

Scenario 175

MILITANCY HIGH IN PAKISTAN

During his nightly show on **GEO TV's** live program '**Aapis Ki Baat**' dated **18th February 2013**, Najam Sethi said that:

*"While acknowledging that the Pakistani Taliban, Afghan Taliban and ASWJ are all linked, the [then] on-going massacres of Shias in Balochistan are part of an **on-going 'Iran-Saudi' proxy war.**"*

It was discussed that if the genocide of more than 21000 Shiites of Pakistan was just the outcome of an Iran-Saudi proxy war, then why thousands of moderate Sunnis were killed in various attacks on Sufi shrines and ordinary mosques. Sunni scholars like Sarfaraz Naeemi were killed for issuing a fatwa condemning suicide attacks on civilians. Attacks on Maulana Fazlur Rehman and the threats to Javed Ghamdi were also on record.

During his show, Najam Sethi kept on focusing the blame on the *Awami* National Party [ANP]. However, some media persons believed that this party had suffered the most at the hands of the Taliban – in direct contrast to the Pro-Taliban and Pro-LeJ. But the responsibility of not taking action lied with the elected governments in succession.

Sethi also made little mention of PML[N] links with LeJ-ASWJ though in a vague way because he was part of the caretaker setup that had followed the ending of PPP's government once and labelled as '*turncoat politician*'. But it remains a fact that the PML[N] and other signatories to Nation Action Plan [NAP] did nothing significantly after signing the resolve following APS Peshawar episode.

The history would blame them for the erosion of their own civilian writ over the affairs of the state. The two year's space, as mentioned in the 21st Constitutional Amendment needed exceptional governance, including freeing the police from political pressures – but the time was wasted out through diverse kinds of political gimmicks. The scale of the challenge was evident from just a couple of examples. One could look at the published statement in court of the main accused (since executed) in the GHQ attack case:

'The arms for the GHQ attack were brought from Jhang. The huge truck-bomb that all but destroyed the Islamabad Marriot Hotel in 2008 was also driven in from Jhang.'

The threats came from FATA-based militants but their members were harboured for long by groups such as *Jaish e Mohammad* whose membership had always interlinked with *Lashkar e Jhangvi* & *Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan* in southern Punjab. Southern Punjab was readily identified for elements who had bought into the *takfiri* ideology.

[A **takfiri** (Arabic: تكفيري *takfiri*) is a Muslim who accuses another Muslim (or an adherent of another Abrahamic faith) of apostasy. The accusation itself is called **takfir**, derived from the word *kafir* (unbeliever), and is described as when "one who is, or claims to be, a Muslim is declared impure."]

MALIK ISHAQ OF LeJ FREED:

On 22nd December 2014; the provincial review board, comprising three judges of the Lahore High Court [LHC], rejected the Punjab government's plea to extend Malik Ishaq's detention for three months in the wake of the Peshawar school carnage by the TTP, many of whose commanders had been affiliated with the *Lashkar e Jhangvi* [LeJ] in the past.

Daily '**the News**' dated **24th December 2014** narrated in its Top Story:

*"...in fact, most of the major terrorist attacks suffered by Pakistan since 9/11 have a common grandmother — the **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** or the Army of Jhangvi — which is one of the most popular groups of choice for hardcore militants who are adamant to pursue their ambitious Jihadi agenda.*

*Launched in 1996 as a Sunni sectarian group, the **Lashkar** today*

has deep links with al-Qaeda and the Taliban and is considered to be the most violent terrorist organisation which operates in Pakistan with the help of its lethal suicide squads.

As with most sectarian and militant groups, almost the entire LeJ leadership is made up of people who have fought in Afghanistan and trained by the Taliban-linked al-Qaeda elements.”

The judicial review board, comprising LHC’s Justice Manzoor Ahmad Malik, Justice Farrukh Irfan Khan and Justice Abdul Sami Khan, held in-camera proceedings. The Punjab government’s counsel requested to extend Ishaq’s detention for further three months in the wake of the Peshawar school massacre [occurred just six days before], adding that his freedom could be a risk to law and order.

After arguments and counter arguments from both the sides, the provincial review board of the LHC observed that the Punjab government had failed to produce convincing evidence. The government subsequently opted to withdraw the appeal which was dismissed as withdrawn Malik’s detention for three months had started on 25th September 2014. The LHC’s Review Board had declined to admit the confessions made by some recently arrested high profile target killers of LeJ.

The facts placed before the board were that in a major breakthrough in solving high-profile murder cases of religious figures and professionals, the Crime Investigation Agency [CIA] Punjab had busted in April 2014 a gang of killers which was working under Malik Ishaq’s command and involved in target killings.

[The gang members had already confessed to their involvement in the murders of advocates Shakir Ali Rizvi and Arshad Ali Shah, Dr Syed Ali Haider and his son Syed Murtaza Ali Haider, Khurram Raza Qadri of the Sunni Tehrik, and three more Shia leaders — Allama Nasir Abbas, Syed Ali Hussain Qazilbash and Syed Mubashir Hussain Naqvi.]

In their confessional statements, the gang members claimed that all these people were killed on the instigation and instructions of Malik Ishaq. But Ishaq had strongly refuted his involvement in any of these killings when he was subsequently interrogated by the police.

Addressing a press conference at the Qila Gujjar Singh Police Lines in Lahore **on 20th April 2014**, Capital City Police Officer [CCPO] Ch Shafiq Ahmed said that the suspects identified as Abdul Rauf Gujjar, Moham-

mad Hashim and Mohammad Sabir alias Ikram Khan all three of Badami Bagh, Sheikh Farhan Rafique of Rehmanpura, Shafaqat Farooqi of Shahdara and Suleman Pathan of Bund Road, had admitted to their involvement in at least 18 murders and murder attempts on high-profile personalities, including writer Asghar Nadeem Syed and journalist Raza Rumi.

The CCPO said that the gang was linked to Malik Ishaq and was working under his command. According to the CCPO, the gang leader, Abdul Rauf Gujjar, had launched his group with the approval of Malik Ishaq after holding several meetings with him at *Madrasah* Farooq Azam in Shahdara, Lahore, and was being instructed by Ishaq to target famous Shias. But Malik Ishaq had already refuted these allegations as a pack of lies.

Malik Ishaq had pointed out that despite keeping him behind bars for more than 12 years on terrorism charges, the police had failed to prove these allegations which were eventually dropped in July 2011 when the court had ordered his release.

But the police circles insisted that the court had to release Malik Ishaq due to witness intimidation. Among those who faced intimidation was Fida Hussain Ghalvi, a key witness in a murder case in which Ishaq was accused of killing 12 members of a family during a Majlis in 1997. When Ghalvi and three other men had identified Ishaq, he told them in front of civil judge and the DS Jail that "*dead men can't talk*".

Subsequently, five witnesses and three of their relatives were killed during the trial - thus Ishaq was acquitted because of "*lack of evidence*".

Daily '**the News**' dated **24th December 2014** continued to say:

"..... that is just the tip of the iceberg. A more remarkable case was the bombing of an Iranian culture centre in Multan, in 1997. Eight people were killed. When the investigating officer, Ejaz Shafi, persuaded two witnesses to appear in court, his car was sprayed with bullets.

Anti-Terrorism Court judge Bashir Ahmed Bhatti convicted Malik Ishaq but the Supreme Court overturned the conviction in 2006 because of lack of evidence.

In March 2007, the same judge, scheduled to hear another case against Malik Ishaq, was on his way to the court when a remote-controlled bicycle bomb exploded near his car, killing his driver and

two policemen.

Malik Ishaq was charged with planning the bombing. Two years later, the prosecution's witnesses suddenly turned hostile. Malik Ishaq was acquitted in April 2009, because of 'lack of evidence'."

Even then, the fact remains that Ishaq was acquitted every time by the court. In an interview with an Urdu publication in October 1997, Malik Ishaq had admitted his involvement in the killing of over 100 Shiites.

According to Abdul Khaliq Hazara, Chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party [HDP] from Quetta:

"Ishaq's detention hardly puts him out of business. The law agencies have credible evidence to prove that the leadership of the Quetta chapter of LeJ, especially Usman Saifullah Kurd and Shafiqur Rehman Kurd, is string-pulled by Malik Ishaq.

The agencies have already concluded that the explosive-laden water tanker which was used in the February 16, 2013 Quetta blast [that killed 111 Shia Hazaras] was assembled by the LeJ people in the Akbari Mandi area of Lahore.

Two of the four LeJ men who had been involved in the gory incident and killed in a shootout by the security forces a day after the Quetta carnage, belonged to Rahim Yar Khan — the native district of Malik Ishaq and Maulana Ahmed Ludhianvi, the president of the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat [ASWJ]."

Malik Ishaq's walk to freedom was not at all surprising keeping in view the clout he enjoyed in state's high circles - as he was once flown from a Lahore jail to Rawalpindi through a special plane to hold talks with ten TTP *fidayeen* attackers, led by Aqeel alias Dr Usman, who had stormed the GHQ building on 10th October 2009. Aqeel alias Dr Usman was hanged in mid 2014 for masterminding that GHQ attack.

LOFTY MILITANCY IN PUNJAB:

Killing episodes of late 2014 in Gujranwala suggested that TTP was active in central Punjab too. If the number of Shiite killings in Karachi was an indicator, sectarian killers were active and well-organised in around Lahore and

in Punjab too. The scale of the challenge could be gauged each Friday as semi-literate preachers send out hate messages from the holy places across the country. Most of them represented by outright adherents of the *takfiri* ideology still massacrating Shiites or Brelvi Sunnis or who used to call daily for the elimination of *Ahmadis*.

For the civilian leadership and the military hierarchy, the Peshawar school carnage was the red line, even if the mass murder of Hazara Shiite in Quetta or the lethal attack on praying Ahmadis in Lahore or the bombing of the church in Peshawar were not there; but the later events were equally important and could have invited the leadership's attention much earlier.

Dawn's above quoted essay of 27th December 2014 ended with:

'Admittedly, my perspective is that of a beggar's. As it is; the task before those at the helm; is like changing the direction of the Titanic in the moments before it hit the iceberg. One lives in hope that the Sharif - Sharif combine will be able to do it.'

Ayesha Siddiqua in her essay titled **'The Myth of Civilian Failure'** of January 2015 narrated a fact that:

"..... Mourning, I argue, lies not in knee-jerk reactions and simply in calls for revenge through military courts but [lies] in a commitment to systematically thinking through the roots of the violence that has ravaged our country.

[during] the last five or six years, political parties have links with militants and are too weak to deal with them, and the civilian judiciary has proven unwilling and incompetent in punishing them."

J Iftikhar M Chaudhry, the former CJP, had released Malik Ishaq, the leader of *Lashkar e Jhangvi* (LeJ) in 2011. And, ***Ch Nisar Ali Khan, the interior minister, had admitted before media that 95 banned militant groups were operating in Punjab.***

The continued existence of militant groups, a growing number of spectacular and smaller attacks, and low conviction rates were the strongest indicator of the foot-dragging and incompetence of Pakistani civilian leaders. In fact, not long before Peshawar episode, PM Nawaz Sharif, who was asked about militancy in Punjab by a journalist Cyril Almeida, had vehemently re-

fused to admit to the existence and growth of militancy in Punjab.

The new Army Chief, Gen Raheel Sharif, was more willing to fight the war and punish those who attacked the army unlike his predecessor Gen Ashfaq Kiyani; a visible realignment of ideology within the armed forces – foreign media had also noted. Ayesha Siddiqa quoted an old event:

*'A police officer in Bahawalpur that I spoke to and who was in charge of an operation against JeM, told me that he could not keep its members imprisoned despite the organization's vocal threats to **"flow rivers of blood through the city"**.*

*The police officer, posted in Bahawalpur in 2002, also told me that Masood Azhar, the leader and founder of JeM, told the government **"not to divert JeM's attention away from external jihad to events within the country by trying to arrest them"**.*

Intriguingly, the matter was never given access to national media.'

Three factors, which guided the army's approach towards Punjabi *jihadis*:

- *With these groups firmly based in Punjab, the rulers were afraid of a blow-back if they decided to react against those jihadis. Gen Kiyani resisted launching an operation in Punjab precisely because he feared that the situation would get out of control.*
-
- *The Punjab government had made efforts to bring the Sipah e Sahaba [SSP] & LeJ network into mainstream politics by involving them in elections and working closely with leaders like Maulana Ludhyanvi and Malik Ishaq.*
-
- *Most importantly, groups like JeM, Lashkar e Taiba [LeT], SSP, LeJ, etc.—operated as proxy militias for many. Some groups like JeM, had guaranteed security in the areas where they were based; assuring **'no attack on state infrastructure'**. However, they did not guarantee security of religious minorities.*
-
- *Despite JeM's split from Harkat ul Mujahideen headed by Fazlur Rehman Khalil in 2001—prompted by a decision not to target Shiites—but sectarian violence prevailed.*

In fact, some groups had joined the Afghan Taliban in the past. Malik Ishaq's group allegedly remained involved in sectarian violence all over the country including the killing of Hazara Shiites in Balochistan. One Shafiq

Mengal was a key figure among Baloch separatists, who was responsible for atrocious abductions and killings of the student activists; mass graves discovered in Khuzdar in 2014 [details on some other pages] referred here.

A more comprehensive tackling of militancy means confronting it more than just a question of arresting and prosecuting *jihadis*. The Pakistani political leadership perhaps assumed that the militancy machine would come to halt with a click of military court's sentence; forgetting they were dealing with hundreds of youngsters recruited in the name of *jihad*, mostly because they were jobless or unemployed.

Groups like LeT, LeJ and JeM had penetrated colleges and universities in Punjab where they made student wings and provided financial assistance to students, and thus gained access to fresh, young and educated crop of men and women. There were thousands of people trained in one form or another as militants. The LeT had been running an extensive program for years that even provided basic military training to women; varying from the fully trained to those who have done *Daura-e-A'Ama* [basic training].

The JeM has been following a similar strategy. Its chief, Maulana Masood Azhar worked extensively to produce his *Fathul-Jawwad*, [details available at www.fathuljawwad.com] an exhaustive treatise on *jihad* as guided by the Holy Qur'an. The JeM members, who opted for *Daura-e-Khas* [special jihad training], were mostly the men who had qualified in *Daure-e-Tafseer* in which they spent 30 days understanding Maulana Azhar's book.

Were there an alternative and a method of re-integration for those *jihadists* in our civil society – OR was there any plan in NAP to tackle those groups? Certainly there was none.

Just a few factors: the population of Punjab is in the region of 100 million; the province has a vast mosque - *madressah* network operated by multiple groups — some of them hold names, others unheard of outside the local regions; and virtually nothing had been done in over a decade to clamp down on extremist and militant outfits in the province.

On 15th January 2015; Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan briefed PM Nawaz Sharif on steps taken under the National Action Plan [NAP] against militant groups and extremists operating in Punjab and even the scant details offered to the media were:

"14,000 individuals hauled up for investigation, 780 of them were formally booked; 341 allegedly involved in hate speech; 1,100 warned for misuse of loudspeakers; and 41

shops closed for distributing hate material.

The number of banned organisations actively engaged in terrorism and extremism in Punjab alone had reached 95."

The numbers surely represented only a fraction of the militancy and extremism in Punjab. Just in Islamabad the law-enforcement agencies had picked up 180 individuals and formally charged 48 of them. The ruling PML[N] faced the bitter truth about spiralling extremism in Punjab when Interior Minister Khan revealed the above facts to the media.

The official statement released after the meeting did not include the names of the banned organisations in question, the new figures were substantially greater than the number of organisations previously listed as banned in the national security policy document of early 2014. It indicated that the PML[N] government had failed to check the spread of such outfits, despite repeated reminders by the media about the militant presence festering in the province; meaning that:

".....all these militant outfits were in Punjab since long, but instead of acting against them, the PML[N] preferred to cohabit with them".

Fact remained that at that moment it was difficult to categorise the banned outfits then available on the state record. However, they did reveal that most of those groups were concentrated in the southern districts of the province. The fatal organisations had expanded their spheres of influence all across the province, which was quite a worrying scenario. One observation was that *"...this is quite a large jump, but the scope and types of these groups remain to be seen."*

In that meeting, the PM directed the Federal Board of Revenue [FBR] to ensure that funding to proscribed organisations was stopped and asked the IT ministry to take steps to ensure the blocking of websites and social media platforms that were being used by terrorist organisations. The federal government would facilitate provinces and provide them all the assistance they needed, but stressed that they had to be proactive in their approach towards terrorism and extremism.

PM Nawaz Sharif told that a state-of-the-art rapid response force was being formed to tackle terrorism, adding that ***"this properly equipped force would be trained on modern lines and given better pay packages"***.

[Statistics are important, but should not be a substitute for meaningful details. To begin with, which groups comprised the proscribed 95? That number was well above the nationally proscribed 72 groups that the interior ministry itself had listed, so which were the additional groups active in Punjab?

Who were the leaders of these groups? Where did they operate and who funded them? Which madressahs, mosques or religious networks were they linked? What attacks had they carried out till then? And, perhaps most relevantly, what types of attacks were they suspected of planning?]

Most important - that state functionaries, print and electronic media, the anchors and analysts always seen jumping with jubilees with the figures of raids on dens, arrests of culprits, seizure of piles of arms and taking custodial remands – but never with figures that how many of them were hanged, sentenced, fined and sent to jails. Figures could be shameful; Pakistanis do not see through disappointments.

Judges and courts were blamed as usual – never the parliamentarians and champions of democracy. With the given set of 170 years old laws and procedures what better you could expect from your court-rooms.

Who will formulate and make out laws & legal procedures required for 21st century's changed needs... of course, the military courts are not for ever.

However, encouraging aspect was that the PML[N] was seen willing to acknowledge a militancy problem in Punjab - defeating the militant threats required more transparency and determination by the state. It was a hard luck or miss-management that after PML[N]'s recent resolve of National Action Plan [NAP], such terrorist activities got momentum – see the following paragraphs wherein three attacks are mentioned which took immediately after the launch of high trumpeted NAP just two weeks earlier.

Two out of three episodes though not occurred in Punjab but speak about the inept attitude and incompetence of PML[N]'s government.

Attack on Shiites in Rawalpindi: On 9th January 2015, a powerful blast rattled an *imambargah* in a densely populated area of Rawalpindi, killing eight people and injuring at least 16 others. The blast took place outside *Imambargah Aun Mohammad Rizvi* in Chitian Hatian area of Rawalpindi, also damaging the building. An *Eid Miladun Nabi* [PBUH] congrega-

tion was being observed at the *imambargah* at the time of the blast.

The authorities believed the bomber tried to go into the *imambargah*, when he was stopped at the entrance, he blew himself up outside. It was being considered a suicide attack but the Bomb Disposal Squad later ruled that explosive material was detonated outside the *imambargah* and it was not a 'suicide blast'.

the eye-witnesses held that there was a huge bang. The injured were being taken out of the mosque on carts because ambulances were unable to enter the narrow street. The Federal Interior Minister Ch Nisar Ali said that:

"Every tenth madrassa is being used to promote terrorism and hatred against religious minorities. Today's attack indicates that terrorists are present everywhere in the country."

MALIK ISHAQ KILLED:

On 29th July 2015; leader of the banned Sunni extremist group, Malik Ishaq, alleged to have killed hundreds of Pakistani Shiites in tens of bombings, died in shootout after his supporters tried to get him freed from police custody.

Thirteen supporters of Malik Ishaq, the leader of *Lashkar e Jhangvi* [LeJ], were also killed in the clash early morning in Muzaffar Garh Town of the Punjab Province. Punjab's Home Minister, Mr Khanzada told the media that armed supporters attacked a police convoy that was transporting Mr Ishaq, his sons and three of his aides, all of whom had been arrested on suspicion of involvement in sectarian killings.

Malik Ishaq's two sons were also among the dead, Mr Khanzada said. Six police officers were wounded, and some of the attackers escaped, according to the police. LeJ had claimed responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of Shiites, including two bombings in the western city of Quetta in early 2013 that killed nearly 200 people. Additionally, Mr Ishaq was accused of having masterminded a 2009 attack on Sri Lanka's cricket team near Liberty Market in Lahore.

Rai Tahir, the head of Punjab's Counter-Terrorism Department, told:

"Malik Ishaq had offered to take police to an arms dump after he

was arrested five days earlier. A special team was organised to visit the area with him, his two sons and colleague Rasool to recover explosives from a house situated in Shah Wali near Muzaffargarh.

The moment the special team arrived at the place, some 20 militants attacked and tried to free Malik Ishaq and others. In a direct exchange of heavy fire, Malik Ishaq, his two sons and colleague Rasool were killed along with 11 others.

The haul of weapons recovered from the house included 40kg of explosives, suicide bomb vests and guns.”

It might be a police story ostensibly implausible. But more likely was that, faced with a socio-legal paradigm where no witnesses would step forth to bear testimony against Malik Ishaq, no trial judge would have the protection to render a verdict against him, and no appellate Court would find a 'beyond reasonable doubt' case to convict him, the security agencies could have decided to eliminate this man who had proudly confessed to killing over 100 Shiites while releasing an interview to media and newspapers – without question of any fear or undue pressure.

In the circumstances, accepting the fact that the police stepped outside the gates of law in order to do what was 'necessary' and better for the state, for the nation and for the human beings, why not to amend laws or the Constitutional provisions to provide enforcement agencies enough space.

But the history would remember that successive parliaments during 2008-2016 were distinctly impotent.

Mr Ishaq was imprisoned from 1997 to 2011 and had been accused in more than 60 criminal cases till then, but he was never successfully prosecuted. Analysts called it a reflection of Pakistan's weak judicial system, in which militants were and still are able to intimidate judges and witnesses, as well as political leaders.

After that, Malik Ishaq was detained by Pakistan's police on 22nd February 2013. The detention of the leader, who was jailed on separate accusations of hate speech, represented the government's most prominent step yet against extremists responsible for escalating violence against minority Shiites. The two devastating bomb attacks that LeJ claimed responsibility for were targeted against minority Hazara Shiites in the western city of Quetta on 10th January & 16th February 2013 respectively.

The Punjab government's failure to stem the bloodshed could be analysed through the freedom of movement enjoyed by Malik Ishaq, who used to roam the country freely since being released from jail in July 2011, allegedly stirring hatred against Shiites.

Background Case:

On 14th July 2011; the Supreme Court Lahore Registry granted bail to Malik Ishaq, allegedly the mastermind of a deadly March 2009's attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team. He had been kept in jail since 1997 on a series of terrorism charges, and he was showered with rose petals by hundreds of waiting supporters as he left the Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore.

"We will peacefully continue our mission," Malik Ishaq had told his hard-line *Lashkar e Jhangvi* [LeJ] members, and would continue to pursue its anti-Shiite struggle.

But the journey had taken start much earlier than that.

In 1997, Malik Ishaq was alleged to have killed one Fida Hussain Ghalvi's twelve family members in cold blood. Malik Ishaq and seven of his accomplices had attacked a Shiite gathering at his relative's village in village *Do Kota* in Mailsi Tehsil of Vehari. Ishaq has been in jail since 1997 on that count, in addition to being allegedly involved in killing 58 other people in various incidents of sectarian violence.

Referring to the '**Express Tribune**' dated **15th July 2011;**

".....Ishaq, however, is no ordinary killer. He is one of the founders of the dreaded terrorist outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), key suspect in the attack on the Sri Lankan team in Lahore in 2009 and 43 other cases in which 70 people have been killed.

He was granted bail by the apex court after the prosecution failed to prove his involvement in the case of attack on Sri Lankan cricket team."

Malik Ishaq was arrested from Faisalabad the same year [1997] and sent to Multan central jail. The complainant named Ghalvi and other witnesses were summoned to identify Ishaq. He was least disturbed when witnesses pointed him out. In the presence of a civil judge and jail Deputy Superintendent, Ishaq threatened the witnesses and said: ***"Dead men don't talk."*** Malik Ishaq's associates then unleashed a violent campaign against

the witnesses and their families.

Malik Ishaq's followers had also threatened judges, policemen and prosecutors. The intimidation resulted in Ishaq being let off in 42 cases registered against him. He was granted bail in the 43rd case and only one case was left pending against him in July 2011.

During Ishaq's trial, eight more people linked to witnesses were killed while the complainant Ghalvi and other witnesses continued receiving death threats from Malik Ishaq's men. But at the end poor investigation & prosecution, and disregard of evidence contributed to Ishaq's freedom. Fear also played a major role since Malik Ishaq's cohorts frightened everyone involved in or linked with the cases.

Malik Ishaq was acquitted in 34 out of 44 cases while in the remaining 10, including the attack on Sri Lankan cricket team, he had already been granted bail. The electronic media had then widely discussed the said bail event because the then sitting government Punjab government of PML[N] had extended all legal and administrative help through police and prosecution staff under the explicit instructions of their Law Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan.

The Punjab government faced accusations of being soft on extremists after its law minister, Rana Sanaullah, once shared a stage with activists from a sectarian group related to *Lashkar*.

'**The Express Tribune**' dated **15th July 2011** also confirmed that:

'...the release comes after Maulana Ahmed Ludhianvi, chief of the defunct outfit Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan which is now known as Millat-e-Islamia / Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamat, met with Ishaq for more than two hours at Kot Lakhpat Jail. Other prisoners were not allowed to meet their families during that period.'

On 11th November 2011; the Supreme Court dismissed a review petition against bail granted to Malik Ishaq, former head of *Lashkar e Jhangvi*, accused of plotting the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in 2009.

A 2-member bench of the SC comprising Justice Tasadduq Hussain Jilani and Justice Asif Saeed Khosa held proceedings at the SC's Lahore registry on a petition filed by the Punjab government against the bail granted to Malik in July 2011 after spending 14 years in jail since 1997.

The bench held that the bail had been granted to the accused on merit and could not be withdrawn. Friday, the 11th November was the first date of hearing of the petition and it was dismissed without even a notice being issued to the respondent.

The Punjab government had urged in its Review Petition that the SC while granting bail to Malik Ishaq had observed that *'there is no admissible legal evidence which proved his involvement in the attack'*. The Review Petition said this observation of the SC would influence the trial against the accused. It prayed the court to rectify its observation, the appropriate way for which was to cancel his bail.

However the apex court dismissed the petition and observed that the SC observations would not influence the trial court. The SC had accepted Malik Ishaq's bail petition after it was rejected by Lahore High Court. He was accused of plotting the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team while he was in prison.

Coming Back; in recent years Malik Ishaq had been succeeded by a younger generation of militants. Albeit, his killing on 29th July 2015 indicated that the Pakistani state had gone serious about targeting sectarian militants. Admittedly, Pakistan had seen a substantial decline in sectarian attacks in the past year, since the Pak-Army began an offensive against militant hide-outs in the country's rugged tribal regions.

Some Pakistanis expressed scepticism about the official account of Malik Ishaq's killing. Omar Quraishi, an editor at **ARY News** noted that:

'Pakistan, and Punjab Province in particular, has a history of extra-judicial killings of militants by the security forces. Malik Ishaq's killing in a suspect police encounter shows that the state itself does not seem to have faith in its own legal and justice system.'

UK's newspaper daily **'the guardian'** dated **29th July 2015** commented:

*"Ishaq's killing proved that **Operation Zarb e Azb**, a major push against militant groups launched by the army last year [2014], was being conducted across the board.....the LeJ has long dodged government attempts to crack down on its activities.*

Despite being the head of an organisation linked to al-Qaida and designated by the US in 2014 as a 'specially designated global terrorist', Ishaq had never been successfully convicted by [the pre-

vailing] court system in Pakistan where witnesses, judges and prosecutors are easily intimidated.

In one case in 2011, Ishaq made sure the trial judge was aware of the risk he was running by reading out the names of his children.

In a local newspaper interview in 1997, he even admitted to having been involved in the killing of more than 100 people. Instead, public order laws were used to hold him.... house arrest."

However, the **BBC dated 29th July 2015** divulged totally a new angle of Malik Ishaq's event:

".....his [Malik Ishaq's] death signifies an emerging need in the Pakistani establishment to control sectarian killings. The death comes as Pakistan is pushing for normalisation in Afghanistan and major Chinese funding for an economic corridor connecting China to the Arabian Sea.

He [Malik Ishaq] was wanted in hundreds of sectarian killings but government prosecutors always failed to bring sufficient evidence to get him convicted in a court.... Was facing over 70 charges of sectarian killings..... [but] walked free in December 2014 after a decision by Lahore High Court.

While still in jail, he had started consultations about becoming a member of parliament. ASWJ head Ahmed Ludhianvi persuaded him to shun violence and pursue his anti-Shia agenda through political means. Ishaq agreed and soon started taking part in the ASWJ's political activities. He had huge clout within the group and gained prominence within and outside the party in no time.

However, threatened by Malik's rise, Malik was expelled from the ASWJ, taking with him the more violent elements of the organisation. There were bloody clashes between the Ludhianvi and Ishaq groups and both leaders escaped assassination attempts.

Ultimately, Malik Ishaq was pushed back into Lashkar e Jhangvi and its militant agenda."

The killing of Malik Ishaq, was perhaps the most substantial statement of intent by Pakistan's national security apparatus, with regards to the sectari-

an battle. For the first time, in Pakistan's fight against sectarian extremism, the state overtly expanded the arena of battle from 'anti-Pakistan' groups such as TTP, to the 'anti-sectarian' outfits of LeJ and SSP.

In fact, successive political and military leadership has been showing sympathetic stance towards the extremist groups that were militant within their own sect and more to the Shiites collectively.

Renowned Jurist Saad Rasool, referring to the '**Nation**' dated **2nd August 2015**, pointed out that:

*"Mandatory constitutional command of Article 256, which prohibits '**private organization capable of functioning as a military organization**' was surrendered at the altar of political expediency. Over time, a one-off target killing of Shia Muslims became indiscriminate firings at Imam Bargahs, and then finally mass massacres in the streets of Quetta and Shikarpur."*

Amidst clamour against a two-faced and deceitful policy that made insincere distinctions between good and bad militants, often supported by rogue elements in the intelligentsia, as well as immature politicians, Pak-Army finally decided to erase this inexcusable divide; the killing of Malik Ishaq, his sons and his companions, marked the announcement concretely.

For PML[N] government, which has been in bed with Sunni ideological outfits for the entire duration of their political existence, the killing of Malik Ishaq was apparently un-acceptable - especially with sympathizers like Rana Sanaullah enjoying powerful positions in the government.

The credit, in this regard, purely rested with the Pak-Army – totally opposed to the hypocritical legacy of Gen Kiyani. The killing of Malik Ishaq, even by police, could not have been done without the approval and support of Gen Raheel Sharif in person and his team.

There were questions thereafter; why organizations like *Lashkar e Tayyaba* [LeT] were not included within the fold of counter-militancy operations?

[On 22nd January 2015; Pakistan banned the Jamaat ud Dawat [JuD], a sister organisation of the LeT, and the Haqqani network in the wake of objectives framed by the Pak-Army under National Action Plan [NAP] after Army Public School massacre of 16th December 2014. The said action was a practical manifestation against militant organisations without making a distinction between the good

Taliban and the bad Taliban.

Apart from Haqqani network and JuD, the government of Pakistan had also banned Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation, Ummah Tameer-i-Nau, Haji Khairullah Hajji Sattar Money Exchange, Rahat Limited, Roshan Money Exchange, Al Akhtar Trust, and Al Rashid Trust. The concerned departments were directed to take immediate steps to freeze the assets of the banned outfits.]

ATTACKS ON SHIITES ALL OVER:

Starting from a few months earlier;

On 9th January 2015, five people were killed and 10 others injured in a blast at a playground in Kadda Bazaar area of Kalaya, the agency HQ of the Lower Orakzai Agency. The blast occurred at Hussainia ground during a volleyball match. Political Tehsildar Khiasta Akbar said the blast appeared to be carried out through a planted device. There was a match going on between Mani Khel and Farangi Kalley teams at the time of the explosion.

Orakzai is one of Pakistan's seven semi-autonomous tribal regions in the northwest, where Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda-linked militants were said to have carved out strongholds. It was a key abode of former TTP Chief Hakimullah Mehsud before he was killed in a US drone strike in North Waziristan in 2013.

Attack on Shiites in Shikarpur: **On 30th January 2015**, at least 61 people were killed and about 60 injured in an explosion at a Shiite mosque in Shikarpur city of Pakistan; the attack took place just before Friday prayers started. The militant group *Jundallah*, which last year pledged support for the Islamic State [IS] group based in Syria and Iraq, had claimed responsibility for the attack through the group's spokesman Fahad Marwat.

During evening hours, the Civil Hospital Shikarpur issued a list of 49 victims out of whom 46 bodies had been identified whereas the identity of 3 others was yet to be confirmed – believed to be the suicide bombers; later the death toll reached 61. There were up to 400 people worshipping in the mosque when the blast struck. The *Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen* [MWM] announced to observe a 'peaceful strike' across Sindh.

A number of victims were trapped under debris after the roof of the *imambargah* collapsed due to the intensity of the blast. Many of the casualties were shifted to hospitals in Sukkur and Larkana districts of Sindh. MWM had announced three days mourning, describing the incident a failure of the government. A huge contingent of police, rangers and ambulances arrived at the scene from the nearby towns in the aftermath of explosion.

Meanwhile 14 severely injured were shifted to a private hospital in Karachi for medical treatment. MWM also staged sit-ins at several spots, including MA Jinnah Road, in Karachi to protest against the Shikarpur tragedy. A large number of people, including children, women and senior citizens participated in the sit-ins at Five Star *chawrangī*, Shahrah-e-Pakistan, Abbas Town, Star Gate Shahrah-e-Faisal and Malir 15 – the protests continued till the deceased were buried after funeral prayers.

It was the second major attack on an *imambargah* in the country since the beginning of 2015; the first being an attack on Rawalpindi's *Imambargah* Aun Mohammad Rizvi in the garrison city's *Chitian Hatian* area.

Attack on Shiites in Peshawar: On 14th February 2015; an attack on a Shiite mosque in Peshawar killed 21 people and left 50 injured. The TTP claimed responsibility for those killings, saying it was revenge for the militant known as Dr Usman — who was hanged in December after military court's verdict. It was a gun and bomb attack at an *imambargah* in Peshawar's Hayatabad area - the suicide attackers and gunmen were dressed in police uniforms; the worshippers were offering Friday prayers.

Heavy firing was also reported and the residents had seen thick cloud of smoke engulfed Hayatabad's Phase V area soon after the attack. Three explosions took place inside the *Imamia* mosque. Eyewitnesses claimed that three more attackers, in addition to the three suicide bombers, had entered the *imambargah* after scaling the neighbouring Allama Iqbal University's wall; they did not enter through the main gate as security personnel were deployed there.

Later, the local police confirmed that the three suicide bombers entered the mosque while only one was able to blow himself up. Another suicide bomber was killed by security forces while the third was arrested in injured condition. The worshippers tried to wrestle and snatch the weapons from one of the attackers. After the suicide blast the rest of the attackers started indiscriminate firing.

The police and army personnel conducted a joint operation and cordoned off the area after which bomb disposal squad searched the blast site and

defused the suicide jackets and grenades recovered from the attackers. Hayatabad was under heavy surveillance as helicopters hovered over the area and dozens of FC troops took position to clear the vicinity.

Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen [MWM], Shia Ulema Council, Jaffria Alliance and Imamia Rabita Council had announced to observe three-day country-wide mourning declaring that '*...these attacks will continue if they are not brought under control. They are enemies of the state and Islam.*'

The blast on Peshawar's *imambargah* came as Pakistan was attempting to implement the National Action Plan [NAP] to combat and root out terrorism from the country, an initiative that was set in motion after the 16th December 2014's attack at Peshawar's APS. At the same time, Pakistani security forces were engaged in the North Waziristan and Khyber tribal regions.

Is 'War on Terror' over for Pakistan?

On 12th February 2015; the leaders of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, California Republican Ed Royce and New York Democrat Eliot Engel, wrote a letter to John Kerry, urging the State Department to consider travel bans suspending assistance, and imposing sanctions on corrupt officials of his own country associated with Pakistan affairs:

"...until Islamabad can regain the initiative against the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar e Taiba, and the Haqqani network. We appreciate what you doyet it does not appear that this engagement has resulted in any real change in Pakistan's policies."

In January 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry had paid a surprise visit to Islamabad to parley with PM Sharif, floating promises of emergency aid to fight militants – the said letter was written in the same back-drop.

Royce and Engel's concerns stemmed from Pakistan's muted response to the Taliban attack on Army School Peshawar on 16th December 2014 leaving about 153 dead.

On 13th February 2015; three Taliban assailants hurled grenades, exchanged gunfire with police, and detonated a suicide vest at another Shia mosque in Peshawar, leaving 20 dead.

The fundamentalists continued their attacks **on 17th February 2015,** when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a crowd of people in Lahore,

killing five and injuring dozens more.

In fact, those attacks had come at a critical time in Pakistan's fight against the militants through Operation Zarb e Azb started in June 2014 but got wracked with false starts and casualties. For the outer world, it was rhetoric. Pakistan claimed it killed more than 2,000 militants since the offensive began in June 2014, sustaining just 129 casualties of its own but no concrete effect was seen.

The progress was, of course, visible. Pak-Army did bombings in the Datta Khel area and destroyed a terrorist hideout in January 2015, killing 35 insurgents. Those efforts were abetted by US drones strikes which claimed the lives of 27 militants in addition. In North Waziristan: the **Zarb e Azb** offensive was bolstered by a surge of 170,000 troops on the Afghan border, almost a third of Pakistan's entire military.

The American press had admitted that Pakistan sacrificed its 4,400+ troops since 2002 in that War on Terror, nearly twice the number of American casualties in Afghanistan; Jack Detsch's essay dated 24th February 2015 on American media is referred.

Then why doubts about Pakistan's commitment.

All so-called American aids like from Congress funds, from the Kerry-Lugar-Berman act or Washington's cash pipeline to Islamabad for surgical operations, had already dried up for Pakistan.

President Obama was keen towards Delhi as his chief partner in South Asia – why the US Congress did not ask India to send its troops in Kabul to tackle Taliban on trial.

Jacobabad Attacked:

On 23rd October 2015; Sindh Interior Minister Suhail Anwar Siyal said that the banned sectarian outfit *Lashkar e Jhangvi* [LeJ] had claimed responsibility for a day earlier's suicide bombing at a Muharram procession in Jacobabad city; adding that the *Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was behind terrorist attacks in Pakistan and they were active across Sindh.*

Meanwhile, Shiite organisations staged a sit-in in Jacobabad calling for the relevant security officials to be removed for their negligence in not preventing the deadly tragedy. The CM Sindh Qaim Ali Shah reached Jacobabad

next day and announced a compensation of Rs:2 million for the family of each person who lost life as a result of the said suicide attack.

Also that those handicapped would get Rs:1 million along with a government job while lightly injured victims would get a sum of Rs:0.2 million as compensation. CM Sindh also added that the Deputy Superintendent Police [DSP] of the area stands suspended.

The said suicide blast ripped through a mourning procession killing 24 people, mostly children, and injuring more than 40 others; the procession was returning from Shershah Jo-Per to Quetta Road in *Lashari Muhalla*.

A day earlier, on **22nd October 2015**; in another incident of terrorism, a suicide attacker blew himself outside an Imam-bargah in Bolan district of Balochistan, killing at least 10 people and injuring 12 others. The attack was also claimed by the banned *Lashkar e Jhangvi* [LeJ].

United Nations [UN] Chief Ban Ki-Moon also condemned the two blasts and mourned the loss of lives in a statement released from his New York office next day. He also called upon the Pakistan government to bring the perpetrators of the terrorist attack to justice.

Pakistan has a history of attacks on religious processions in the Islamic holy month of Muharram, especially on 9th and 10th of the month, claimed by banned militant outfits targeting people belonging to Shiite sect of Islam.

A month later; during the first week of **November 2015**, posters hoisted aloft at a protest in Kabul against the stoning to death of a woman in Afghanistan reading **"Ignorant Taliban are the mercenaries of Pakistan and America"**; it indicated that more was wrong with US policy in Afghanistan than many Americans could appreciate.

While the US was rightly accused of many errors in Afghanistan in the war it has fought against the Afghan Taliban, it was troubling for American policymakers that they could not convince Afghan civil society that *'the US stands with them against the Taliban'*.

Perhaps the protest placard was a sign of fresh divisions in Afghan society after collapse of the post-Bonn Afghanistan of 2001 that blamed the US for its seemingly soft approach on the Taliban then; an utter lack of foresight in American policy concerning the new Afghan society in making.

In fact, it took long for the US to accept that a political settlement between the government and the Taliban was more viable option for stability.

After fifteen years follies, the US came around to this point of view — when US political considerations made the continuation of a large-scale war effort in Afghanistan untenable — so fragile the American foreign policy was.

Pakistan, too, made more mistakes and there remained an ambiguity in state policy towards Afghanistan — till how long the US and Pakistan would go deceived making policies for other states at the cost of their own population's interests.

On 27th August 2016; four accused terrorists — three of whom were charged with involvement in the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team — were killed; Punjab's Counter-Terrorism Department [CTD] claimed in its statement:

"On Aug 27 at about 11pm, a CTD team was taking accused terrorists involved in the Moon Market Iqbal Town Lahore blast of 2008 for pointation of a house in the Lakho Dehr area... where they had prepared for the attack at that time.

The CTD team was attacked by 7-8 terrorists when they reached the East Service Road of Ring Road near the Mian Town bridge. The CTD team took precautions and returned fire in self defence. When the firing stopped, four accused terrorists were found dead by firing of the attacking terrorists.

Those killed were identified as Zubair alias Naik Muhammad, Abdul Wahab, Adnan Arshad and Ateequr Rehman. The first three terrorists were also involved in the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in March 2009, in which six police officials were killed... and cricketers were injured.

The attackers fled the scene under cover of darkness and that a large quantity of weapons was recovered from the site. An investigation is underway to arrest the fleeing terrorists."

Earlier, Anti-Terrorism Court, **on 22nd June 2016**, had indicted six members of a banned outfit in that case of attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team. All the suspects pleaded not guilty and decided to contest the case during an in-camera hearing in Kot Lakhpat jail. The court had already declared two suspects — Mohsin Rasheed and Abdul Rehman — proclaimed offenders in the case.

[Gulberg Lahore police had already registered a case against Malik Ishaq and others for their involvement in the attack on the Sri

Lankan cricket team.

*A bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricketers came under a gun and grenade attack at Liberty Chowk, near Qaddafi Stadium, **on 3^d March 2009**. Seven players and an assistant coach were wounded, while eight Pakistanis were killed in the attack.]*

The suspects included Obaidullah, Javed Anwar, Ibrahim Khalil, Abdul Wahab, Zubair and Adnan Arshad. The first three suspects were on bail, while others were behind bars. All the suspects had pleaded not guilty and decided to contest the case during an in-camera hearing in Kot Lakhpat jail.