the only sustainable way to establish peace in the region; but also, no doubt that the way our foreign ministry planned its participation and foreign office had raised more doubts about the direction and capability of the people at the helm of foreign affairs.

Foreign policy is one of the most sensitive and complex parts of a country's political strategy. It involves intricate relationships, deep and vast knowledge of various countries, and sharp skills in diplomacy and communication management. The success of this policy defines the international stature of a country, and the failure of this policy destroys the international perception and standing of a country. The present state of affairs is a reflection of how badly and how reactively this all important political segment has been treated.

There is a lot of hue and cry about the absence of a foreign minister. It is exaggerated. Even if Sartaj Aziz or somebody else is appointed as a foreign minister, nothing really will change. We have a minister for commerce and the exports have been consistently declining in the last three years. Despite exporter's strikes, pleas, and lobbying, the state of exports is in free fall. The problem lies not just in appointments of the right man but also in the constant interference of the government in their decision making and working. What happened in Amritsar is a classic example of that.

Reports are pointing to the fact that the decision to participate was a hasty and ill-prepared affair. The participation in such events generally, and in India in particular, is a matter where security agencies and the foreign missions are taken into confidence to decide the matter. Apparently in a hurry to assert its authority on foreign affairs, the Prime Minister decided to participate without proper planning and consultation. What followed was humiliating, to say the least. Sartaj Aziz went a day earlier to attend the dinner with Modi. He was not just given the cold shoulder by not being placed on the main table but faced the brunt of the Afghan President who was derogatory in his speech about Pakistan. In front of ministers of 30 countries, he rejected Pakistan's offer of financial help and said that this money would be better used to stop terrorism in their own country. Such public condemnation and degradation is almost unprecedented. Modi, of course, enjoyed this moment and added insult to injury by making India look as the affected party at the hands of the terrorists let loose by Pakistan.

And if this was not enough, Sartaj Aziz was almost imprisoned in his hotel and not allowed to go to Golden Temple or to hold a media talk. While we are busy bashing India and Afghanistan, the real fault lies within. It cannot be purely coincidental that countries like Afghanistan and Iran have become disgruntled neighbours. It has been a lack of vision, a lack of direction, and a lack of international acumen that has made Pakistan be treated with such disrespect. Foreign policy may be a very pragmatic connectivity of international politics, yet it remains a tool of expressing a nation's stance and stature in the comity of nations.

The subtle game of what to show, what to say and do is the art and science of diplomacy that creates image and perception. This perception, in turn, plays a pivotal role in making other countries aligned to your national interests. The image Pakistan has at the moment is the main mischief monger in the region. This is a perception created not just by our neighbours but by our own inability to counter and develop a different perception. Every meeting ends up with Pakistan bashing, where we start blaming India and US with the little responsibility of preempting this behaviour. While the Indian agenda is to make us appear the culprit, what is our agenda? Where is our strategy, and plan? In the absence of our agenda, we will be playing on their agenda. In the absence of a strategic plan, we will be rushing into conferences and shooting back with nothing but charge sheets.

Our perception is of a nation too keen and too defensive in its international postures. If India was not enough, look at the manner in which we handled the Nawaz-Trump call. The conversation was released within minutes and without consultation with the White House. Not only did it irk the White House officials, but also made US media aghast over this breach of diplomatic norms. Thus, the image of a gushing, desperate and reactive nation is more due to lack of strategic planning than just some nasty comments and actions of a few sworn enemies.

Informed and considered decision making becomes the casualty of concentrated power. With the Prime Minister approaching all matters as family matters, very little room is left for the right expertise to make a contribution to effective policy making. According to reports, the Trump press release was not made by the Foreign Office but the PM media office which we all know is run by his daughter.

The habit of appointments on appeasement also creates further damage. The open secret of Sartaj Aziz/Tariq Fatemi rivalry is also making all diplomatic moves look like dividing the pies between the two. While Sartaj Aziz was sent to Amritsar, Fatemi has been sent to America for a 10-day trip to understand the Trump thinking. What we really need is to understand our own thinking behind this comedy of errors. Last year, the federal government pleaded with the Supreme Court to lift the ban on houbara bustard hunting as it was a very important "pillar of our foreign policy with Qatar and the Middle East." Are these the "pillars and principles" on which we are trying to build our relationships? On what principles is our foreign policy based? Unless we discover that fundamental question, we will continue to look and sound sorry, and lost in this highly complex and cut-throat world of international relations.

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Tree felling: Reply sought from CS, environment secretary

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF REPORTER — PUBLISHED Dec 07, 2016 06:55am

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LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Tuesday sought replies from the Punjab chief secretary and the environment secretary on a petition challenging felling of trees for the Lahore Canal widening (from Doctors Hospital to Thokar Niaz Beg) and Orange Line Metro Train projects.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf information secretary Andleeb Abbas filed the petition saying cutting down hundreds of trees would cause environmental degradation and increase pollution levels in the city.

Representing the petitioner, Advocate Sheraz Zaka argued that the government failed to enforce the fundamental rights of people.

He said Lahore had been deprived of its scenic beauty since thousands of trees were felled to accommodate different mega projects like Orange Line metro train and Canal Road widening.

The counsel pleaded that the Canal Road project should be declared illegal and if it needed to be allowed, the government should be placed under obligation to plant trees to prevent environmental degradation of the city.

After hearing initial arguments of the counsel, Justice Ayesha A. Malik issued notices to the respondents for Jan 13 and directed them to submit their replies.

Geo-tagging: The Punjab government informed the Lahore High Court on Tuesday that geo-tagging of madaris (religious seminaries) had been completed and their financial resources were being strictly monitored.

A reply submitted by the home department stated that “madarissa reforms” were also under consideration.

The department filed the reply to a petition questioning the government’s failure to implement the National Action Plan (NAP).

The reply states that a crackdown on the proscribed organisations and their affiliated people, including the facilitators, is being carried out by the Counter-Terrorism Department and law-enforcement agencies in the province. It says the federal and provincial intelligence agencies are fully cognizant to their statutory duties and are vigilantly monitoring the activities of all anti-state elements.

Accounts of the proscribed organisations and their affiliated persons have been frozen, the reply adds.

It states steps are also being taken against those who are using the social media for illegal activities. The department asked the court to dispose of the petition.

Justice Shahid Karim adjourned hearing of the petition till Jan 16 as the federal government’s counsel sought time to file the reply to the petition.

Advocate Azhar Siddique filed the petition alleging that federal and the Punjab governments were reluctant to implement NAP.

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PTI to further squeeze CM Shahbaz

National DECEMBER 3, 2016 BY PAKISTANTODAY



Hamid Khan Wazir

ISLAMABAD: In a bid to further screw the Sharif's brothers, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) sought certified information pertaining to the taxpayers' money, spent on the Chief Minister Secretariat, Lahore, and the personal residences of CM Shahbaz Sharif during the fiscal year 2015-16.

Andleeb Abbas, a senior PTI leader, in her letter to Chief Minister Secretariat principal secretary, Lahore, has requested that being the citizen of Pakistan and a taxpayer, under the Article 19-A of the Constitution of Pakistan and the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013, she should be provided with certified information regarding the taxpayers' money, spent on CM Secretariat and the Camp office.

The letter, which is available with Pakistan Today, stated that according to the budget 2015-16, passed by the Punjab Assembly for CM Secretariat, Lahore, was Rs 344.201 million and it was later revised to Rs 572.464 million which meant additional Rs 228.263 million were spent on CM Secretariat, 66 per cent hike in the budget.

'Since this is taxpayers' money and according to the Punjab Assembly rules, Chapter XVI no supplementary budget can be approved without the approval from the assembly'.

She that she should be given certified information, as when and where did the Punjab Assembly approve 66pc increase in the budget for CM Secretariat for fiscal year 2015-16, besides providing the details of where this 66pc additional money was spent.

Aside from CM Secretariat, she said, 'I also seek the certified information about the money spent on personal residences of CM Shahbaz Sharif during the fiscal year 2015-16'.

Andleeb Abbas raised serious questions stating that why personal residences of CM Shabaz Sharif have been converted into six camp offices and what were the expenses of these camp offices and under which head the money was being spent?

She questioned, 'Was the Punjab Assembly taken into confidence on converting the residences into camp offices and what are the security and maintenance expenses of Jati Umra residence and why are they being funded by the taxpayers' money?'

The PTI leader requested that she should be responded these questions within 14 days as specified in the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013.



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PTI demands spending details on Shahbaz Sharif's secretariat

December 04, 2016

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RECORDER REPORT



Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Saturday demanded the provincial government of Punjab to make expenditure details of the Chief Minister Secretariat public. In a letter to Principal Secretary to Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, a senior PTI leader Andleeb Abbas asked on what grounds 66 percent increase was made in the expenditures of the CM Punjab Secretariat.

"We want to know under which law you've increased the budget of the CM Secretariat...is there any specific law which allows you to increase the budget, and on whose permission this was done?" she questioned. She also demanded the provincial government to make the details of Rs 572.464 million expenditures by the CM Secretariat public. She added that the details of the huge money should be made available as the money belonged to the taxpayers of the country.

"We also want to know why personal residences of the chief minister have been turned into camp offices. The Constitution of Pakistan gives right to people of the country to know all these details, and the Punjab government must inform us about all these details," she added. Andleeb demanded that the huge sum of taxpayers' money which was being spent on the camp offices of the chief minister, who claimed to be Khadim-e-Aaala (chief servant) of the people, should be approved by the provincial assembly.

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PTI questions Punjab govt's plan to procure jet for CM

SYED IRFAN RAZA — UPDATED Dec 12, 2016 08:22am

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ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has sought a detailed reply from the Punjab government regarding its plans to procure a jet aircraft for Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

The party regretted that on the one hand Havelian-like plane crash incidents were taking place in the country because of lack of maintenance of available aircraft and, on the other, public funds were being spent on luxuries of the rulers.

PTI leader Andleeb Abbas has sent to the Punjab government a letter raising several questions, ranging from the source of funds for purchasing the aircraft to alleged violation of procurement rules.

The letter said the information was being sought under the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. It pointed out a tender notice had been advertised by the province's additional secretary for welfare in July this year about "procurement of executive jet aircraft for the government of Punjab".

The PTI leader wondered how the chief minister could order a VIP executive jet worth Rs2 billion from taxpayers' money and claimed that there was no mention of such allocation in the document of the provincial budget for 2016-17.

"How the Punjab government can use public funds worth Rs2bn without even allocating it in supplementary budget. This is also a violation of Punjab Assembly rules, chapter XVI," the letter said.

Ms Abbas wondered whether the Punjab Procurement Regulatory Authority Act 2009, Punjab Procurement Rules 2014 and Public Procurement Regulatory Authority rules were being followed while purchasing the aircraft.

She said the nation had recently suffered a fatal plane crash due to failure of one of the engines of a PIA aircraft. "Why this money (Rs2bn) is not being used for maintenance and improvement of PIA aircraft to avoid such tragedies?" she asked.

The letter said PIA had suffered billions of rupees of losses last year and asked: "How can we afford a VIP jet for the personal use of CM Shahbaz Sharif."

The PTI leader said: "As a citizen of Pakistan, I feel that in view of the tragic plane crash near Havelian due to insufficient maintenance, such VIP purchases through taxpayers' money are illegal and immoral and must be stopped."

Ms Abbas asked the Punjab government to reply to her letter within 14 days as required under the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013.

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PTI leader questions 'additional spending' from taxpayers' money

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF REPORTER — UPDATED Dec 04, 2016 10:52am

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LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf leader Andleeb Abbas has written a letter to the principal secretary to the chief minister, invoking Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 and seeking "certified information" about spending of budget over and above the one passed by the Punjab Assembly.

In her letter as a 'citizen of Pakistan', Ms Abbas has stated that the budget estimates for 2015-16 for the Chief Minister's Secretariat were passed by the Punjab Assembly to the tune of Rs344.2 million. However, these were revised to Rs572.464 million, meaning an additional Rs228.26 million (66 percent more) were spent on the CM secretariat.

Stating that since that was taxpayer's money and according to the Punjab Assembly rules, Chapter XVI, no supplementary budget could be approved without consent of the assembly, Ms Andleeb has sought certified information to know when and where did the assembly approve 66pc hike in the budget for CM Secretariat for fiscal year 2015-16. She also sought details of where that additional taxpayers' money was spent.

She also sought certified information on the taxpayers' money being spent on personal residences of Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif during the 2015-16 fiscal.

Ms Abbas further asked, "Why have personal residences of chief minister Shahbaz Sharif been converted into six camp offices? What are the expenses of these camp offices and with which budget are they being funded? Has the Punjab Assembly been taken into confidence on converting the residences into camp offices? What are the security and maintenance expenses of Jati Umra residence and why are they being funded by taxpayers' money?" She demanded that the response on her questions be provided within 14 days as specified in the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013.

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