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**Getting out of the grey list**

In its plenary session in October 2019, the FATF – while noting that Pakistan had made progress on 21 action plans out of 27 given by the agency – decided to keep the country on the grey list asking it to complete action on the remaining six points by February 2021, when another review will be made to assess the effort and to decide the issue.

President of FATF Marcus Pleyer told a post-meeting online news conference: “The plenary recognized that Pakistan has made progress. The government has now completed 21 of 27 items of its action plan. It definitely means the world has become safer. But the six outstanding items are very serious deficiencies that still have to be repaired. The FATF members had decided by consensus that Pakistan needed to work on the six outstanding items before this agency would consider sending its team for an on-site visit to review progress and determine whether to remove the country from the grey list.

“As long as we see that the country is progressing with the action items – and we have seen progress with Pakistan – we give them a chance to repair the outstanding issues.”

The statement clearly indicates that the February review will not be the final deadline, meaning that if Pakistan was found deficient on some points and having made progress on others, the agency will keep encouraging the country to complete action on the remaining ones. This was a reassuring statement which removes the scepter of being pushed into the black list in case some of the points remain unimplemented. However, Pakistan would surely want to get out of the grey list in February. The completion of action on 21 points out of 27 by October 2019 was a reiteration of the commitment and sincerity of purpose by Pakistan in implementation of the FATF benchmarks.

Pakistan realizes that being in the grey list or relegation to the black list is not in its own interests and it cannot afford any slackness in efforts to get out of this categorization. The black list comprises countries considered non-cooperative and supportive of terror financing as well as money-laundering activities. Placement on that list triggers international economic sanctions and restriction in nations' dealings with foreign lending institutions. Even remaining on the grey list for a long time is against the interests of the country.

Pakistan was put on the grey list in 2018 by the FATF on a resolution moved by the US; the agency gave Pakistan a 27-point action plan to curb money-laundering and plug terror financing avenues. This was ostensibly the consequence of world politics. The US and its allies wanted to put pressure on Pakistan to vigorously pursue their mantra of ‘do more’, notwithstanding the fact that Pakistan had already done enough to check terrorism in its tracks.

India, taking advantage of the situation, has been trying its best to have Pakistan pushed to the black list. But, courtesy the unflinching support of China, Turkey and Malaysia and improved relations between Pakistan and the US after the former played a pivotal role in facilitating the US-Taliban deal, India failed to achieve its objective.

The reality is that Pakistan has been a sincere partner in the ‘war on terror’ and has not only dismantled the infrastructure of terrorist outfits based in its territory but has also engaged in eliminating the remnants of their supporters within the country. During the last twenty years, the security forces conducted 1200 operations to root out terror outfits killing 18000 of them besides eliminating and capturing 1100 Al Qaeda operatives; Pakistan also shared intelligence with 70 countries.

The effort has cost the country 83000 lives including civilians and security personnel and financial loss to the tune of $126 billion. As revealed by the DG ISPR in a presser recently, over 371,000 intelligence-based operations were also conducted under Operation Radd-ul-Fasad. As a result, terrorists’ support bases, their facilitators, abettors and financiers have been eliminated and no organized terrorist infrastructure exists in Pakistan.

The Pakistan government has also taken all possible administrative and legal measures to check and block the sources of funding to the terrorist organizations. Pakistan has promulgated a presidential ordinance to amend the anti-terror legislation in order to include all UN-listed individuals and groups in the national listings of proscribed outfits and persons. The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) also took measures in keeping with the FATF regulations and issued Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Regulations 2018. The PTI government also had an anti-money laundering and terrorist financing law passed by parliament.

The 15-year jail term awarded to Hafiz Saeed and five others last November, incarceration for five years of a leader of the LeT on charges of terror financing last week as well as sentencing of six JUD operators for six months jail a few days ago also speaks volumes about the commitment of the government of Pakistan to fulfill its FATF obligations.

The recent initiative of the government to introduce uniform curriculum in all educational institutions including seminaries is yet another far-sighted move. It will not only ensure equal opportunities for the advancement of all segments of society but also help mainstream seminary students and impart them science education along with religious teachings to enhance the chances of their employability in the job market. Bringing seminaries under the government radar – some of which are alleged to have played a role in promoting militancy and terrorism – will surely help in checking the process of the radicalization of society. Pakistani authorities also feel confident that the actions taken by Pakistan to implement the remaining six points since last October will go a long way in satisfying the FATF.

In view of the fact that relations between Pakistan and the US are on an upward trajectory and the former has also done extensive lobbying with the member countries of the FATF and taken concrete steps in implementing the 27-point action plan, it can be hoped that Pakistan will manage to get out of the grey list in the next plenary meeting of the FATF.

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