

## **SCENARIO 259**

### **PM's DOWNFALL – 'OTHER' KEY FACTORS'**

#### **CM USMAN BUZDAR FACTOR**

**On 17<sup>th</sup> August 2018;** a day before Imran Khan was sworn in as Pakistan's prime minister, he made an announcement that left his followers stunned, deepening the factionalism in his *Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf* (PTI). Mr Khan announced that he had picked his candidate for the office of chief minister of Punjab — the most politically important province of the country. Mr Khan told the rationale for the selection saying:

*"I have nominated Sardar Usman as Punjab chief minister and I want to tell you the reason for doing so.....*

*He belongs to an area of Punjab that is the most backward. People there have no water or electricity or hospital. The special thing about Sardar Usman is that he is well acquainted with how people live in those areas and secondly, he is aware of how the poor lead their lives. When he will assume the office of the chief minister he will know the nature of the plight that faces the under-privileged people of Pakistan...."*

[***Barthi in Jhandi Tribal Area***, Buzdar's remote town on the outskirts of *Taunsa Sharif* along Punjab's border with Baluchistan, had no access to basic civic facilities; health facilities were so poor that most local women suffered from night blindness due to malnutrition and in the early '80s, leprosy was diagnosed amongst record residents there.]

Nominated CM Usman Buzdar — the son of a three-time former MPA - had triumphed in the 2018 general elections from PP-286 [Dera Ghazi Khan (DGK)-II] by securing 26,897 votes. He was a *tehsil nazim* of a mountainous tribal area of DGK during president Gen Musharraf's era.

Designated CM Buzdar was a member of the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PMLQ) from 2002 to 2011. Later, he left the party to join the PMLN. In 2013, he ran for provincial assembly seat on PMLN ticket but was defeated by a PPP contestant. Before the 2018 general elections, Buzdar joined the ***Janoobi Punjab Suba Mahaz***, which then merged with the PTI, thus making him a member of Khan's party. Buzdar has a bachelor's degree in law and master's degree in political science.

Curiously, Mr Khan was going to nominate Usman Buzdar, but his choice clearly did not sit well with many in the party — especially those who had financed PTI's campaigns for years and were expecting some experienced head in Punjab. The skepticism over Buzdar's selection was so rampant within the party that Imran Khan had to take to Twitter the morning after taking his oath; while defending his decision, saying:

*"I want to make it clear [that] I stand by our nominee Usman Buzdar for Chief Minister Punjab. I have done my due diligence over the past two weeks and have found him to be an honest man. He has integrity and stands by my vision and ideology of Naya Pakistan."*

But the tweet did little to appease party stalwarts from the province, as well as its newly elected members of the provincial assembly, who were still in disbelief. Many believed that '**Usman Buzdar was picked up on the instructions of his new wife Bushra Bibi who had got some spiritual guidance from.....**'. PTI's elected MsPA did not know anything about Buzdar, except what Imran Khan had told them in a video message and later through his tweets. Few, if any, believed that Buzdar could effectively run the government in the stronghold of the Sharifs, which they had just snatched from them — with much difficulty and might be 'accidently'.

Imran Khan's reasons for handpicking Buzdar from anonymity were simply discarded by the PTI voters, at least on the face of it that Mr Buzdar was from one of the most backward areas of Punjab — and that Buzdar was the only member of the Punjab assembly who did not have electricity at home. Mr Khan repeatedly assured his party members saying he fully backed Buzdar all the way. Since the first day of his office as the CM Punjab, Usman Buzdar had been firefighting rumours of his early departure. Despite growing unease within the PTI's ranks about his effectiveness, he continued to bank on the support of PM Imran Khan.

When Buzdar's critics painted him as a failure with nothing tangible to show, PM Khan predictably turned to cricket comparisons. '**He will prove to be Wasim Akram Plus**', the PTI leader said on multiple occasions. PTI's most members ridiculed at the idea that Imran Khan selected Buzdar for the position solely because he was from an under-developed region having no electricity, water and a hospital. One PTI MPA often pointed out that the region did not have these facilities '**in spite of the fact that Buzdar's father had been in active politics since the early 1980s and was thrice returned to the provincial assembly between 1985 and 2002**'. One could imagine what was the capability, acumen and wisdom of his father / family.

See one Lahirite MPA's arguable comments:

*"The man we were ordered to elect as the Leader of the House had made it to the provincial assembly for the first time and had no prior administrative experience to handle the Punjab's bureaucracy. Who would entrust such a man with such a huge responsibility of running the country's most populous and politically most important province? He may be a good man but he was NOT THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THIS JOB he had been given. Time has proved us right."*

The cynicism about Buzdar's ability to match his restless predecessor, PMLN's Shahbaz Sharif's abilities wasn't the only factor that caused an outrage among the PTI old guard. Buzdar was not only an unknown commodity in the political arena but his ties with the party were also rather recent. He had contested and lost the 2013 election for a provincial seat on PMLN's ticket, a party he had joined after quitting PMLQ. He quit PMLN only a couple of months before the 2018 elections to join the **Junoobi Punjab Sooba Mahaz** (The Southern Punjab Province Front), which was formed by PMLN 'dissidents' led by Makhdum Khusro Bakhtiar, who was later the PTI's federal Minister for National Food Security. The *Mahaz* opted to merge with PTI after dissolution of the previous assemblies (2013-18); so Buzdar was there.

The fact remains that Buzdar was chosen for the same reasons that made him ineffective; unlike his other major rivals for his job, he lacked an independent power base and that made it easier for **PM Khan to control Buzdar and rule the Punjab province indirectly from Bani Gala**.

Buzdar was also aware that his opposition from within the PTI, especially from Lahore through MPA Aleem Khan and from Multan via Shah Mahmood Qureshi, would prove to be major challenges for him during his tenure. Hence, when he rose from his seat after his election as the chief executive of the province, to thank the House, he decided to first shut up his detractors — not from the opposition benches, but from the treasury benches of his own PTI; how pity it was. *"I proposed someone else instead of Usman Buzdar for Punjab CMship: Jahangir Tareen"*; **Daily Pakistan Global** dated 23rd October 2018 is referred.

PTI's inner circles knew that Buzdar's background was not the only reason for his elevation to CM's office; his wife was close to Mr Khan's isolated spouse, Bushra Bibi. Others, such as well-known TV journalist **Sohail Warrach**, contended that the premier was told by his wife to pick a man whose name begins with the Urdu letter *aen*; further explaining:

*"There were only two people elected to the provincial assembly in 2018 whose name started with that letter. One of them died, leaving Usman Buzdar as the only choice for Imran."*

Hasan Javid, an associate professor at the Lahore University of Management Science (LUMS), argued that PM Khan had also been trying to balance the factional conflict within the PTI by choosing a 'neutral' candidate. PM Khan was also operating under the [mistaken] belief that he himself would be able to ensure effective governance in Punjab through Buzdar. **But it was not the first time a party leader tried to control Punjab remotely.** In the 1970s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had changed four chief ministers — Mustafa Khar, Hanif Ramay, Sadiq Hussain Qureshi and Meraj Khalid — in Punjab. Mr Bhutto kept changing his CMs in Punjab so that none of them could grow ambitions to challenge his authority.

**On 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019:** Chief Minister Usman Buzdar faced a volley of criticisms from party MPAs at a PTI parliamentary party meeting as they expressed dissatisfaction over the performance of the Punjab government during the past 15 months; **TV news** of that day are referred.

The parliamentary party meeting, called ahead of the Punjab Assembly session, was meant to take party MPAs into confidence with regard to plans for holding the local government elections in March 2020. In the meeting the MPAs complained that the bureaucracy was not cooperating with them and even their genuine issues were not being resolved. Unbridled price hikes and unemployment or facing salary cuts were also discussed; thus, PTI's popularity had hit an all-time low.

*[In Pakistan, the parliamentary party meetings are usually called to allow the party MPAs to vent their anger in a closed-door meeting instead of expressing resentment in the assembly session and bring embarrassment for the government.]*

Referring to an essay in the **daily 'DAWN'** dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2020:

*"Apparently, PTI party leaders fear similarly that the success of their proxies in governing Punjab efficiently could eclipse their own performance and create a threat to them."*

*Even Nawaz Sharif never trusted anyone except his younger brother for this office. The only time he agreed to give the job to someone outside the family was in 1990, when he selected Ghulam Haider Wyne. But that was meant to keep Pervaiz Elahi out — a step that sowed the seeds of an unbridgeable rift between the Sharifs and the Chaudhrays from Gujrat."*

CM Buzdar was seen as an unassuming, modest and quiet person; was often felt knowledgeless and ineffective in comparison with his predecessor Shahbaz Sharif of the PMLN. Buzdar had always been at the center of media speculations about his looming departure. A senior Lahore-based journalist pointed out that PM Khan had intentionally not groomed anyone from his party for the Punjab CM's slot.

*"His party [PTI] didn't promote any specific candidate who could replace Shahbaz during its campaign for power in 2013 and 2018. In my view, Imran Khan realized that the day he announced his candidate for the post of Punjab's chief minister, the party would lose all its popular momentum and might as well break up. Thus, he deliberately kept his options open until his ascension to power."*

'The Blunders of 'Kaptaan'' in **Newsweek Pakistan** dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022 is referred here for the following script:

*"Under Buzdar's watch as the Chief Minister, five Inspector Generals of the Punjab Police were changed. He was largely and consistently criticized for his incompetence during his time as chief minister, and one of the worst appointments Khan made during his tenure. It was later revealed that several PTI members including Jehangir Tareen and Asad Umar were against Buzdar's appointment as Chief Minister, and it was one of the major points of disagreement among Khan and other party members."*

In fact, none of the PTI leaders such as Aleem Khan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Aslam Iqbal — who were often discussed by the media as potential candidates for the coveted position — were ever given any signal by Imran Khan; they were mostly wild guesses by the media. Buzdar represented a new experiment in Punjab. It was after almost 45 years that Punjab had a chief minister hailing from South Punjab and the first who didn't have any links with the urban industrial business community and the middle class from central Punjab. Also, he was the first chief minister who was not groomed politically under military rulers.

### **BUZDAR – WHY SO DESPARATELY NEEDED?**

PM Khan's relentless support for CM Buzdar notwithstanding, he remained under clouds ever since his election as the 26th chief executive of the province. One TV anchor after another and one columnist after another predicted Buzdar's imminent downfall. His own PTI colleagues were not happy with him and considered him an ineffective manager, ill-equipped to handle the Punjab's tedious affairs. He had not only survived this onslaught of speculative attacks but also managed to throw out key-people like his media adviser Shahbaz Gill (Mr Gill had tried to exercise PM Khan's executive powers).

CM Buzdar kept rival Aleem Khan, who could prove a threat to him, out of his cabinet; of course, it could be a direction from the top boss, PM Khan. ***A number of PTI leaders believed that CM Buzdar would be the main factor if the party's popularity declined in Punjab - an eventual downfall.*** Governor Punjab Ch Sarwar had been often accused of supporting efforts to oust Buzdar, or at least bring him under his wing. Allegedly, Aleem Khan was nursing a grudge against Buzdar for refusing to re-induct him in the cabinet. After all, Aleem Khan had generously financed the party's campaign for power in the province and he could have been in Buzdar's place, but the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) cases against him were the main hinderance.

Some of Buzdar's cabinet ministers also kept on nurturing hopes of one day replacing him; yet he was there despite all the loud media speculations, which peaked in ending year 2019 when 20 PTI MPAs from south and central Punjab formed a pressure group to secure development funds for their constituencies. Some reports suggested that the group was created at Buzdar's own behest to thwart his opponents campaigning with PM Khan for '***odd changes in Punjab scenario***'.

During CM Buzdar's times, most political analysts agreed that the then '***political crisis in Punjab***' was mainly linked to factional fighting within the PTI government as well as to the popular perceptions about **Buzdar's incompetence**. It was clear that Buzdar's appointment had always been an issue for the PTI governing figures. From the beginning, the Punjab government had to deal with competing centers of power; thinking about Jahangir Tareen, Pervaiz Elahi and, to a lesser extent, Aleem Khan and even Shah Mahmood Qureshi — initially all were vying for the [Buzdar's] position, of course with their own agendas.

The attacks repeatedly mounted against Buzdar by his detractors who always focused on underscoring poor governance and ineffective administration under CM Buzdar. No one ever accused him of corruption,

apart from giving a few jobs to his relatives and friends and diverting huge development funds to his home constituency. One of his critics asked from his own PTI:

*"Who needs corruption charges to bring him down? His incompetence and poor governance are enough to topple him whenever his opponents get the signal from the right quarters."*

Throughout CM Buzdar's governance, there had been signs of visible decline across the province: stalled infrastructure projects, erosion of projects, such as dengue control and garbage collection in Lahore, that were previously seen to work well. All of this, coupled with the wheat flour shortages and delayed actions to fight smog in the cities had harmed his image. On top of that, the federal government's own problems with the economy, growing inflation and bureaucratic slowdown in fear of NAB cases, had reinforced the idea that the Punjab government remained weak and ineffective for the period CM Buzdar incumbered. A compromised CM, Buzdar had always been perceived as weak and, thus, an easy target for his critics, precisely because he lacked a credible base of his own.

In a context where the Punjab government was existing with a razor-thin majority, it was not difficult to see how PMLQ, the main ally of PTI in the province, for example, could tighten the screws in the hopes of gaining more concessions and control at a given time. This was where the governance issues popped in. Under PMLQ and PMLN since 2002, Punjab was governed by strongmen — Pervaiz Elahi and Shahbaz Sharif — who, despite their many failings, had delivered in tangible ways. See a media comment here:

*"A lot is made of how a disproportionate amount of attention was paid to Lahore and, it was seen when comparing Lahore's infrastructure with any other Pakistani city. Both PMLQ and PMLN had invested heavily in developing the entire province's road network, upgrading sanitation and, less successfully, uplifting schools and hospitals.*

*Traditional patronage politics also continued under them, but visible signs of improved service delivery like roads and sewers supplemented the thana-kuchehri [police station and court] politics as a basis for the support enjoyed by their governments. **Under PTI, there is less visible evidence of service delivery.** While the government talks about health insurance, etc., the effects of such initiatives are too diffused to be seen by the electorate."*

In later months of the PTI rule, there were signs of visible decline across the province in various organizations. Sohail Warraich, a top journalist and widely respected person, broadly agreed with the analysis but said the uproar over Buzdar's ineffectiveness was never the objective of the so-called pressure group of PTI MPAs to blackmail him or get him replaced. Further he commented that:

*"They had come together to support the chief minister and help him take back some administrative powers over the bureaucracy and the police from **Imran Khan, who has been directly and remotely controlling the province from Islamabad.** The federal interference in the province's administration increased to a new high after wholesome changes in the provincial bureaucracy and police with both the new Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police directly reporting to the prime minister."*

The fact remained that even PMLQ didn't want Buzdar to go. It didn't suit their interests, they wanted Buzdar to be a strong chief executive so that they could share power in the province with him in exchange for their support in the assembly. This was a (hidden) major bone of contention between Imran Khan and the Chaudhrays of Gujrat, in fact.

There had been strong indications that CM Buzdar's poor governance was also a concern for the establishment, as Punjab was the key to governing Pakistan and anything that could undermine PTI's credibility in Punjab would weaken their backers as well. Many times, there were disturbing posts on social

media that ***the first line of difference amongst PM Imran Khan and Gen Bajwa [the then Army Chief of Pakistan], drawn during ending 2018, was about the removal of an ineffective administrator named CM Usman Buzdar which suggestion was turned down by PM Khan very cold bloodedly and without any discussion on merits of the advice.*** An Islamabad-based political analyst and a think tank said:

*"The establishment is a major stakeholder in the new political system that has emerged in Pakistan after the 2018 elections. But I don't think it is involved in day-to-day politicking. ..... [though] they will not mind using the allegations of poor governance in Punjab as an excuse to control or replace PTI, [if and when] they need."*

Federal Railways Minister Sh Rasheed contended that the real target of the campaign against Buzdar was his leader, Imran Khan, and not the chief minister himself. According to him: '***.... once Buzdar is shown the door, Imran Khan's opponents will come after him.***'

Journalists community and the electronic media affirmed that:

*"There is a lot of truth in Sh Rasheed's claim. Those who are pursuing Buzdar are actually after the prime minister, there is no doubt about it. But it is true to the extent of opposition parties and not for those who aren't in any way linked to the PTI-led coalition in the province or in Islamabad."*

For PMLN and other opponents, weakness in Punjab — particularly in terms of governance — created the opportunity to attack the government and build support. At a time when there were rumours of an understanding being reached between the establishment and Shahbaz Sharif, a change in Punjab was in fact a cogent precursor to bigger changes in Islamabad. The establishment always wanted to keep civilians off-balance by not allowing any single party to consolidate its support. They cut PMLN down to size and did the same with PTI in April 2022; No Confidence Move is referred.

Many still believe that the establishment had correctly managed to avert the crisis of legitimacy that had initially emerged from the persisted crisis of governance in Punjab. Instead of getting a change in Punjab, they got the whole table turned in Islamabad, PM Khan sent home; it was done through creation of forward blocs in PTI and the resurgence of PMLQ and PMLN.

PMLN played its own game. It wanted the cracks in the coalition and within PTI to bring down the governments in Punjab and then in the Centre - while watching the game from the sidelines. The infighting ultimately pulled down the PTI-led administration in Punjab through its bureaucracy — and then they aspired to jump in higher stakes. PMLN came in a good position to capitalise on PTI's weakness in next elections. The rumours of a rapprochement between the establishment and Shahbaz Sharif came true and the political scenario started changing in March 2022 with full fervor, passion and eagerness.

It was extremely unlikely that Buzdar's removal could lead to the fall of the PTI government in Punjab at that time. But the PMLN succeeded in creating a small forward bloc defecting from PTI in the Punjab and National Assemblies both. History tells us it was not a difficult task — with the right signals from Rawalpindi — so it was dramatically launched in early 2022 to pack the luggage of PTI and also for PM Khan.

Despite all odds, CM Buzdar was indeed a lucky man; his future was closely tied to the first lady Bushra Bibi and in turn with PM Imran Khan because his dismissal could be taken as a big defeat for the prime minister, who kept on refusing to relent in the face of pressure from his party. Ultimately, Buzdar's incompetence dragged his leader, PM Khan, with him.

### **SARAIKI SUBA (PROVINCE):**

The Punjab game, in fact, had slipped out of PMLN's hand on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2018 when ***Junoobi Punjab Sooba Mahaz*** [JPSM] president Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtayar had urged all the political parties to support their demand of SEPARATE PROVINCE and added that it would only be possible with consensus of all the political parties. Terming the JPSM a voice of over 35m people of south Punjab, Mr Bakhtiar said:

*"If someone cannot contribute to resolve their problems, they should not create hurdles – ours is a one-point agenda of the creation of south Punjab province for the political and financial well-being of the people of the region. In the past all political parties made commitments to us - but were never fulfilled.*

*It is regretted that the budget for the Orange Line Metro Train Lahore was over Rs:240bn [then] whereas the budget for the whole south Punjab region stood at Rs:206bn."*

**On 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018;** the negotiations between *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* [PTI] and JPSM concluded while general elections were ahead. The JPSM group, which comprised of more than 21 sitting and former elected representatives of the PMLN, made its merger official after meeting PTI Chairman Imran Khan there and then.

In fact, the PMLN had not fulfilled its promise of ***declaring the Southern Punjab a province*** during its full tenure of five years – thus the reaction was evident. Next day, during the joint media conference, Mr Bakhtiar explained his agenda that 'new provincial demarcations are the need of the time. The demarcation of new provinces will ensure that funds allocated for Rajanpur are not given to Multan.'

During the interim government period, they were ready for dialogue with any party. But the PTI had backed the JPSM's demand for a separate province - not for linguistic reasons but on administrative grounds to mitigate the miseries being faced by some 35 million people living in Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan Divisions. ***As per their written and signed contract, the PTI had agreed to include the formation of southern Punjab province in the PTI's agenda for the first 100 days – if they came in power.*** Contrarily, PMLN's Federal Minister Maryam Aurangzeb had claimed that 'those lawmakers' had already been planning to quit the party, and termed them a bunch of opportunists.

Later, the said estranged PMLN lawmakers making JPSM officially merged into the PTI to contest the 2018 general elections under the PTI banner. Mr Bakhtiar again highlighted that the PMLN had been ruling Punjab for the last 30-35 years kept south Punjab with itself not for the sake of federation but just to keep on ruling. PTI's Imran Khan had assured the JPSM leaders that agreeing to the formation of a new province was not a political decision but [his] conviction.

### **SARAIKI SUBA: WHAT PROGRESS IN PTI ERA:**

Making a new province in the Southern Punjab was the main and written promise of Imran Khan in their original manifesto before the general election of 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018. When his party *Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf* [PTI] got majority vote in the elections and Mr Khan took the office of the premiership, he reiterated his promise again through his 100-days agenda. The people of the region had high hopes that the PTI government would make their dream come true but the initial serious work for constitutional amendment couldn't be taken up till the last day of that year. No preliminary practical measures were taken in this regard whatsoever.

Earlier, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz [PMLN] and Pakistan Peoples Party [PPP] had promised to establish South Punjab province during their respective tenures but both parties failed to implement their resolve. One Tahir Bashir Cheema had also established his separate **South Punjab Province Mahaz** [SPPM] and ran the campaign before 2018-elections. During that campaign, Imran Khan had announced that the province of South Punjab would be established within the **first 100 days** of his government. After the aforesaid written agreement, the SPPM also merged with PTI and participated in the elections on PTI ticket calling a sweeping victory in their respective areas of influence – all for the PTI chief, Imran Khan.

After the polls, PTI won more than 50 provincial and 29 National Assembly seats in Southern Punjab and became a representative majority party of the region. ***But despite completing 100 days, the ruling PTI failed to present a Constitutional draft in the National Assembly for the formation of South Punjab province; instead, PM Khan formed an Executive Council for the said purpose.*** An office had also been provided at chief minister's secretariat in Lahore. Five meetings were held by that Executive committee / council members over the matter; every time discussions were held but no practical measures could be taken to make out the required 'constitutional draft'. It was an uphill but an essential task; meetings were held amongst the secretaries of related departments, including revenue, finance, water resources, education and legal departments, ***however, no fruitful results seen.***

**On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018;** Punjab Chief Minister Usman Bazdar, during his visit to Dera Ghazi Khan had once more repeated that the prime minister would soon announce establishment of a separate South Punjab province. However, the PTI remained confined to negotiations with 'other' stakeholders on different issues for the creation of a separate province and PM Khan couldn't succeed in fulfilling his promises. One local MPA Owais Leghari said before the press that:

*"PTI is a U-turn party and they can step back from its promises. Hundred days have been completed yet so far their ministers did not raise the issue of South Punjab province in any assembly."*

Khawaja Ghulam Farid, head of another but similar **Saraikistan Qaumi Ittehad**, said that:

*"...the present government (of the PTI) has completed its hundred days so they should fulfill their promise. Balanced federation is a symbol of strong Pakistan. The leadership of the SPPM is also (asking for) stability in the country; now the **province of Siraikistan** should be established."*

Recalling back; PTI's one of the promises before forming the government was to '**spearhead the creation of a South Punjab province on administrative lines**'. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, in October 2018, had said that '**the dream would come true during PTI's tenure**'. In late 2018, the party had started off on an active footing, setting up the Executive Council on Creation of South Punjab province and forming a committee to develop political consensus over the creation of the new province.

Over the 3+years PTI's stay in power, however, much of the progress towards creating the said new province remained focused on setting up the **South Punjab Secretariat**, described by the PTI as the first step towards establishing the new federating unit. However, ***differences emerged over whether the sub-secretariat would be set up in Bahawalpur or Multan***, with PTI stalwart Jahangir Tareen admitting that there were divergent opinions within the party over the location. PTI's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi had announced that the prime minister would make the final decision on the location of the secretariat after meeting representatives from the areas.

**On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019;** the PMLN took lead on the said old issue and submitted in the National Assembly a constitutional amendment bill for creation of the Bahawalpur and South Punjab provinces. ***PTI's job was actually done by its opposition in parliament and PM Khan could have taken it as blessing and welcome the bill FOR THE SAKE OF STRONGER PAKISTAN.*** The bill demanded that Article 1 of the Constitution be amended to create the Bahawalpur and South Punjab provinces. The Bahawalpur province

would consist of the then administrative Division, while the Divisions of Dera Ghazi Khan and Multan would fall into the South Punjab province.

The bill also called for amending Article 51, over-seeing the changes in allocation of seats in the National Assembly, making way for representation of the two new provinces in parliament. Once the amendment was done, Bahawalpur would have 15 general and 3 women-seats, bringing the total count of seats to 18. The bill also called for the allocation of 38 seats to the South Punjab province. After the amendment, the total number of seats on the NA floor would be 326; 266 general seats + 60 as women-specific seats.

The amendment also called for relevant changes to be made in Article 59 of the Constitution; it was regarding the seats for non-Muslims.

The amendment called for 39 seats of the Punjab provincial assembly to be allocated for Bahawalpur; 31 general seats + 8 for women. According to the bill, 80 seats were to be allocated for the South Punjab province; 64 general seats + 14 for women and 2 were to be allocated for minorities. The bill also called for an amendment in Article 154 of the Constitution, through which a National Commission for the Creation of New Provinces was to be constituted to deal with the area and other such specifications of the new provinces. The bill also said that Article 175(a) of the Constitution should be amended to create respective seats of the Supreme Court and the high court in new provinces. **The bill pointed out that on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2012 the Punjab Assembly had already approved the creation of these provinces.**

Speaking to the media regarding this development, PMLN leaders Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Marriyum Aurangzeb and Ahsan Iqbal announced that **the PMLN would support the PTI government unconditionally** to create the two promised provinces.

However, the PTI and its leadership didn't take interest in obliging their own signed contract for the Southern Province. In fact, after three years, the PTI and Imran Khan both paid much heavy price for it – Khusro Bakhtiar of the JPSM, though was holding a portfolio as federal minister for Food then, was the first parliamentarian to quit the PTI's coalition govt along with his companion-MsNA in early 2022 – thus carving path for NO CONFIDENCE MOVE in March 2022 – which sent the PTI home on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

**On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020;** the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) and Additional Inspector General of Police were formally appointed. The secretariat was to cover the Divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan and the civil servants were to be divided between Multan and Bahawalpur – but **the CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WAS THE BASIC REQUIREMENT** for which the PTI had missed the train in early 2019.

Calling it a major milestone in the establishment of the South Punjab province, Mr Qureshi, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020, announced the posting of high-level bureaucrats to South Punjab for a fully functional secretariat. Six months later, Prime Minister Imran Khan laid the foundation stone of the secretariat in Multan.

### **SARAIFI SUBA: FINALLY IN OFFING?**

**On 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021:** Apart from the establishment of secretariats, PM Imran Khan approved a plan for the development of South Punjab as a separate administrative zone. He also gave consent to amend the Punjab Civil Servants Act of 1974 and to carry out necessary legislation to dedicate 32 per cent job quota for South Punjab — proportionate to the region's population percentage in the province. **In June, however, the Punjab Cabinet Committee on Legislative business deferred the proposal for the job quota.**

PM Khan had given signal to a plan envisaging development of the South Punjab in ending 2020 - as a '**separate administrative zone**' within the Punjab province with an all-powerful secretariat to tackle issues ranging from lack of resources to under-representation of the region's populace in public sector jobs especially in Education and Health sectors.

However, the South Punjab secretariat comprising **15 departments** remained under criticism since their inception in September 2020 as ***the Punjab govt had failed to give any changeover plan to transfer the due administrative powers to the new administrative secretaries posted there.*** The plan came under wider public scanner when the PTI government withdrew two notifications, issued on 29-30<sup>th</sup> March, regarding rollback of these establishments. ***While the rules of business had been formulated in December 2020, they were never notified.*** Eventually, Punjab CM Usman Buzdar had to himself appear before the media to claim that '***the issuance of the notifications was a technical mistake and human error***' – BUT there was no compensation or re-issuance of the same.

The issuance and withdrawal of 'erroneous notifications', however, provided enough time to the Punjab govt for captivating all necessary measures it had been reluctant to take for the past seven months. The plan that got the PM's approval was prepared by Punjab Finance's ministerial committee after marking all the possible and practical hurdles that, till then, had been delaying vital decisions and measures. It was placed before the Prime Minister Khan during his next visit to Lahore.

The prime minister was informed that poverty rate in South Punjab was twice as much as in rest of the province as the region had been given only 17 pc of the development share despite having 32pc of the population of the province. During his presentation, the PM was told that the PTI government had allocated a minimum guaranteed annual development program (ADP) share of 33 pc and ring-fenced the allocation by the provincial cabinet. Also, that a separate ADP book would be published for the south Punjab region in the upcoming budget.

It was also suggested that amendments would be needed in the Punjab's Civil Servant Act 1974 (Act VIII of 1974) to allocate a quota for the region in the public sector jobs and the same would be possible through provincial legislation, as all the provinces except Punjab had the powers to allocate jobs on zonal / regional basis; Balochistan had seven zones, Khyber PK five and Sindh had two zones. Thus, the south Punjab region was entitled for 32pc job quota in line with its population base.

A PC-I had to be developed to offer technical assistance to all the departments being moved to South Punjab secretariats to ensure a smooth transition and meet operational challenges. However, the power thirsty Lahorite-bureaucrats suggested that the devolved departments such as ***finance, planning and development, law, services and general administration (S & GAD) as well as home department be reverted back to Lahore*** to be run at the central level and their devolution could be reconsidered in a second phase by the ministerial committee.

Besides the above said five departments that might be moved back to Lahore, and send the ***livestock and dairy development, agriculture, health, education, wildlife and fisheries, irrigation, housing, urban development and public health engineering (HUD & PHE), board of revenue (BoR), communication and works, local government and community development*** to the outh Punjab's new secretariat at Multan. The Punjab government also had plans to initiate work for the construction of new buildings for the secretariats in Multan and Bahawalpur on immediate basis during that fiscal year.

Shah M Qureshi also called on PPP and PMLN politicians from South Punjab to help the government establish the new province and form political consensus in this regard. Days earlier, the foreign minister had announced that a bill for the creation of the new province would be tabled in the National Assembly but that day never saw dawn during PTI's government. With a lot of work yet to be done, the PTI was sent home in April 2022 – the setting up the new Saraiki Suba was no more on the cards of new incumbents.

The end-story was: the controversy that surrounded the Punjab government's plans regarding the future of an administratively and financially autonomous south Punjab was not likely to move ahead with the withdrawal of notifications that reportedly rolled back the powers to be devolved to the people of this area. Once CM Buzdar said that '**human error**' was responsible for those notifications. One notification had '**erroneously taken back**' the order issued in September (2020) to administratively separate the province's three divisions — Multan, Bahawalpur and D.G. Khan — with split secretariats at the divisional headquarters of Multan and Bahawalpur.

The other notification amended the rules of business for south Punjab, limiting the authority of officers appointed in the South Punjab secretariat. The CM announced the formation of a ministerial committee that was supposed to come up with recommendations for reinforcing the separate administrative set-ups for the southern districts and devolving more functions and departments to improve governance and resolve problems at the local level.

The PTI had won the majority of seats in the national and provincial legislatures from south Punjab in the 2018 elections on the promise of creating a new **Janoobi Punjab province**. Although it ring-fenced the share of the southern districts in the provincial development budget in accordance with their population, the administration continued to delay bringing the issue of the new province to the legislature for Punjab's division into more parts.

Not only did it take CM Buzdar administration two years to set up a separate secretariat for the region, the officers working there had limited powers to take administrative or financial decisions in their jurisdiction. This led to frustration even within the ranks of the ruling party. Indeed, the division of a province was never easy and required much political give and take and several changes in the country's constitutional and legal framework. But a fully functional and independent south Punjab secretariat equipped with complete administrative and financial powers could have been the first effective step BUT the intentions were NOT honest.

Much later....

**On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2021:** A well-attended procession reminded PM Khan and the ruling PTI of its electoral promise to establish a Seraiki province in its first 100 days of the government in Layyah's Kot Sultan town. The rally was organised by the **Seraiki Sooba Saang Committee** in which a large number of people -- women, students, intellectuals, journalists and local political activists -- were present. The rally was supported by the *Seraiki Lok Saanjh, Seraiki Students Council, Seraiki Wasaib Movement, Bazam-i-Farid, Seraiki Action Committee, Sindhu Bachai Tarla and Seraiki Tareemat Saanjh* - small local groups of the areas around.

*[Point to Ponder: if there were so diverging groups in one small district, not joining hands under one banner or putting support for SPPM, one can understand how serious the Seraiki people were for their cause; may be it that was why they all failed to get separate province for them – as a collective cause.]*

The issue of the Seraiki province had been hovering for many years. Initially, the PPP passed a bill in 2012 in the upper house of parliament to carve out a *Seraiki* province. Not Just that, the PPP tabled another bill in the Senate in May 2019 in order to accelerate the efforts to make the province but it remained a fruitless exercise. The PTI also came up with a south Punjab secretariat, the future of which was equally uncertain. ***It was all a story of the false promises of the province – and for vested interests of many from within the Seraiki political gurus.***

Had the PTI wished to survive and sustain its vote bank in this part of Punjab, it could work to fulfil the said promise; ***all political parties had empty slogans in their bags.***

In fact, the *Seraiki Sooba* could serve as a corrective measure to the past injustices inflicted upon the *Seraikis*; one speaker in the procession opined.

*'Our leadership is silent over the matter as they had been awarded ministries. If the prime minister wants political stability in the region – Seraiki Province is the answer.'*

### **IK DITCHED HIS (INVESTOR) FRIENDS:** **FAMOUS SUGAR REPORT (2020)**

*[In Pakistan, Sugar cane support price was Rs.180 per kg in December 2019. Industrial standard says that from 400kg sugar cane, 56kg Sugar is refined; means that each kg sugar costs Rs:32.14 as per sugar cane price. 15% (Rs:4.82) was the industry running cost - bringing the sugar's final price at about Rs:37 per kg. Adding 17% Taxes on sugar, bringing its price for the consumer at Rs:43.29.*

*But in 2019, sugar was being sold at Rs:60 [on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019 for reference], while the Government of Pakistan used to pay additional subsidy to sugar industry; the industry also cheat the farmers every year by creating delays in buying sugar cane.*

*If the sugar cane is left lying in the sun for some days after harvest, it loses weight by losing water content and this factor nets less cash for the farmer. The sugar industry shows a lower production, selling more than 35% sugar production as undeclared - by declaring a low conversion %age in Industry calculations. In Pakistan, the sugar industry easily avoids taxes on this undeclared sugar production.*

*It is also on media record that some sugar mills had not delivered Sugar stock on contract to the Government of Pakistan for more than a year and availed stay orders from the courts to avoid punishment or paying of taxes. Thus, it was logical for the Government to take strict action against the sugar mafia that was cheating the entire Pakistani nation. However, the successive Governments in Pakistan were never seen willing to take action against the cheating sugar industry as most of the industry was (and still) owned by first tier politicians, government bureaucrats and policy makers.]*

**On 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020;** Prime Minister Imran Khan constituted a three-member committee headed by Director General FIA as convener to conduct an inquiry into an abnormal hike in sugar prices during past two months. The other two members of the committee included a senior officer of the Intelligence Bureau [IB] and the Director General Anti-Corruption, Punjab. The convener was allowed to co-opt for any other member for the completion of given assignment.

The Terms of Reference [TOR] included to identify and fix responsibility, if any, on any individual, officer or organisation or any purported benefit to a private party, besides suggesting a way forward for future course of action. The committee was asked to look into the matter from various angles, keeping in view mainly 14 questions, which included: was the then export of sugar justified? Any subsidy was given on its export and its impact, with potential beneficiaries within or outside government.

The other questions for the committee were: whether the production this year was low as compared to past years. Was minimum support price sufficient? Did the mills purchase sugarcane at exorbitantly higher prices than minimum support price; if yes, reasons thereof? Reasons for the mills not purchasing sugarcane, for a limited period of a few weeks from farmers and its impact, if any, on sugar price? Basis for determination of ex-mill price and reasons for increase in ex-mill price? Market manipulation / cartelisation

by sugar mills? Impact of tax increase on sugar price at ex-mill / retail level? Hoarding at wholesale or retail level and within sugar mills, vis-à-vis stocks of last year etc etc.

**On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020:** GEO TV News told that, as per report of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), some top PTI members were among those who gained from the the then sugar crisis in the country. The more influential were Jahangir Khan Tareen [JKT] and a brother of Minister for National Food Security Khusro Bakhtiar.

The report also claimed that the companies belonging to Moonis Elahi — a PMLQ's MNA and son of the then sitting Speaker Punjab Assembly — profited from the sugar crisis. The document didn't mention under whose influence Punjab government had issued subsidies amounting to Rs:3 billion to sugar mills or why the Economic Coordination Council [ECC] approved the decision to export sugar. Tareen, PTI's former General Secretary, said that out of the Rs:3bn subsidy to the sugar mills, Rs:2.5bn were given in the PMLN's government. A tweet from JKT said:

Some points to note on sugar inquiry report:

@JahangirKTareen

1. My companies exported 12.28% while my market share is 20% so less than I could have.
2. Export was on First come First serve basis.
3. Of the total Rs:3 bn subsidy rec'd Rs:2.5 Bn came when N was in power and I was in opposition.

The PM was also sent the investigation report on the wheat crisis, compiled by a three-member bench headed by DG FIA Wajid Zia. As per report, the crisis originated due to poor planning by the centre and provincial governments. The Punjab Food Department was unable to control flour mills and started collecting wheat after a delay of 20-22 days. The food department failed to come up with a process for the demand and supply of the crop and products; they did not take decisions as the situation was deteriorating.

Former Secretary Food Naseem Sadiq and ex-food Director Zafar Iqbal were blamed in the report for failing to handle the wheat crisis. Furthermore, the Punjab food minister Samiullah Chaudhry did not take the measures necessitated by the situation. "No single individual can be held responsible for procuring inadequate wheat from Sindh," the report said.

In fact, the Sindh government had not taken any decision on the summary for wheat procurement; thus, responsibility of buying wheat in low stock couldn't be placed on any single person. Khyber PK Food Secretary Akbar Khan and Food Director Sadaat Khan were also held responsible for not procuring wheat in accordance with the government's target and plans.

Amid the growing public anger, instead of firing Khusro Bakhtiar from his ministry and immediately ordering an inquiry against him, PM Khan made him minister for Economic Affairs instead, while Samiullah Chaudry resigned as Punjab's food minister.

Now details of the **FIA Committee's Report:** In its 32-page report, the committee on sugar price hike termed *Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf* [PTI] government's decision to allow export of sugar unjustified as it caused a 30% increase in its price. The report said:

*"The exporters of sugar gained benefit in two ways: first they were able to gain subsidy and secondly, they made profit from the increasing sugar prices in the local market.*

*Sugar mill owners who availed maximum subsidy had political clout and influence in decision making and they tried to gain maximum benefit in a very limited time."*

The committee report revealed that PTI's former Secretary General JKT and Federal Minister for National Food Security Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar were among the main beneficiaries. Both these stalwarts went away with Rs:1.03 billion subsidy on the export of sugar, paid out from the taxpayers money, which was equal to 41% of the total subsidy the government of Punjab paid to sugar barons.

On the recommendations of the Inquiry Committee, an inquiry commission was instituted by PM Khan under the Commission of Inquiry Act of 2017, showing his determination to fix the culprits. Nine teams were doing forensic audit, including the sugar mills owned by JK Tareen. The Commission was given 40 days to complete its work.

It transpired that respective government's decision to allow export of sugar led to increase in the retail price. Before the decision the per kilo sugar price was Rs:55 in December 2018 that jumped to Rs:71.44 per kg in June 2019 – an increase of Rs:16.47 per kg or 30%, according to the findings. Moreover, despite the clear calculations of the stock position after deducting the strategic reserves, Sugar Advisory Board in its meeting of June 2019 did not ban the export of sugar.

There were signs of "**cartelization and manipulation**" by sugar mills and the ex-mill sugar price determination formula was also "**unfair**", according to the findings. For concrete evidence, the inquiry committee recommended forensic audit of the mills. Very few top heads controlled the industry in fact; six groups were in control of 51% of the production of sugar in Pakistan.

*[JDW Group of Jahangir Khan Tareen controlled 19.97% production; RYK Group of Khusro Bakhtiar controlled 12.24%; Al-Moiz Group controlled 6.8%, Tandlianwala Group 4.9%, Omni Group 1.7% and the Sharif family owned 4.5% of the production]*

The FIA's inquiry noted that many policies were conveyed to the sugar mills from the platform of the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association [PSMA]. The strike call that the sugar mills once gave to bring sugarcane prices down was observed by the mills owned by JK Tareen, Sharif family and Khusro Bakhtiar sugar mills initially.

The increase in the sales tax rate from 8% for filers and 11% for non-filers to 17% did not contribute much to the ex-mill price increase, which was largely made before the budget. The agony was that neither the provincial nor the federal government had any clue how the ex-factory prices of the sugar was calculated by them collectively. In fact the ex-mill pricing formula was manipulated jugglery; it was "**faulty and unfair**". The assumptions to set that ex-mill price were wrong. The federal government had allowed to include the GST into the ex-mill price which was not right; the report urged. The report said:

*"The calculation of the ex-mill price provided by the PSMA cannot be relied upon unless full audit of all determinants of ex-mill price are calculated in a financial audit."*

The Punjab government also gave Rs:3 billion subsidy on export of sugar at Rs:5.35 per kg to the millers. The sugar mills owned by JK Tareen availed Rs:561 million subsidy, which was equal to 22% of the total allocated amount. The sugar mills owned by Food Minister Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar availed Rs:452.3 million subsidy, which was 18.3% of the whole chunk. Astonishingly; the Punjab government was giving out the subsidy for export of sugar at a time when the price of sugar was increasing in the domestic market; the Chief Minister Punjab should have been caught by neck in such situations. The report said:

*"The committee is of the considered opinion based on documentary evidence that the export of sugar was not justified as the sugarcane production was expected to be low in the upcoming harvesting season....that despite 2.7% reduction in the cultivation area this year the sugarcane production increased 1% till 25th of February. The crushing season continued in March as well."*

The committee underlined that the sugar millers purchased off-the-books sugarcane and its production was also kept off-the-books to evade the General Sales Tax [GST]. It was the responsibility of the Cane Commissioner to record full sugarcane production while the FBR was responsible for recording the sugar production.

The fact remained that quantity of sugar produced was sufficient for annual national consumption. The retail price increase from Rs:55 in December 2018 to Rs:74.64 per kg in January 2020 was not at all justified while major increase was enforced much before the start of the new crushing season.

The committee also found that the Rs:190 per 40 kg sugarcane support price was sufficient but this price increase [in sugarcane] was delayed, depriving the farmers from making an informed decision. Also that the sugarcane was purchased at about 15% higher than the support price [of Rs:190 per 40kg] but it observed that the mill owners were also "**larger growers of sugarcane**", which could "*potentially be a reason for higher than the support price buying of sugarcane*".

That's why recommendations were made for proper forensic audit to examine the possibility of a grower-cum-miller buying the commodity at higher price. The inquiry report rejected the PSMA's claim that it closed mills operations for few weeks due to the less availability of the sugarcane; in fact the mills were closed to bring prices of the key input down.

It was also revealed that the provincial governments had not maintained any record of stocking the sugar despite it was required under the law. There was likelihood of further increase in sugar prices before Ramadhan [April-May 2020] so hard crackdown against the major players was needed.

As apparently evident from above, two reports on the sugar and wheat crises in the country were made public, exposing ruling PTI's bigwig Tareen, Khusro Bakhtiar, PMLQ's Monis Elahi and their relatives as being involved in the scam and benefiting from export subsidies at a time when the commodity was short in the country. Prime Minister Imran Khan was waiting for a detailed forensic report on the matter before taking action against anyone. The PM Khan vowed that no powerful lobby would be able to gain undue profit and create an artificial shortage of essential items in the future.

Next day, in a surprise move, the prime minister reshuffled his cabinet for a third time since forming his government in August 2018, removing among others the minister for national food security, Bakhtiar, who was also named as a beneficiary in the FIA reports, instead assigning him the portfolio of economic affairs which news was in offing.

**On 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020:** PTI stalwart Jahangir Tareen acknowledged he was no longer as close to Prime Minister Imran Khan as he used to be but maintained that the premier was still his friend and that he would continue to stand by the PM's cause. Tareen was talking exclusively to **Dawn News TV's** Meher Bokhari in her show **NewsEye** after a Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team released reports on the sugar and wheat crises and beneficiaries of subsidies obtained by the industry's bigwigs and just hours after news began circulating that Tareen had been sacked as the **Chairman of the Agriculture Task Force** in the light of those findings.

Rejecting that he was fired from any position '**because he was never appointed in the first place**', There had been media talks that **PM Khan and members of the FIA inquiry commission had been threatened with dire consequences if the reports were made public**. The sugar cartel had also

threatened the committee that if the report was issued, the commodity would be vanished from the market. But the FIA reports were made public on the directives of the prime minister who, according to Special Assistant on Accountability Mirza Shahzad Akbar, had ordered stern action against those found involved in the crises ***irrespective of their status and party affiliation***.

Mr Tareen had no issues with Imran Khan; however, he acknowledged that:

***".... he has a long-running conflict with Azam Khan, the Principal Secretary of Imran Khan. When we came into power, I had a different vision on how to govern the country. He (Azam Khan) has a different one. I had told Mr Khan that the government's job was not to enact incremental change but to transform the entire country.... I have always been against bureaucratic hurdles."***

The sugar baron also revealed that a vast majority, about 70%, of the prime minister's cabinet agreed with his vision for the country. But the prime minister fully trusted Azam Khan thus the anti-JKT lobby had become dominant. Tareen also criticized the inquiry reports on sugar and wheat crises, calling it a report without context; 'The weakness of this report is that it has no flesh, it consists of bare bones,' Tareen said. He also said there was no correlation between sugar exports and the rise in the commodity's price because there had been no shortage of sugar in the country; adding that: ***'Sugar prices rose only because sugarcane's price increased - 80 per cent of sugar's cost of production is the price of sugarcane'***.

Tareen rubbished opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif's claim that he (Tareen) had been given a ***'gift of Rs:18 billion'*** by Prime Minister Imran through subsidies, saying no player in the industry received direct transfers.

See a media comment on media pages (FB) sent by one Sohail Anwer **on that day of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021:**

***"Jahangir Tareen was Khan's best friend. He helped Khan in most tough times. He even helped Khan become the PM. Did JKT cheat Imran Khan? Did he refuse something IK wanted for himself? None of that.***

***So, what happened? What went wrong? Pakistaniat happened. IK's love for Pakistan happened.***

***JKT's name along with others came in a report exposing those who harmed Pakistan's treasury and tax payer money. That was enough for Imran Khan to break his own friendship. He himself published the report exposing the name of his friend among those of other parties. Why? Just for Pakistan. Just so poor tax-payer money is saved.***

***And guess what. No one mentioned other names. Multiple names from all parties were exposed in the same report."***

**On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022:** Former prime minister and PTI Chairman Imran Khan revealed the reason behind his differences with former aides Aleem Khan and Jahangir Tareen and said that both were seeking ***'illegal benefits from him'***. Speaking during a podcast (***a program made available in digital format for download over the Internet***) with GEO TV that day, the former premier revealed that differences with both estranged leaders developed when he, as PM, refused to entertain their requests; ***'Aleem Khan expected me to legalize his 300-acre land near Ravi - from then onwards, I developed differences with him.'***

Talking **about Jahangir Tareen**, the PTI chairman stated that:

***"...his problem was the Sugar Mill Scandal on which a commission was also formed. Tareen stood with those who are the biggest dacoits in the country. When I ordered a probe into the matter, differences developed with Tareen."***

Mr Khan said that even if PTI lose the election, they would not give tickets to those who enter politics for personal gain. ***'Our system is such that money is spent in Senate elections. But Yousuf Raza Gilani's son was spared after he was caught bribing lawmakers.'***

On the other count, just next day on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022; Aleem Khan challenged Imran Khan to have a live debate with him and Jahangir Tareen regarding the allegations levelled against them; he was addressing a press conference. The separated PTI member revealed that the land Imran Khan was talking about was his property since 2010.

***"I was with Imran Khan in the Opposition from 2010 to 2018 and I own the property since 2010; the PTI chairman also visited the property when his father died. Did I know 10 years ago that Imran Khan will become the prime minister in 2018?" he questioned.***

***(Correcting the figures, he said) that he owns 3,000 acres of land and not just 300 acres, mentioning that he did not acquire lands but instead bought them from private landlords. This land is now with Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) — which was formed by Imran Khan — (but) how RUDA sold this land to private developers when it bought the land at the govt price. An investigation should be done regarding the developers who were given the land."***

Aleem Khan also revealed that the land was given to favoured private developers. ***"If your [Imran Khan] golf course can be constructed under RUDA then why not my housing society?"*** Aleem Khan questioned. He said if Imran Khan wanted to unveil the truth, then he should sit with him and Tareen to hold talks.