

Scenario 263

CM USMAN BUZDAR FACTOR

ORIGIN & LITTLE BACKGROUND:

On 17th 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 Balochistan, had no access to basic civic facilities; health facilities were so poor that the local women suffered from night blindness due to malnutrition and in the early '80s, leprosy was diagnosed amongst most 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 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 incredulity 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'.

On 10th April 2022: A long-drawn-out political drama was over in Pakistan; Prime Minister Imran Khan was removed from office following a vote of no confidence in the Parliament. Next day, the opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif sworn in as new prime minister of the country. However, it was not an end of political turmoil in Pakistan, a country of about 240 million inhabitants. After various attempts to stay in power, Imran Khan was finally voted out - more than 100 members of Parliament loyal to Khan had resigned and walked out of Parliament in protest.

The basic, BUT the MOST PROJECTING, charge against Imran Khan was his mismanagement, especially in Punjab where he had appointed one **Usman Buzdar as (dummy) Chief Minister**. He knew that CM Buzdar would not be able to deliver but he allowed him to continue – perhaps Imran Khan wanted to make all pivotal decisions for Punjab from his Banni Gala residence in Islamabad. CM Buzdar was only the rubber stamp. However, the scheme didn't work and here was the first point of difference between the Army Chief Gen Bajwa; his die-heart companions like Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Jehangir Treen were also amongst the silent dissidents.

Imran Khan assumed power in mid-2018 promising a '**New Pakistan**' and an end to the corruption that was for decades been part of Pakistan's politics; but he failed to live up to that promise. Even his chosen CM Buzdar was accused of widespread corruption, taking bribes for making bureaucratic appointments. Even members of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), had raised fingers over this menace. On top of this, Khan was vastly criticized for his handling of everything from the pandemic to soaring inflation in the country.

Shahbaz Sharif for a long time had been chief minister of Punjab, and the general perception prevailed that he was an effective administrator there. His brother Nawaz Sharif served as prime minister of Pakistan on three separate occasions - but had been convicted of corruption and was banned from public office. Shahbaz had also faced allegations of cronyism and corruption - but this has been a usual practice in Pakistan.

Imran Khan fell back on a tried-and-tested tactic in Pakistani politics: Blame America. He claimed to have been unseated by a foreign conspiracy aimed at forcing him from power. And it was America, Khan said, that was really behind the no-confidence motion filed by opposition lawmakers. He accused US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu of being involved in the plot to overthrow his government, suggesting that Lu had warned Pakistan's ambassador in Washington that there would be implications if Khan survived the no-confidence vote. However, The US dismissed this claim.

Khan also said, the Pakistani military was (still) overwhelmingly depending on the US, and as such Pakistan's Generals would want to maintain some semblance of good relations with Washington. But at the top level in politics it was fair to say relations with the US were not good – '**terrible**' was the word Khan used in his 2021's interview.

Imran Khan certainly had a base of support that was very loyal, but doubtful factor was - whether it would outweigh that of the other parties put together – or a coalition of about 13 opposition parties could gain

enough seats to oust Khan in the next election. The media analysts held that Khan never governed with a large mandate, too – his party did not win a majority of seats in Parliament thus required the support of smaller parties. However, many people in Pakistan bought the conspiracy that it was the US that toppled Khan. The fact remained that it was very difficult to win Punjab given the mismanagement through his beloved choice of Usman Buzdar as CM for which he was blamed for - and without Punjab, there would be ashes in the Pakistan's governance basket; for more details see **Prof Ayesha Jalal's** (Tufts University...) analysis on media pages of 13th April 2022.

No doubt, in a nation that had been comforted into political apathy, Imran Khan awakened the masses and brought their attention to the widespread corruption, institutional conflicts, and economic distress in Pakistan; Khan remained an important piece at the country's political chessboard. But, Confucius had said: **'By three methods we may learn wisdom. First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest'**. History is the biggest source of wisdom where mistakes and their stark consequences lie bare. Now see Imran Khan's scenario of 3.5 years' rule over Pakistan in the light of above maxim. [*Mir Adnan Aziz's* article in **daily DAWN** of 5th August 2022 is referred for more details]

- Pakistan's decades-long abysmal and unaccountable governance has left on us an equally checkered institutional history. The military rule too but mostly autocratic civilian regimes have always harboured ambitions and actively worked towards having a subservient and submissive judiciary and similar state organs – a proven fact that all top-level institutional appointments are based on self-interest or personal whims of rulers or on monetary calculations. This policy has been pursued invariably by country's political elite belonging to two families; military rulers however, made selection of their buddy subordinates in uniform – not their family members – but the consequences were monumental disasters and tragedies.

Subsequent history proved that the ruling coalition [PDM]'s constant emphasis on the integrity of a few honorable SC judges was in no way their newfound love for honesty and professionalism; see Imran Khan's cases in that perspective. In 1997, the military leadership ignored President Leghari's advice to provide security to Chief Justice Sajjad Shah who was hearing contempt and corruption cases against Nawaz Sharif. Pakistan and the people still bear the terrible consequences of the unchallenged and ignominious storming of the Supreme Court and the subsequent eviction of Sajjad Shah as the Chief Justice of Pakistan. ***Can that episode be taken as medal for the democracy in Pakistan?***

- That PMLN affront saw no justice as it continued its brand of democracy with renewed immunity.

More vigorously, the ECP, mandated to keep an annual check and balance on party funding, remained mum about the means of funding of all the ruling political parties. It also remained a mute spectator as those embroiled in corruption and money laundering had taken over the highest offices of this country – surely the ECP was and still is the most powerful civil institution BUT it behaved as a ruler family's servant-room.

The history witnessed that in Pakistan, convicts and absconders dictated governing policies to the political elite. PTI leadership held that theirs was the only political party in Pakistan's history that had always declared their funding and the proceeds audited by known accountancy firms – but the ECP and courts went unilaterally against the PTI.

History proves that it is not hostile military might but poverty that has subdued many nations into fragmentation or slavery. Ruling a nation requires honesty, wisdom and far-sightedness. What could be a greater mockery than being in power, the legitimate authority, yet blatantly misusing it for personal gains as has been the norm in Pakistan. In any election, general or *'zimni'*, the whole numbers of votes are not

in love for any particular name or leader – but for people’s hatred for corruption and dishonest politicians which are tested and testified through their past policies for their own family benefits or for public at large.

On 8th April 2023; Maliha Baig’s analysis on the media pages attracted the intelligentsia for **Corruption & Terrorism Charges**, Imran Khan was accused of:

- Members of the ruling party PMLN filed a case against Mr Khan contending that he had failed to disclose the assets in declarations submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan [ECP].
- Illegally selling \$2m unique antique watch, gold pen, ring and cufflinks given to him by the Saudi Crown Prince, Muhammad Bin Salman.
- The sale of state gifts by Mr Khan, known as **Tosha Khana Case**, became a national political scandal, and the ECP suspended Mr Khan from the parliament accusing him of corrupt practices.
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- The opposition parties alleged that Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, misappropriated AL-QADIR TRUST funds. As per report by Geo News, the charges against Khan and the others showed that the accused allegedly adjusted Rs: 50 billion — 190 million pounds at the time — sent by Britain’s National Crime Agency (NCA) to the government of Pakistan.
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- In another high-profile case Khan was charged with **"terrorism"** by the police, a day after thousands of PTI supporters allegedly clashed with security forces; dozens of party workers and senior leaders were named and arrested for committing that unique type of terrorism.

Imran Khan’s reasons for handpicking Buzdar from obscurity 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 underdeveloped region that did not have 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.'**

See one Lahorite 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 Punjabi 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 national food security minister. The *Mahaz* opted to merge with PTI after dissolution of the previous assemblies (2013-18).

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.

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 Warraich, contended that the premier was told by his wife to pick a man whose name begins with the Urdu letter '*aer*'; 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.

MEDIA'S HARSH CRITICISM ON BUZDAR:

On 18th 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 published in the daily '**DAWN**' dated 9th 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 Chaudhrys from Gujrat."

CM Buzdar was seen as an unassuming, modest and quiet person; was often felt knowledge-less 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."

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.

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 party colleagues were not happy with him and considered him an ineffective manager, ill-equipped to handle the Punjab's earlier chief ministers did. 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 his boss'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.

Aleem Khan was believed to be 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 speculation, 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, with their own agendas and interests.

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 party that:

"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 remained in saddles.

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 time of perceived weakness. 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, if not necessarily optimal, ways. See a media comment here:

"A lot is made of how a disproportionate amount of attention was paid to Lahore and, it was, as can be seen when comparing Lahore's infrastructure with any other Pakistani city. But both PMLQ and PMLN 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, 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 directly and remotely controlled the province from Islamabad**. The federal interference in the province's administration increased to a new high after wholesale 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 major bone of contention between Imran Khan and the Chaudhrys 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'***.

Journalist Sohail Warraich 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 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.

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 with him.

WASIM AKRAM PLUS (?) - The fact remained that whenever Buzdar's critics painted him as a failure with nothing tangible to show, Imran Khan mostly turned to cricket comparisons. ***'He will prove to be Wasim Akram Plus'***, the PTI leader said on multiple occasions, comparing Buzdar to another legend in Pakistan cricket, Wasim Akram, whom he had picked from relative anonymity as Pakistan's cricket team captain. But many compare Buzdar's selection from Barhi with another cricketer, Mansoor Akhtar, in whose abilities the *Kaptaan* also had full faith but often failed.

BUZDAR QUILS THE PTI:

Since taking office as Punjab chief minister in 2018, 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 the man who picked him, Imran Khan.

... But he was amongst the first lot of politicians who had ditched Imran Khan keeping the knife inside his back; see the details here.

On 2nd June 2023: Former Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar announced that he would be going to quit politics. Addressing a press conference in Lahore, Buzdar, who did not specify if he was also leaving the party, said, ***'Keeping in view the situation in the country — we have always done the politics of virtue and encourage it. But in the present political situation, I have decided to quit politics'***.

Condemning the violent incidents of 9th May instant — when civil and military installations were vandalised by enraged protestors — he asserted that he always stood with the Pakistan Army and would keep on doing so. Commenting on the ongoing political crises in the country, Buzdar said that all the stakeholders to set aside their ego, [think beyond] their parties and work for a better future of Pakistan. He also extended his best wishes to everyone. Referring to the countrywide arrests made against those allegedly involved in 9th May incidents, Buzdar wanted that relief should be provided to all the innocent citizens who were in jails and called for their immediate release.

The announcement came as several PTI leaders, including Shireen Mazari and Ali Haider Zaidi, had quit politics altogether while also separating their paths from the PTI over the said 9th May incidents. Other PTI leaders Aamer Mehmood Kiani, Barrister Maleeka Bokhari, Imran Ismail, Murad Raas and Malik Amin Aslam had also left the party while Asad Umar and Pervez Khattak had resigned from their party positions but stayed in the party. Buzdar's decision to quit politics had come a day after Khattak, former KP chief minister, resigned from his party positions.

Buzdar's critics and the media mostly painted Buzdar — who had 'survived' many speculations, mostly originating from within his own party, of his early departure from the chief minister's office — as an "inept

and ineffective” administrator. See a daily newspaper’s EDITIRIAL dated 30th March 2022, published much before this political-quit:

"After an abrupt exit from office, Usman Buzdar is likely to fade into forgetfulness, three and a half years after Prime Minister Imran Khan handpicked him to head the PTI government in the country's politically most important province of Punjab.

- *[About 10 days before NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE, the ruling PTI had announced PMLQ leader Ch Pervaiz Elahi as its candidate for Punjab chief minister after incumbent Usman Buzdar presented his resignation to the prime minister.]*

After backing him every step of the way — at the cost of alienating many PTI lawmakers — the embattled PM has been forced to dump Mr Buzdar as he tries to save his government in Punjab and Islamabad in the face of the fierce political challenge mounted against him by the opposition as well as PTI rebels.

*Mr Khan's stated reasons for choosing the then politically unknown Usman Buzdar were simple: he came from one of Punjab's most backward areas.... At least that was the explanation given by the PTI chief to his party members who preferred a strong administrator..... Yet many suspected, with reason, that Mr Khan had selected the soft-spoken Mr Buzdar to avert factional fights within the PTI and **also to control Punjab remotely from the centre since the outgoing chief minister lacked political clout in the party....***

*His critics and the media have mostly painted Mr Buzdar — as an inept and ineffective administrator. Indeed, the criticism is not totally out of place. Yet, for a small-town politician constrained by his total inexperience in the affairs of the state, a lack of connections in the Punjab bureaucracy, and deep economic turmoil, he leaves behind a mixed legacy.... His sins of omission and commission as provincial chief executive aside, he represents **a new experiment in Punjab that went wrong both because of his own limitations and the failings of his leader. Few will mourn his exit.**"*

In June 2022, Buzdar (the ex-PTI leader) and his family also had corruption cases registered against them for 'unlawful and illegal misappropriation of state land in Dera Ghazi Khan'. Earlier that month, a Lahore accountability court had extended his interim pre-arrest bail in an inquiry of illegal assets by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) with a warning to him to join the investigation without fail.

On 2nd August 2023: The PTI cancelled the basic membership of 22 party leaders from South Punjab, including former Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar and ex-federal minister Khusró Bakhtiar for violating the party policy. These leaders were warned of legal action in case they use the party's name or their designation. PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan issued a termination notice to them while immediately suspending their party membership.

A number of PTI stalwarts including Buzdar and Khusró Bakhtiar, had waved good-bye to the party after its alleged involvement in the riots that took place in the wake of party chief Imran Khan's arrest by the paramilitary Rangers from the Islamabad High Court premises on 9th May 2023.