

The Truth International

15th - 31st March 2022

No-Confidence Move
Government and opposition claim to succeed

Russia-Ukraine War
International community have to act cautiously
to avoid World War

IMF Programme
Negotiation on 7th review likely to fail

No-Confidence—Voting Awaited



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Yes or No Confidence?

By Hammad Ghaznavi



Finally, the no-confidence move against Prime Minister Imran Khan has been initiated in the National Assembly. Will PM Imran Khan be voted out of the office? Or will he survive the toughest test of his political career? Either way, history will be created as no elected Pakistani prime minister has ever completed his/her term, nor has there been a successful no-confidence move against an elected PM.

The more visible feature of the volatile political situation is the confusion in the ranks of ruling coalition. Khan's allies are evidently emitting suspicious signals. More importantly, PTI itself seems to be splitting at the seams. First, look at the government allies. The Chaudhries of Gujrat seem struggling to find a good deal in the post-Imran setup. Pervez Elahi has repeatedly said that the party will decide its position on the no-confidence move when the time comes. MQM has also categorically said that it will decide who to side with in due course of time. BAP's stance in Balochistan is no different. Pir Pagara of GDA avoided meeting the PM and left for his hometown when Imran Khan was in Karachi. The coalition partners' indecision on the no confidence move is revealing.

PTI itself looks fractured. Jahangir Tareen group has been there for some time but now new factions are also raising heads – Aleem Khan group, Cheena group, Lali group, Faisalabad group, etc. From Amir Liaquat to Tahir Sadiq, quite a few PTI MNAs are getting more and more vocal against their own government. The other

day Finance minister Shaukat Tareen has criticized Imran Khan for condemning European Union in a public rally. Evidence of fissures in PTI is abundant. On the other hand, the opposition so far has managed to put up a united front, with PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto repeating Shehbaz Sharif's name as their consensus candidate for the premiership.

Imran Khan, however, seems ready to valiantly fight this battle of survival. For public consumption, he has taken a populist stance – the west has turned against him for saying 'Absolutely Not' when it comes to national interest. The PM had a special meeting with 'good' youtubers to spread this stance. His ministers are also busy drawing analogies between Imran Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, an alleged victim of an international conspiracy for being a champion of national interest. This tag of 'martyrdom' can be handy in the next elections.

It seems a no-holds-barred battle for IK. The government is considering keeping its members away from the parliament on the day of the voting on the no confidence motion, though many jurists consider such a move unconstitutional. Another option reportedly being discussed in the government circles to thwart the move sounds rather cheeky – Speaker Asad Qaisar may not count the votes of the party defectors in light of the floor crossing laws, though the forum concerned in this regard is Election Commission of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Imran Khan announced a 'mammoth' public gathering in front of the Parliament a day before the voting. While PML-N

president Shehbaz Sharif also hinted at a similar power show by the opposition.

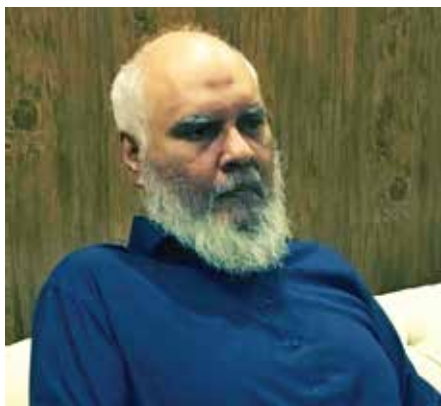
In this charged political atmosphere, the arrest of JUI MNAs from the Parliament lodges only added fuel to the fire. Maulana Fazlur Rehamn says, "we will not tolerate badmashi of the government." Analysts argue that Maulana seemed to be testing the claims of 'neutrality' of the garrison before D-day.

The opposition believed that the PTI government was installed by the 'selectors' after a controversial election in 2018. And it has come this far with the blessings of the 'same page'. But no more. That page is binned and the powers-that-be have gone neutral. This factor, many believe, will be the deciding factor as for the outcome of the no confidence move. "The army is with the government under the constitution," says Fawad Chaudhry. Imran Khan, addressing a public rally, said that only animals were neutral, having no sense of the good and the evil while humans stood with the forces of good. Meanwhile, the DG ISPR reiterated that the army had no role in politics. There are germs of anarchy in this scenario.

The real test of the political forces has begun. The opposition shall also strictly follow the law to dislodge the government. If the government adopts highhanded methods to deal with the no confidence move, things can really get messy. And if the mess multiplies, who will clean it up and restore order? Politicians need to handle it all with maturity by following the constitutional path.

The conspiracy against the Kuptaan

By M A Niazi



Look, I'm not objecting to the cut in the petrol price and electricity tariff that was announced by Imran Khan. But I do think that we need to keep in mind who's doing the announcing. Not only does the Kuptaan carry out U-turns, but he has extolled them as the mark of a true leader. I hope there's no U-turn on this. I don't know where he's going to get the money from, so long as it isn't from me. He hasn't made any recoveries of the money salted abroad by the looters and plunderers to pay for the subsidies.

He has his hands full otherwise, what with the opposition planning to bring a no-confidence motion against him. Well, that's what the opposition is supposed to do, and what else is expected of looters and plunderers? But he expected better of the Multan Sultans, who went down to ignoble defeat in the final of the PSL, to give Shaheen Afridi's Lahore Qalanders their first win in seven editions of the PSL. Remember, one of the main threats to us is that Shaheen might somehow knock Imran off the same page, and climb on himself. It's good to see that the Aussies have not been cowed by the officer trying to persuade them to throw their wickets away so that he could have a candidate for being on the same page.

I'm not too sure that being on the same page makes all that much difference. After all, no one knows whether Rodney Marsh was on the same page or not, but everyone knows that he once had the record for the most dismissals behind the stumps. Similarly, Shane Warne may or may not have been on the same page, but he did once hold the world record for the number of wickets in

Test cricket. However, both are now no more. That should give Imran some pause, for Warne was his junior, and Marsh a playing contemporary, though very much his senior. Marsh took 95 catches off the bowling of the great fast bowler Dennis Lillee, and Lillee is still around. Which should be a great encouragement for Imran, whose hair alone proclaims the belief (held by a surprising number of PTI followers) that fast bowlers live forever.

It's not just Ukraine and cricket that have suffered losses. A dear friend of mine lost his father-in-law. I had met the departed soul only once, before my friend's marriage, but after the match had been agreed. That was the only time a friend ever thought me worthy of being introduced to his future father-in-law. I must add that I met several other fathers-in-law of friends, but it was a random exercise, not deliberate on the part of either them or me. Still, that passing saddened me.

I was also saddened by the passing of Tayyib Gulzar Khan, who had been my neighbor several years ago. I am afraid that I did not benefit from his friendship as much as I might have, but he was a friendly soul, who had a kindly word for me whenever we met, and his passing was marked by an outburst of tributes on Facebook. I was

initially surprised by the variety and depth of his mourners, but then I remembered what a nice person he had been.

Coming back to the troubles that Imran is facing, I'm surprised that he hasn't pointed out the example of Sri Lanka, which is facing a major crisis because of foreign exchange, and is unable to import fuel, which has led to several hours of light being cut off, not to mention that inflation in January was 16.8 percent. Well, they've got a cricketing connection too, and Imran has played against them too. And so far he has manfully resisted the temptation to tell us that we're better off.

Anyhow, there's an explanation doing the rounds of why the opposition has planned a no-confidence motion: it's because the West is egging them on. The West doesn't like Imran. Imran, we mustn't forget, has not only liberated Kashmir but also personally defeated the West in Afghanistan.

Therefore, they hit back at him through their agents. Like in Peshawar, where the bomb was placed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Shehbaz Sharif together. Still, it was a horrible thing to happen, and the guilty must be punished. Also important is to stop it happening. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan hasn't helped. So what will?



Will the Opposition's No-Trust Motion Succeed?

It's a united opposition vs. a divided ruling party, and any outcome will definitely be a surprise to many



By Sarfraz Raja

Finally, it is done: After three years and seven months of premiership, Imran Khan will have to face a serious challenge of no confidence move. On 8 March, the opposition submitted in assembly secretariat a requisition to summon a National Assembly (NA) session signed by 86 members – and a resolution to conduct vote of no confidence against Prime Minister.

Under the Constitution, the Speaker has an important role to play. After a requisition signed by one-fourth members of total strength of the house, the Speaker has to call the session within 14 days. But the date of submission of requisition was important.

Pakistan is hosting an important conference of foreign ministers of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) on 22-24 March in Parliament House. Sources in National Assembly Secretariat say the staff requested the opposition to submit the requisition after 10 March so session could be called after 23rd March OIC meeting, but this sudden requisition was unexpected and a surprise for them.

Constitutionally, Speaker has maximum time of 21 days to complete the process of no confidence – 14 days

maximum to call the session after requisition and then to go for a voting on resolution of no confidence within not less than 3 and not more than 7 days.

So it has become a big worry for NA secretariat and speaker's office to meet this constitutional obligation with other planned engagement of OIC summit. How speaker would proceed in requisition session remains to be seen.

His office sources say this would be first session after death of a PTI MNA from Hangu, and as per parliamentary norms and precedents, such session adjourns after dua for the deceased member.

In short, it is all on the speaker's discretion either he takes up opposition agenda or not while adjournment date is also his discretion but if he takes up agenda of no confidence resolution, he has to go for a voting in next three to seven days.

Number crunching

After summoning of session for voting, number game is the most important matter with everyone having a calculator in hand. With the thin majority of

the ruling coalition, every single vote is important. It is important for Prime Minister to have a majority of total number of house that is 172 but actually its opposition who has to get that magic mark to oust the Prime Minister.

Right now, the government has strength of 178 members with PTI having 155 seats MQM 7, PMLQ 5, Balochistan Awami Party BAP 5, Grand Democratic Alliance GDA 3, Awami Muslim League of Sheikh Rasheed 1 and Jamhori Watan party 1, two out of 4 Independent members of assembly also supporting government till now.

On other hand opposition parties are having support of around 161 members where PML-N has 84, PPP has 56, Religious parties alliance MMA has 15 seats with 14 members of JUI. One member of Jamat-e-Islami, four of Balochistan National party led by Akhtar Mengal (previously on government benches), one of ANP and two independents are on their side as well.

But as opposition claims about two dozen members of PTI are in contact with them, 16 of them are with PMLN, 6 with PPP and 2 with JUI and if we consider these claims opposition



strength reaches around 185 which is much more than they need to achieve their objective to oust Imran Khan.

PTI faces defections

The voting process of no confidence resolution is not a secret ballot rather it would be an open voting. Constitution of Pakistan clarifies that if any member from government benches votes against party line, he or she would be disqualified. So if some of PTI members support opposition's move they will have to face a disqualification but it will have to follow a process.

If any government member stands against the party policy in a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister, parliamentary leader will send a reference to speaker against that member for a disqualification. Speaker could either reject this reference or send it to Election Commission for further processing within a month time and if he does not take any actions, the reference automatically transfers to ECP after 30 days.

Election commission after hearing would decide the disqualification matter. This process could take around two to three months.

Opposition sources when approached to discuss this matter say that in the case no

confidence fails, PTI would not go for disqualification of their dissident members as in such case they would lose majority and if opposition wins, there is a strong possibility that the assembly would be dissolved for new elections before any disqualification.

Secret contacts

Opposition has to complete and show its numbers while government has to keep intact its strength. That is why both sides have kept secrecy around their covert lobbying to strengthen their lineups.

Opposition sources say Nawaz Sharif in London has held some important meetings including with PTI dissident leader Jahan-gir Khan Tarin to settle a quid pro quo for their possible support, while Asif Ali Zardari and Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman remain active in Islamabad.

All these top leaders are in a compact to ensure their complete strength and also to get clear support and assurances from disaffected government members.

On the government side, on a special task assigned by PM Imran Khan, the Defense Minister Pervez Khattak had some meetings with party colleagues who were expressing their reservations and having contacts with opposition. These back

channels are still active and will remain so till the last moment.

History's lesson

Imran Khan is the third Prime minister of Pakistan to face a no confidence move. Pakistan People's Party's former chair and first women prime minister of the country Benazir Bhutto, who was once challenged with a no confidence motion way back in 1989 during her first term as Prime Minister. That no confidence was not only defeated but actually government got four votes more than their strength.

In 2006 then Premier Shoukat Aziz faced a no-confidence motion but that time too it was prove to be unsuccessful. The pressure, therefore, is on the opposition and stakes are high.

PM Imran Khan and his spokespersons are showing confidence, that the motion will be beaten back but insiders in government admit it is a serious move and anything is on cards, especially as there clearly have been defections among PTI ranks.

Both government and opposition have claims to surprise their opponents but political gurus believe anyone could be surprised as it has become seriously a close game which could go either way.





Showdown in Parliament

The die has been cast: PM Khan must demonstrate his majority in the National Assembly or lose office



By Noor Aftab

Prime Minister Imran Khan's detractors have started beating the drums of war. Khan is declaredly unbothered by his rivals' plan to oust him because he thinks that the 'toothless' opposition lacks capacity to pass a no-trust motion against him.

The opposition parties, on the other hand, believe that Prime Minister Imran Khan is a goner. They have submitted requisition for National Assembly session and no-trust motion against the prime minister.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has termed the opposition's newfound bonhomie with junior partners of the ruling coalition as nothing but social calls that have no political implications.

The opposition parties are wary of the fact that they cannot afford to see their no-confidence move failing at this crucial time. They seem confident and determined but things are still sketchy and many key decisions are yet to be made.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has already completed its long march that began with party chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari calling it a 'war on Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government. The party organised the march as the final push against the government, which was aligned with the broader goals of the PDM.

Despite some recent infighting, the component parties of PDM participated in the public meeting that was held at the culmination of the long march in Islamabad on 8 March.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of 10 opposition parties, is also preparing for their own long march that will start from 23 March.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also held its long march that started from Ghotki on 26 February and reached Karachi on 7 March. Although PTI leaders Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Ali Zaidi and Asad Umer tried their best to stir emotions of downtrodden segments of the interior Sindh, their rhetoric lacked the real bite necessary to make inroads into the political stronghold of PPP.

Under the rules of the National Assembly, a simple majority—172 votes—is required to remove the prime minister from office.

If we take a look at the numerical strength in the National Assembly, then it appears that the ruling alliance has total 179 members including PTI (155), Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (7), Pakistan Muslim League-Q (5), Balochistan Awami Party (5), Grand Democratic Alliance (3), Independent (2), Awami Muslim League (1), and Jamhoori Watan Party (1).

While the opposition parties have 162 members comprising Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (84), PPP (56), Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (15), Balochistan National Party-Mengal (4), Independent (2) and Awami National Party (1).

If some PTI lawmakers cast a vote in favor of the no-confidence motion, legal action of defecting from the party can be taken against them. However, if the allies of the PTI cast their vote in its favor, no legal proceedings can be initiated against them.

Interestingly, both sides are claiming to have support of over a dozen members of the other side in case of any eventual no-confidence vote in the parliament, another reminder that there is never a dull moment in Pakistani politics.

The increasing rifts in the ranks of ruling PTI have become a matter of grave concern for Prime Minister Imran Khan who is putting in his best efforts to win back support of disgruntled party big-wigs Jhangir Khan Tareen and Aleem Khan.

The emergence of new players from the ruling party has apparently minimized the bargaining position of PML-Q but it is still in the game. Khan recently visited residence of Chaudhry brothers during his visit to Lahore and spent 30 minutes with



PML-Q's top brass, who are allies of the government in Punjab and the Centre.

The visit was clearly a counter move to the recent efforts of the opposition parties that have been constantly trying to make inroads into the ruling coalition.

Opposition leaders including Shahbaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari and Maulana Fazlur Rehman also paid visits to Chaudhry Zahoor Palace before this visit of the Prime Minister to canvass them for the no-trust motion.

As far as our political history is concerned, Prime Minister Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar was removed from his office through a vote of no-confidence on 11 December 1957. In 1989, the opposition moved a no-confidence motion against then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto but her government survived against all odds.

Nawaz Sharif was the Chief Minister of Punjab at that time and leading the opposition to remove Benazir Bhutto from her office. However, it emerged, later on, that he was the person who actually made a real dent to the efforts of the opposition parties.

Nawaz Sharif was informed that the Leader of the Opposition Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi would be made prime minister if no-trust motion succeeded against Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The turn in the political scenario was against the aspirations of Nawaz Sharif, who himself was interested in coming an ultimate beneficiary of this political move. So, he tacitly made some key moves that led to the failure of no-trust motion against Benazir Bhutto.

The first no-confidence motion in the world's parliamentary history was tabled against British Prime Minister Lord North in 1782, when the legislators expressed their anger over the defeat of the British force during the siege of Yorktown in 1781. Similarly, more than two dozen no-confidence motions have been tabled in our neighboring country India. At least three elected prime ministers, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, H D Gowda and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were ousted by no-confidence votes.

Some political pundits are of the view that the chances of success of the no-trust motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan appears bleak since the coalition partners of

the ruling party are still reluctant to extend support to any such move. They said the opposition would not be able to touch the golden number of 172 needed to de-seat the prime minister without the support of the ruling coalition partners.

The opposition has an uphill task of winning over the PML-Q and the MQM-P to make its no-trust motion against the prime minister a success. Its bigwigs are yet to reveal their real game plan about how they want to proceed with the no-trust motion.

Former President Asif Ali Zardari had told the PDM leadership to move a no-confidence motion in the Punjab first. He maintained that once the opposition won the Punjab, the chances of success of in-house change at the Centre would increase to a satisfactory level.

The government officials are downplaying the efforts for in-house change and assuring their supporters that their government will complete their constitutional term.

Defense Minister Pervez Khattak dubbed the opposition's plans against the PTI government a political 'drama'.

Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry has said that the incumbent government would respond to the opposition's no-confidence motion according to the Constitution.

He stated that the opposition would never succeed in its no-confidence motion as all the coalition partners were with the government and had full confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

There was a time when Prime Minister Imran Khan was hesitant to inquire about the health of Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain even on telephone, but amid changing political scenario he paid a visit to Chaudhry Zahoor Palace in Lahore and met both the Chaudhry brothers. He is also not showing any hesitance to approach MQM-P and GDA with an aim to win the confidence of the coalition partners and thwart the threat of an in-house change by the opposition parties.

Apart from it, the government has also adopted a policy that is quite simple: blame everything that went wrong or out of control on the previous governments. It propagates that the corrupt have united against the democratically elected government and they are bound to meet the same fate as they can never stand on their own feet.

It appears that the most simple and easy solution to all the economic and social problems is to blame everybody else. But the problem with this strategy is that it works well for a while but in the long run it loses its appeal among the people.

In sum, the situation is quite tricky and only time will tell which way this no-trust motion goes.

Treasury Benches	
PTI	155
MQM-P	7
PML-Q	5
BAP	5
GDA	3
JWP	1
AML	1
Independent	2
Total:	179

Opposition Benches	
PML-N	84
PPP	56
MMA	15
BNP-M	4
ANP	1
Independent	2
Total:	162



Which Way Will Punjab Go?

Islamabad may be the bigger prize but Lahore is the power behind the throne and known to set the pace for the rest of Pakistan



By Ahmad Waleed

“Political change always comes from Punjab” is a maxim that resurfaces whenever the country’s politics is at a crossroads – and it checks with history; Punjab has always played a pivotal role in the politics of Pakistan.

Now, Punjab is in the spotlight again where a lot of political wheeling and dealing is going on to gain maximum support for or against the co-confidence motion moved by the opposition.

A few days ago, all the opposition leaders of various parties were here in the provincial capital to fine-tune the strategy to topple the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government. After having their internal meetings, the opposition leaders reached out to the government allies to muster votes required for the long-desired plan to submit a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan.

After all the meetings and deliberations, the top leadership of the opposition went to Islamabad to execute their plan.

The ruling alliance was shocked when just a day before the no-confidence motion was moved in the National Assembly, a new group within the ranks of PTI led by Aleem Khan emerged and landed at the Jahangir Tareen’s residence to repose full confidence in Tareen to make decisions in the near future.

A strong candidate for the slot of Chief Minister of Punjab after the 2018 elections, Aleem Khan had recently resigned from the cabinet of Chief Minister Usman Buzdar. He was serving as Provincial Food Minister.

At the time, he had cited ‘personal’ reasons for his resignation, saying he would like to focus on his business. This was around time

when estranged leader and a major financier of PTI acquired Samaa TV with an aim to strengthen his political clout.

Aleem Khan had been perturbed since the PTI leadership resolved to make Usman Buzdar the Chief Minister of Punjab. He was the strongest candidate. His dreams were shattered and in his private talks, he would often express his grievances against the party chairman for sidelining and ignoring him.

Later, he was arrested and put behind the bars, but he kept his silence throughout this period and tried to focus on his business. His sudden appearance at the Tareen camp came as a shock for everyone.

Aleem Khan claims to have the support of dozens of PTI legislators and vows to ‘reorganise the former loyalists of Imran Khan, who had been side-lined because of



those who encircled him after becoming the Prime Minister and to save the party and its public popularity’.

He openly criticised Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar for his poor performance without naming him, and voiced his serious reservations about the performance of Punjab government.

Aleem Khan minced no words when he said CM Usman Buzdar was not acceptable for his group. He lamented that Mr Tareen had a vital role in PTI's struggle to power and it was very strange and unfortunate that he was side-lined and not given any role after the party came to power.

Aleem also regretted that voters and loyalists were upset over the poor performance of the party government and there was widespread public anger, especially in Punjab. He said he spoke to over 40 MPAs recently and a majority of them were dissatisfied with the Punjab government performance.

About any chances of tabling a no-trust move against Usman Buzdar, he said his group would take a joint decision at the appropriate time.

This being the state of affairs in Punjab, the country's political scenario is changing rapidly. As soon as the opposition managed to garner support of the parties within its ranks and allies of the government, the government also jumped in to woo back the estranged allies and party lawmakers.

Prime Minister Imran Khan came to Lahore and visited PML-Q leadership to convince them they should not support the opposition. Then he went to Karachi to allay the concerns of MQM, a part of the ruling coalition at the federal level.

The PTI is facing a situation of being between the devil and the deep blue sea in Punjab. Many of his key leaders in the province are not in favour of Chief Minister Usman Buzdar due to the perception and governance issues while his major ally PML-Q wants Usman Buzdar to stay.

The Chaudhrys of Gujrat are very clear in their stance and want the chief minister's slot for themselves if Usman Buzdar is to go. "We will not accept any other person for the slot of Chief Minister if Usman Buzdar is removed," they assert.

In the new scenario, Jahangir Tareen and

Aleem Khan groups claim to have the backing of over 50 members of National and Punjab Assemblies. The members of both the groups have put their weight behind Jahangir Tareen and they want Usman Buzdar to be replaced.

Aleem Khan recently rushed to UK to have a consultative meeting about the future political alignments. Though Imran Khan has flatly refused to replace Usman Buzdar, rumours are ripe that he may change his stance in the backdrop of emerging political situation in the country as the opposition is more than confident that their no-trust motion is bound to sail through the National Assembly.

On the other hand, PTI government is determined enough about the failure of the opposition move after it claims to have alleviated the concerns of its allies and its own lawmakers besides having legal deliberations over how to 'subvert' the opposition designs.

The country is at a crossroads for one more time with economic, foreign policy and internal security challenges staring it in the face.





Why Imran Khan's Long March in Sindh is Uphill

Like the ruling PPP's, PTI too seems focused on mobilising its cadres for the next general election



By Azfar Ashfaq

For the first time in the last 14 years, the Pakistan Peoples Party, which has been ruling Sindh since 2008 without any major resistance in its rural strongholds, is facing a coordinated and organised mass movement on its traditional turf.

Spearheaded by Prime Minister Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, one of the major opposition parties in the province, the challenge has involved big rallies and public meetings that have been going on for nine days.

While the PTI's organisation in interior of Sindh is not impressive, many believe the current movement successfully presented it as the party that has the potential to end the PPP's rule in the next general election to be held in 2023.

On 26 February, the Sindh chapter of the PTI launched its Huqooq-i-Sindh March from Ghotki. It passed through Shikarpur, Kashmore, Jacobabad, Qambar-Shahdadkot, Khairpur, Naushahro Feroze, Nawabshah, Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Umerkot, Tharparkar, Badin, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tando Allahyar, Matiari, Hyderabad, and Kotri, reaching its final destination in Karachi on 6 March.

In Karachi, when the PTI march entered Quaidabad from National Highway it was welcomed by thousands of people gathered there from all parts of the metropolis. The party staged a massive rally but instead of marching on further ended the nine-day event abruptly.

A PTI leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, confirms the party planned to march on Sindh Chief Minister House from Quaidabad to stage a sit-in there.

MPA Jamal Siddiqui, who is also a spokesperson for PTI Sindh, says the march was ended since Prime Minister Imran Khan summoned Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Ali Zaidi to Islamabad urgently in view of rapidly changing political environment of the country.

It all began with the announcement by the PPP in January that it would launch a long march on Islamabad from Karachi on 27 February against the PTI government in the centre. The ruling party in the Centre deliberated upon the PPP move and concluded that the PPP should be paid back in same coin since it is one of the ruling parties in the country but trying to portray it as an opposition party despite the fact that it

had been ruling the second largest province of the country in terms of population since 2008.

Thus, the newly appointed president of PTI's Sindh chapter, Ali Zaidi who is also the federal maritime affairs minister, was given the task to mobilise the party cadre.

Since the PPP's march was to begin from Karachi on 27 February, the date of PTI's counter march from Ghotki was set a day before, i.e. 26 February. Zaidi was assured that PTI vice chairman and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who has significant support in Sindh particularly in Thar region, would lead the march while general secretary Asad Umar along with former chief ministers Arbab Ghulam Rahim and Ghous Ali Shah, late Mumtaz Bhutto's son Ameer Bux Bhutto, Mohammadmian Soomro and others would accompany him in the march.

On 30 January, Asad Umar told a press conference in Karachi that the PTI's march would lead to the fall of the "Zardari mafia" and put the PTI in charge of the provincial government in 2023.

When the party held its first power show in



Ubaro, a town of district Ghotki, to formally launch the march on 26 February, thousands of people came to attend the event. Speaking on the occasion, Shah Mehmood Qureshi heaped scorn on the PPP and its bad governance in Sindh and promised the audience to bring about what he called the much-needed change in the next general election in Sindh. "People present here to join this march against PPP show that they want a change and support Prime Minister Imran Khan," he had said.

However, Mr Qureshi was not that bitter during the day one of his party's march. The next day, the PPP launched its long march on Islamabad from the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah with party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari adopting an aggressive tone against the Prime Minister and his party.

Within hours, Mr Qureshi responded in the same tone when he said time had come for people of Sindh to rid the province of "Zardari and his coterie of tyrant feudal lords who have plundered public resources".

He chose to target Asif Zardari and was full of praise for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto throughout his journey. He challenged Mr Zardari and his party in Larkana, the heartland of the PPP, and told his audience that Zardari was not a true successor to the Bhuttos.

Mr Qureshi said after 18th Amendment provision of potable water, better health-care and education facilities were the responsibility of the PPP-led provincial government in Sindh, but it failed to fulfil its core responsibilities.

He alleges Sindh got PKR 8.9 trillion after the Seventh National Finance Commission Award and a huge amount of PKR 1,400 billion was embezzled. "If such a huge amount had been utilized for welfare and development of the people the situation would have improved a lot in Sindh and problems of masses would be resolved but PPP leaders attached priority to their personal interests instead of public welfare," he says while speaking at the Karachi's impressive rally.

At the end of the march, Ali Zaidi presented a charter of demands asking the PPP government to introduce a consensus and empowered local government system in Sindh, setting up of the provincial finance commission award, appointment of a non-political administrator of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation by replacing incumbent Murtaza Wahab, and issuance of a no-objection certificate for the establishment of a public sector university in Hyderabad.

The Chief Justice of Pakistan was also asked to take suo motu notice on murder

cases against PPP lawmakers. Against the backdrop of Faisal Vawda's disqualification for concealing his dual nationality at the time of filing nomination papers for contesting election, the party demanded that a similar case was pending against Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah for long and called for its early decision.

Political analysts believe the mass mobilising drives by the PPP and PTI are not aimed at dislodging each other's governments but actually the soft launch of their campaigns for the upcoming local government elections in the province.

They say the response the PTI got in its march can easily be described as impressive, but it remains to be seen as to how the party would translate this public support into electoral success.

No doubt, the PPP has failed to provide basic facilities to the people in interior Sindh, but it has brought millions of families into the Benazir Income Support Programme. Even the financial assistance being provided under Ehsas Programme of the PTI is considered in interior Sindh as a gift of the PPP since it is a continuation of BISP. Under such circumstances, it will be a gigantic task for the PTI to challenge the electoral dominance of the PPP in any election.





Is the US orchestrating the no-trust campaign against Imran?

How likely is it that the United States will be able to influence a change of government in Pakistan?



By Aimen Bukhari

The PTI administration is spreading a narrative that the foreign establishment, presumably the United States, is behind the Opposition's present effort, i.e., a no-confidence resolution (NCM).

How likely is it that the United States will be able to influence a change of government in Pakistan? Here are a few occurrences that can help to explain why PTI supporters are pushing this story.

Since President Biden's election campaign, when the MOFA, a former Pakistani ambassador in Washington, and some Pakistani community leaders were openly advocating for President Trump's re-election, the PTI government failed to break the ice with the present US administration.

It was a strategic error by the PTI administration, which had already set the scene for the Biden Administration to view the PTI government in a bad light. After that,

President Biden failed to make the iconic phone conversation to PM Imran Khan, leaving the PTI government enraged with the administration. The Biden administration invited and presided over a "Democracy Conference" that the PTI government refused to attend.

The PTI government, on the other hand, failed to provide a convincing rationale for the boycott, just claiming that it was necessary to balance Chinese interests. As a self-assured democratic state, the PTI administration should have attended the Conference and declared its opposition to any alleged duplicity by the United States towards democracy.

The PTI government's last remaining leverage was snuffed out by the USA's Afghanistan exit. Washington's perception that the PTI government no longer needed the active backing of the Biden administration in Afghanistan was strengthened by this aspect.

The recent trip to Russia by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan also raised eyebrows. It was very debatable when the decision was made. The PM tried his best, but it was nevertheless viewed as strongly anti-American. "At a time when the United States and Europe, as well as the rest of the world, were strongly opposed to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan was in Moscow", one onlooker said. The timing was highly controversial.

The MOFA and the PTI government's efforts to counter their pro-Russian impression had already been perceived as ineffective at that point. By not joining Russia in censure and abstaining from the United Nations General Assembly, the PTI administration attempted to strike a delicate line. For some reason, it still appeared as though the government's position was at odds with the worldwide consensus led by the US administration.



The PTI administration did not want to give the impression that it has a hard stance against Russia. But PTI has unwittingly become a victim of the renewed Cold War between Russia and the West.

The usual link between the Prime Minister and the USA Administration, which was there in case of Trump Administration, was also absent. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman said to have been displeased with the Biden Administration's outcry over the Khashoggi incident, which is why he has distanced himself from President Biden.

Despite close relations between Pakistan's government and the US military and intelligence community, this continues to be the case.

Despite the establishment's efforts to improve relations, PM Imran and President Biden's relationship remained icy.

The Rivals are Here:

Throughout the years, Nawaz Sharif and Vice President Biden have formed a close relationship. As a senior politician, Vice

President Biden had an excellent relationship with former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's supporters are working overtime to get him to support Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Donald Blome, the next US Ambassador to Pakistan, is a long time State Department employee who formerly served in Islamabad and is a close friend of Pakistani opposition leader Bilawal Bhutto.

Relations between the PTI government and the Biden administration were meant to be doomed in this environment. It also does not inherently establish the conspiracy idea that the Biden Administration is trying to ouster Imran Khan's administration or has the ability to do so.

The United States has long since lost the power to overthrow Pakistan's government.

A successful vote of no confidence in the PTI administration will be due mostly to local factors; the foreign and economic policies of the PTI government have not been the primary motivators for opposition and PTI dissidents.

Even inside his own party, the PM's radical political views have provoked an opposition backlash that has forced him to retreat. Political survival, NAB's purported accountability witch hunt, the nightmare possibility of another five-year term, and fortuitous timing arising from inflation and misgovernance all played a role in the opposition's decision-making processes.

However, the PM's claimed non-political behaviour of considering all PTI members as disposable commodities led to defections and factions within the party. To put it another way, the Opposition's No-Confidence Move (NCM) is not powered by the number of Opposition MNAs, but rather by the number of PTI dissidents.

An attempt is being made to make Prime Minister Imran Khan an anti-American martyr by portraying him as an enemy of the United States, which is being pushed by the PTI's populist inclination.

The NCM, however, is mostly driven by domestic causes.



Is a Tectonic Foreign Policy Shift Afoot in Pakistan?

Other worlds and other world views are possible, but nothing warrants the unseemly blundering in evidence at Islamabad



By Umer Farooq

Prime Minister Imran Khan met President Putin in Moscow hours before the latter ordered his troops into Ukraine. This potentially could put Pakistan on a collision course with the West.

Life on the wrong side of Western World is not impossible or even difficult for those countries and states which are politically independent and economically strong and self-sufficient. But this axiom does not hold true for countries like Pakistan.

Health of our economy is dependent on the trade facility offered by western capitals, monetary and development assistance offered by western financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF, and commercial loans accessible through Western bond markets.

A photo-opportunity with the American President at White House Lawn or a telephone conversation with an occupant of White House adds to the authority of the Prime Minister or President and increases the acceptability of the ruler within the power structure.

Of course, rulers are judged within the power structure based on financial goodies they can attract from Western capitals and the political clout they can muster as result of their relations with Western leaders.

For a country with this political profile, life on the wrong side of western world would be very difficult.

Pak-Russia convergence

Many in Islamabad's officialdom think we need Russia in Afghanistan. Precisely how Russia can help us in Afghanistan, they do not say. "We need Russia in Afghanistan" has almost become a cliché among the practitioners of diplomacy and statecraft in Islamabad. They, however, do not delve into the strategic reasons or factors that necessitate Russian help for Pakistan as far as Afghanistan is concerned.

Will Russia help us stabilize Afghanistan? Will Russia help our allies, the Afghan Taliban, in consolidating their power or hold on Afghanistan? Will

Russia act as a diplomatic counterweight to western world, which expectedly will be more critical of our Afghan (read Taliban) Project?

After a series of background chats on the subject with several officials, one is convinced that there is a method in Islamabad's foolhardy move to have the Islamabad-Moscow Summit in Moscow on that fateful day. This was followed by Islamabad's abstention from the UN General Assembly vote on a resolution to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Do these developments indicate a shift in Pakistan's foreign policy, away from the west? A vehement "No" was the answer I received from every quarter of the officialdom.

The thinking in Russia and Pakistan has converged in the recent years, especially with regards to their respective positions towards the Afghan Taliban. More than once during past three years, Russian security officials have obtained pledges from Afghan Taliban that they would continue to fight the ISIS fighters in Eastern and Northern Afghanistan.

More than once over this period, Russians have helped Taliban negotiate a deal with their client groups and leaders in Northern Afghanistan to pave the way for Taliban capture of Northern cities in the war torn country.

Similarly, Russians have also repeatedly emphasized to the Pakistani security establishment the need to deal with the threat of ISIS and other radical Sunni groups, with a transnational agenda from consolidating their positions in Afghanistan.

There have been reports in local media as well as Russian media about close interaction between Pakistani and Russian intelligence services in connection with the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan.

It was precisely because of this convergence of thinking that there was no rise of Northern Alliance-like military alliance in Northern Afghanistan this time when Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021.

When Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, Russian, Indians and Iranians were the main backers of Northern Alliance led by legendary military commander, the late Ahmed Shah Masood. Russia's primary security fear with regards to Afghanistan stems from the possibility of a spillover of violence from Afghan territory into Central Asian states—that Russia still considers part of its strategic backyard and within its security cordon.

Russia also fears that the terror groups with transnational or global agendas, if allowed to gain a foothold in Afghanistan — could attempt to reach Russian heartland through Central Asian territory.

Islamabad will be over-estimating Russian interests in Afghanistan or its inclination to go for a massive financial, military, strategic or diplomatic investment in Afghanistan if the basis of our assessment about our ability to convince Moscow into playing a major consolidating role in this war torn country is so superficial.

One Western expert of Russian strategic thinking about the region is of the opinion that the main feature of Russian policy towards our region is "low expectation". In other words, Russians expect very little from Afghanistan and our region.

All they need is a proxy—which they have found in the form of Afghan Taliban—which can counter the influence of terror groups with transnational and global agenda and religious motivations. This thinking will engender a very low level of expectation and low level of investment.

Experts on Russian strategic thinking believe that Russia is primarily interested in Central Asian states both at the military level and as related to its dream of achieving Eurasian economic integration.

"Beyond purely defensive goals, the Russians want and expect little from Afghanistan", says Paul Stronski, a senior fellow in the Russia and Eurasia Program of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"Their long-term task will be to maintain Moscow's influence in Central Asia as the reemergence of the Taliban and religious fundamentalism potentially shake up the region's balance of power and security dynamics."

Russian have recently assured Central Asian countries like Tajikistan —vulnerable to spillover effects from Afghanistan — of their continued military support in case of violence reaching their territory.

With its elaborate military and security structures, Pakistan is best suited to become part of this security architecture. We can help Taliban consolidate their military hold on their territory and defeat the groups with transnational agendas, if for no other reason than to serve the strategic interests of Russians and Central Asian states.

But such military centric and security centric policy choices would transform our orientation in the regional and international system.

First of all, our newfound love for Russia would be enacted in the context of rising tensions between the West and Russia over the Ukrainian war. Does Pakistan have the diplomatic muscle it will need before it can avoid the wrath of Western countries while running a major security project with the assistance of Russia in Afghanistan?

Pakistan is a major country with a myriad security, political, economic and financial interests in the international system. There is all likelihood that the West led by Wash-

ington will try to make Russia a pariah state after its invasion and destruction of Ukraine.

Pakistan is also not a darling of the West after its role in the ascendancy of Afghan Taliban become common knowledge. Has the Pakistani foreign policy establishment picked up signals from Western Capitals which distressed them to such an extent that they have decided to make a desperate diplomatic advance towards Russia? Whatever may be the answer to this question one thing is sure: We are approaching big shifts in our foreign policy.

End of American unilateralism

This shift might take the form of moving away from a foreign policy overly dependent on Washington. Pakistan's ruling elite is too much dependent on American support for the continuation of their hold on the power structure.

We might be entering a phase in our foreign policy that will define our foreign relations for the next few decades. Incidentally, the Ukraine crisis might prove to be a trigger for such a change.

American ruling classes' fantasies and political imagination about the advent and persistence of a unipolar World after the demise of the Soviet Union have been under pressure for quite some time. Russian President Putin's move to invade Ukraine has smashed these fantasies to smithereens.

Americans' ruling classes' political imagination about the existence of the Unipolar World started life after the Soviet Union dissolved and found its way into the dustbin of history. The practical manifestations and military outcomes of this political imagination were the First Iraq War, intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, invasion of Afghanistan and Second Invasion of Iraq.

Now suddenly, President Putin made them realize that there could be another military power on the planet Earth that could take unilateral military action against an independent country and a member of the United Nations.

This country, Russia, has one of the largest and most well equipped land forces in the world. It is a permanent member of the

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and thus can veto any collective security measure that other world powers might be contemplating against it.

This is not the rise of another military pole in world politics. This is actually the assertion by an existing military pole of its military power in its backyard.

Russia has been exercising its military assertiveness in the past few years: Its intervention in Syria and its promise to its Central Asian allies that it would carry out air strikes inside Afghanistan if there is any spillover of violence into the region that it considers within its security parameters are two cases in point.



Multipolar world ahead?

Will there be two poles in the world as far as military power is concerned? In fact, there is a possibility of many regional powers asserting their military power in their respective regions to resolve outstanding political conflicts in their favor.

Americans have only recently tasted failure in their military adventures and by now must have realized that even extremely lethal military power cannot turn political games in your favor.

Pakistan is one country whose ruling classes will miss and mourn the lapse of the American unipolar moment in world politics. Despite the existence in our society of a very critical narrative of anti-Americanism directed against America hegemony in world politics in general and in the Muslim world in particular, Pakistani state all through its existence has served as a facilitator of American hegemony in our region.

Twice our security establishment facilitated Americans intervention in Afghanistan – first as a conduit of military assistance to

Anti-Soviet Mujahedin and then with the provision of logistic and intelligence support to American occupation forces in Afghanistan.

Our military government even considered sending battalions of land forces to Iraq, another Muslim country, after American Invasion in 2003. In return, we received billions of dollars in military and economic assistance.

So our problem at the moment is not that American hegemony in the region should come to an end, our problem at the moment is that Americans should stop aiding the rise of another country, in this case our enemy India, as a facilitator to bolster its unipolar fantasies.

China was showing signs of economic growth and expansion since the beginning of the 21st century with many predicting the size of its economy surpassing that of the American economy by the middle of this century. Military prowess would be natural corollary.

Since 2006, successive US administrations have supported India as a counterweight to China. The Pakistani state and military started to lose strategic relevance for Americans after they realized that Islamic extremism is but a tiny problem compared with issues related to competition for global supremacy that had by then started emerging on the horizon.

So the Pakistani ruling elite's discomfort and unease with Americans is understandable—but showing this discomfort by calling on Russian President Putin hours after he ordered his troops to cross the international border into a member state of the United Nations was an extremely foolish thing to do.

No event in Pakistan's diplomatic history would qualify to be described as a public

relations disaster bigger than Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to Moscow. The fact that the Prime Minister met the Russian President only a few hours after the latter ordered his troops into the Ukrainian capital has created an unexpected diplomatic embarrassment for Pakistan's diplomacy.

Perhaps the Pakistani foreign Office anticipated this when it asked the Pakistani ambassador to Ukraine to meet their Deputy foreign Minister and reiterate Pakistan's position with regard to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state.

A week ago, the country's powerful Army Chief was in Brussels meeting NATO military leaders. There are reports in the media that the Army Chief wanted to visit Washington on the same date Prime Minister Khan was in Moscow. This could not happen as Americans refused to receive him, according to Pakistani media. Thus, diplomacy was thoroughly mismanaged.

Or was it a case of a pro-West Army general and an eccentric Prime Minister pulling our foreign policy in different directions and in the process brought a fiasco on our doorstep?

Future of Pakistani democracy

My fear is that we will lose our political space and freedom as a result of indirect repercussions of the loss of the American unipolar moment for our state and its ruling elite. If all the big talk about strategic shifts and new alliances being formed is true, we may find ourselves in the camp of China-Russia combine.

The Pakistani ruling elite is extremely malleable as far as its political proclivities are concerned. After all, political freedoms in Pakistani society in the post-Zia period started to usher in after the advent of Neo-liberal economic and political model in the English speaking West.

The Pakistani state softened its position towards media and political parties in the post-Zia period. They would take influence from their authoritarian friends more readily as it would also suit their natural inclinations.

Who Needs the War in Ukraine?

No country can bear the brunt of the Ukraine crisis, but where is the willingness to beat a path to peace?



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

With massive damage to infrastructure, loss of life, a refugee exodus and a declining social set up, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is perhaps the most significant event in the post-Cold War Europe. The question for most policymakers however, is when this war with widespread ramifications for the globe will end.

The spike in oil prices, a proliferation of arms sales and the increased activities of the military industrial complexes across the world point at one harrowing reality: This war could result in massive global destruction which no country can afford.

This sense of impending doom has especially increased in gravity after multiple bilateral talks between Ukraine and Russia failed to result in concrete proposals for de-escalation and resolution. The impasse between the Zelensky administration and the Kremlin is made worse by humanitarian corridors being bombarded unabashedly by artillery shelling.

The blame games, trust deficits and lack of a peaceful settlements has contributed to a power vacuum which is vulnerable to exploitation by passive actors to satisfy their own strategic objectives. Hence, the prospects of protracted conflict provides two alarmist and realist scenarios which requires immediate attention

Firstly, corporate punishments on Russia at the sub governmental levels with major Western companies ceasing operations and withdrawing personnel, which is damaging the international financial system, has emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Reported losses to companies such as Tesla as a result of the withdrawal is translating into a decline in revenue generation for American corporations. The jolts and shocks have also translated into a decline in shares in stock markets across the world with Asian markets bearing the brunt of a conflict exploding out of proportion in Eastern Europe.

Cutting out Russia from the international financial system as a US Congressional policy also entails a loss of gas supplies to European states such as Germany, France and Italy alongside other NATO member countries which rely on energy imports from Russia and are undergoing a gruelling energy crisis otherwise.

The implications of sanctions on Russia are also being felt across the Atlantic where close to USD 4 a gallon pump prices of gasoline are putting pressure on the United States' citizenry. Despite an overriding consensus that Russia must be penalized by banning the Kremlin's oil and gas imports, the economic crunch is being felt by ubiquitously with even the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg cautioning of a looming energy crisis due if the conflict is prolonged.

Diplomatically, foreign relations are fraught with tensions as alliance building and camp politics become realities in the post-Cold War era, despite a widely

misguided belief that the fall of the Soviet Union has resulted in a more integrated global order.

Russia's isolation has also resulted in increased pressure on China where suddenly sovereign issues which are flashpoints between Beijing and Washington DC such as Taiwan and Hong Kong are suddenly being invoked with a concerted attempt to delink China from Russia despite strategic sense prevailing in Beijing that neutrality is the way to go forward.

This divergence between countries is harming the international financial system as both China and the United States were previously embroiled in a pernicious trade war which was an affront to multilateralism. If it continues, this trend risks alienating the United States from China which has otherwise vouched for apolitical cooperation in the absence of geopolitical whims from the Pentagon or the US Congress for that matter.

With these variables in place, it is critical for the war in Ukraine to end as economists, businessmen, stock brokers, diplomats and most importantly the citizenry across the world are being affected.

The way forward should always be anchored dialogue and deliberations despite the failure of bilateral engagements between Russia and Ukraine and the suspension of talks between the White House and the Kremlin.

Concessions from both Russia and the United States in the form of implementing security guarantees for Moscow and a commitment to deescalate from Russia for example are necessary to defuse the conflict.

Lack of engagement with only minor diplomatic pushes from countries such as France is also allowing the conflict to fester. With United Nations Security Council and General Assembly sessions resulting in resolutions condemning Russian aggression, the large number of abstentions underlines a fundamental point which is that most countries while expressing solidarity with and being sympathetic to Ukraine, do not wish to get enmeshed in a Cold War binary promoted by the West.

Many of these states have constantly

spoken about negotiations and dialogue to resolve the conflict given their historical commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement which makes it evident that Western diplomacy has been flawed, lopsided and parochial in promoting camp politics.

As for the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin sanctioning a military operation which has resulted in tremendous loss of life is condemnable. This policy needs a massive revamp. There is obscurity surrounding Russia's ultimate objectives of this invasion with no end to the lingering crisis in sight.



Operations in strategically significant cities such as Mariupol and Kharkiv and warding off a Ukrainian response for example is strangulating the indigenous population and preventing them from gaining access to basic amenities such as healthcare, electricity and food.

Russia's persistence is resulting in its international isolation with preconditions for dialogue with the West now resting on the Kremlin being prosecuted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court as championed by the leaderships of Canada and the United Kingdom. Without Russian concessions, a clear end to the conflict will remain elusive regardless of Western diplomacy being an enabler of the war.

It is high time for the international commu-

nity to understand the gravity of this crisis and for all stakeholders to address grievances on both sides by expanding the lines of communication which were previously critical in averting nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War. All those strategies must be tapped into again to synergize potential areas for de-escalation while shelving differences upon the premise of humanitarianism.

So far no leadership has been willing to make concessions with media outlets awash with propaganda warfare which

includes the Kremlin's crackdown on the international press and media outlets. For journalists, reporting has become a cumbersome and tedious task amid an environment where independent voices are being muzzled. This is an affront to journalism and presentation of facts which needs to be averted to ensure that communication lines continue.

Given the economic, military and security implications of the conflict, its swift resolution is of paramount importance, but it is nowhere on the horizon. The economic implications of the war are so deep and broad that the world must find a way to end it in short order.

That, however, cannot happen unless concessions are made, diplomacy prevails, and de-escalation becomes a reality.

The Powder Keg that is Ukraine Crisis

While it is true only the dead have seen the end of war, there is no harm in trying

By Mahnoor Arif

The region of Eastern Europe still shakes from terror and dread as negotiations amid Russia and Ukraine remain futile. The cold war that was bubbling up at the Russo-Ukrainian border for the last five months turned hot on 24 February 2022 when Vladimir Putin ordered his military forces to infiltrate and seize the strategic regions of Ukraine.

The largest mobilization of military forces that Europe has witnessed since 1945, gravely threatens the stability of the security structure that Europe has administered since the 1990's.

The roots of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis run parallel to the disintegration of USSR, when Ukraine, the third largest nuclear arsenal of the world, under a series of diplomatic settlements agreed to return its nuclear warheads back to Russia in exchange for security assurances and recognition in the state's sovereignty.

However, Russia failed to keep up with its part of the pact and annexed the state of Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014 amidst growing public unrest against pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich's government. In the following years, a few skirmishes between pro-Russian groups and Ukrainian forces broke out in Donbas but no major development was seen.

However, the Russian annexation of Crimea has long indicated Putin's intention of rewriting the past by restoring Russia back to its glory.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave way for NATO to expand eastwards, eventually enabling the US to claw deep into most of the European nations bordering Russia. With each mile that NATO moved towards Kremlin, Mr. Putin who long grieved the loss of its geopolitical clout was convinced that NATO's expansion was menacing and put Russia at the mercy of a predatory West.

Therefore, he spent 22 years in power to build the financial and military strength of

his country. Now, with the prospect of Ukraine joining the NATO alliance, Russia appears to be intent to draw Ukraine back into its influence in order to form a security zone administered by Russians, reminiscent of the supremacy that Moscow held in the Soviet years.

Deeming the involvement of NATO in the Eastern flank as a threat to Russia's national security, Putin stridently demanded in December 2021 that it must not expand further east towards Russia and must not offer Ukraine membership.

However, his demands were turned down by NATO officials stating they would not bar any Eastern European countries including Ukraine from membership rights. NATO's disapproval of his demands did not go well by Putin, who ordered a major military buildup at the Ukrainian borders in late 2021.

With no significant development to their demands, Russia subsequently launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine unleashing airstrikes on cities and military bases and sending troops and tanks from various sides on 24 February 2022.

Ukrainian soldiers and civil resistance fighters are still fighting vigorously to deter the heavy Russian assault. However, their efforts are insufficient compared to the massive enemy that they face.

Approximately 13,000 innocent lives have been lost and 2 million displaced as Russian troops continue to intrude swiftly into the Ukrainian defenses. A Russian missile struck and destroyed Kyiv TV tower last week and another struck a maternity hospital.

Major accomplishment for the Russians include seizing the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and infiltrating into Kherson and Kharkiv, the second largest city of Ukraine.

Thirteen days into the simmering skirmish between the Russians and Ukrainians, the

brutality and fatalities seen in the region this week are increasing rapidly with no assurance that the war would stop anytime soon. Weeks of intense diplomacy and the imposition of Western sanctions has failed to dampen Putin's resolve.

Even bringing Moscow to the negotiation table for talks could not bear any fruit as their troops continued to advance on the battlefield further threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine, his order to put Russia's nuclear deterrence on high alert, and unaltered response to the sanctions imposed by the West clearly indicates Russia will not back down. The message seems to be that Kremlin is firm in its resolve to stop NATO's involvement from growing in the Eastern Europe even if it has to initiate a thermonuclear war.

The magnitude of the Russian assault is the greatest that Europe has seen since 1945, and the true effect of the conflict if it is not resolved timely will remain and haunt the whole world for decades to come.

This intense war, has already triggered a humanitarian catastrophe and can potentially change Europe's political geography, force restructuring of the international security structure, and start a new and more intricate Cold War period.

It has the potential to bring about a re-militarization and to trigger multiple new arms races, and to re-ignite other inactive territorial disputes and regional claims. In short, it may turn out to be the final death knell for the global governance architecture.

Meanwhile, let us not forget that we live in a world under an impending threat of a nuclear disaster – aggravated manifold by Ukraine crisis.

Truly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine proves how little we have learnt from our mistakes – and how much we can still learn from our past.

Explainer: Russia-Ukraine crisis



By Munazza Siddiqui

See, history does repeat itself, even if it's for karma. In 1962, exactly 60 years ago, the Cuban Missile Crisis took the world to the brink of World War III. The nuclear horrors of World War II were vivid at that time, so Kennedy and Khrushchev were able to keep a cool head, take a step back and diffuse the situation while saving face. This time, with the shoe on the other foot, will Biden and Putin be able to exercise some of that restraint? They will, if they have learnt anything from history.

After an intense deadlock, the Cuban Missile Crisis was averted when Khrushchev agreed to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba (placed in America's backyard at Cuban request after repeated US attempts to overthrow Fidel Castro, the Bay of Pigs Invasion being the final straw). In return Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba and to remove US missiles from Turkey (Soviet backyard then).

The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in a tacit arms and nuclear race by both sides that continued until the end of the cold war. World War II had helped jumpstart the idle US economy; the war created 17 million jobs, increasing industrial productivity by 96 percent. That's one lesson Washington hasn't forgotten. Economic slowdown since the Covid pandemic certainly drove the point home.

Two events of September 2021 were the psychological lynchpin for the Russian invasion of Ukraine: the completion of Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany and the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. The rise of the Middle Hemisphere as the global economic pivot and the US having run out of places for military deployment without stepping on major toes (like that of China and its Road & Belt Initiative spanning nearly 70 countries and international organ-

isations) has left Washington feeling like a third wheel.

To illustrate, let's say Germany buys Russian gas for 100 euros per cubic meter. Whatever is left after domestic use is sold to the rest of Europe for 400 euros per cubic meter. The US doesn't want any further increase in Russia's influence in Europe and the US also wants buyers for its very expensive shale gas. So, Washington wants Europe to buy American shale gas at 2,000 euros per cubic meter. That's right 100 vs 2000.

Now why would Europe, or for that matter anyone in their right mind, go for such a preposterous deal. Under normal circumstances, they wouldn't – unless there's a threat of war and the cheapest supplier also turns into the biggest enemy.

Europe depends on Russia for about 40 percent of its natural gas supplies. It has made remarkable advances in renewable

energy but with climate change taking the global front seat, Europe's dependency on natural gas is increasing as it shifts away from coal and nuclear energy.

The bulk of the natural gas from Russia flows to Germany through a number of supply channels like Yamal, Nord Stream-1 and some other pipelines that run through Ukraine. A pro-Russian government in Ukraine definitely earns Moscow a better deal on the pipeline transit fees. But more than that, if Ukraine joins the European Union and/or NATO, that would, one, allow Nato and by proxy the US to position their missiles right on Russia's doorstep (Cuba & Karma), and two, Ukraine and by proxy the US will be able to influence Russian interests.

The military-industrial complex on both sides of the Atlantic has already started to benefit from the perceived Russia threat. Europe and the US have announced a string of weapon deployments along NATO's eastern border. For the first time, the multinational NATO Response Force, comprising 40,000 troops, has been activated as a defensive measure in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The US has about 90,000 troops in Europe and for weeks the Pentagon has been repositioning them in the former Soviet bloc states of Eastern Europe. The Pentagon says this troop movement is temporary and defensive. Defensive it is, temporary not so much. Based on Russian attacks in Ukraine, this is one place where the US will be able to park troops for years to come.

The Ukraine crisis benefits both Moscow and Washington, but not Europe, which has been suffering from an ever-increasing energy crisis for some years now. Gas prices jumped by over 30 percent as soon as Russian forces entered Ukraine.

Another winner is China. If the Russian attack is successful in bringing about a regime-change in Ukraine, China will have a precedent to refer to in case of Taiwan. China has been trying to scratch that itch for a while now.

One of the pretexts for the 1962 Cuban crisis was the 1823 Monroe Doctrine of the US. The broad-based doctrine says that any intervention by external powers in the 'politics' of the Americas is a potentially

hostile act against the US. It basically allows America to intervene anywhere in the world if it feels that US interests are at stake or threatened, like it did in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moscow has taken a leaf out of this book. Russia draws its lineage from the 9th century Slavs of Ukraine, and even if a majority of the Ukrainians feel closer to the West today, their land carries historical and strategic importance for Moscow. Russia doesn't want to occupy Ukraine; it only wants a pro-Moscow government in Kyiv.

Moscow also wants an assurance that Ukraine will never be allowed to join the European Union and NATO. While the US and the EU are finding it hard to give that assurance, no side wants a protracted war. Both know that it's better to take a step back and restart the cold war than to plunge the world into chaos. A cold war is definitely more profitable than a war.

The writer is an executive producer, Geo News and editor of Jang – The Economist annual edition.



No End in Sight for Afghan Women's Plight

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are yet to win international recognition or Afghans' trust



By Haq Nawaz Khan

In a symbolic development indicating they are alive to their international treaty covenants, the Afghan Taliban have apparently embraced the International Women's Day (IWD) to reiterate their commitment to empowerment and protection of women.

Several top Taliban leaders voiced their support for women's rights and welfare in highly visible remarks around IWD. But all their statements were implicitly or explicitly subject to the usual caveat of compliance with their strict interpretation of sharia – signaling their unwillingness to change.

The puritanical militia that took Kabul by storm in August last year is yet to decide on what kind of role they are prepared to allow women – more than half of the country's population – in the life of the nation that has been gripped by violence for more than four decades.

Everyone is highlighting the plight of the Afghan women that have been the worst hit in the war politically, socially and economically. The plight of women rights activists is reflecting a difficult time.

The Afghan Taliban, though, issued a statement on the eve of the International Women's Day that they are committed to protect and provide women their due rights.

"The Islamic Emirate is committed to upholding the Sharia rights of all Afghan women. International Women's Day is a greater opportunity for our Afghan women to demand their legitimate rights," said Zabihullah Mujahid, a key spokesman and acting deputy information minister of Afghanistan in a tweet. "We protect and defend the rights of our Afghan women, God willing."

Women have been the most active in Afghanistan to protest their rights since the Taliban rose to power in Kabul. Many activists have been allegedly beaten, tortured and put behind the bars.

There is no life for women in the political structure under the Taliban rule. There is no woman minister or top administrator. Women were barred from their duties and girls from age 12 and above were asked to wait till a mechanism for them is prepared. After almost 7 months, it is expected that

the schools and colleges for girl's students would be reopened as announced by the education ministry.

The Taliban leadership has been trying to reassure the women, but many women have either left the country or have gone into hiding to avoid persecution.

The Taliban have their own strict interpretation of the Sharia about women's role in a society, but the International community is asking Kabul to soften the restrictions on women and provide their due share in the politics, and society.

Chief of the Taliban political office in Qatar and designated representative for UN Suhail Shaheen in a tweet reaffirmed his commitment, "I would like to say women have all their fundamental rights as per the Islamic principles. They can avail that. IEA is committed to provide a secure environment to deliver their legitimate needs and demands."

There are commitments and assurances from the top leadership of the Taliban, the reports coming out of Afghanistan paint a

different picture. As needed, some women have been allowed to resume their duties like doctors and other medical staff, and also in the security forces, but that is considered by the critics as nothing.

The Taliban admit women have been among the worst hit by violence in Afghanistan, but they have taken no measures to support the affected women. Many families have lost their male members to the war, and women have leave their homes to put food on the table.

A man, who was the most hunted by the US led Nato allies with a head money of USD 10 million, Sirajuddin Haqqani, acting interior minister, has ended the mystery of his covering of face. He made his public appearance in front of the media.

A soft spoken Sij Haqqani, the incumbent patriarch of the Haqqani Network, has assured the world the Taliban pose no threat to them. "We have made a commitment to the world that we will not be a threat to them. We also have made a commitment to our people that their lives and properties are secure.

"I call on those who have left the country to return to their homeland. Their lives and properties would be protected, and no threat will be posed to them," Siraj Haqqani said, adding, "The world has been asking for women's rights, let me inform them we have our Afghan women here in the police, right here in the ceremony."

Haqqani Network was considered as the most dreaded group under the Taliban that

had carried out a number of attacks in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Siraj Haqqani alias Khalifa only one photo was circulated in the media with half covering of his face. He was in the list of top most wanted 'terrorist' by the US after the slain Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar, founder of the Afghan Taliban movement. Siraj Haqqani's public appearance made headlines in the International media, revealing that tension with the US has been relaxed.

But the hurdles are still there in the way of getting international legitimacy.

The Taliban also celebrated the second anniversary of the Doha peace agreement across Afghanistan, terming it a victory against the world's powers. The event was titled as, 'the end of invasion'.

"As we did prove our capability in liberating our country, we'll prove it once more in rebuilding our country by using all we have," Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the first deputy prime minister of the Taliban, told a seminar in Kabul at the start of this month.

However, there are some challenges in implementing the peace agreement in letter and spirit. Many countries have played a role in mediating the peace negotiations by facilitating to bring both the warring parties to the table. Qatar hosted the Taliban political office to facilitate the Taliban and the US-led allies to reach a political settlement of the two decades long war. Pakistan assisted the parties to end the conflict with peace negotiation.

The Taliban government has been asking for the recognition of its government as the legitimate and representative government of Afghans, lifting of economic and political sanctions, unfreezing of the reserves held by the US, and removal of the names of leaders of the Taliban from the blacklist.

However, there is a deadlock on the issues or no progress, despite the passing of 7 months of Taliban rule. International community has been pressing the Taliban to form a broad based and inclusive government, where all political groups and women are represented.

But the Taliban argue their government is the true representative government of all Afghans from the East to West and North to the South. The intra-Afghans talks could not succeed as the Taliban took control of Kabul when the foreign troops pulled out of Afghanistan and the former government of Afghanistan collapsed in days in August last year.

Human rights, freedom of speech and women rights are the contentious issues that have been causing the mistrust between the international community and the Taliban.

Some diplomatic efforts are underway to engage the Taliban to implement the pledges made in the Doha peace deal. Qatar, China, Pakistan and the Islamic countries have been active to end the political crisis and to help millions of Afghans, facing the worst economic fallouts.



It's Short-Term Relief vs Long-Term Economic Reform, as Always

With government conflicted and shaky and IMF guarded and wary, the 7th review of Pakistan's EFF is on slow burn



By Mehtab Haider

The choice between short-term relief for the citizenry and long-term health of the economy has tried every government in Pakistan, and Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is no exception. Every political leader inevitably gravitates towards short-term relief as their term in power draws nearer its end, and Imran Khan is no exception.

But the relief measures the Prime Minister announced the other week in a desperate bid to shore up his plummeting approval rating fall foul of Pakistan's reform commitments under an IMF bailout program.

On top of it all is the little complication that the opposition has set in motion a parliamentary process to oust Khan from power, which seems to have a fair chance of success.

For all these reasons, the seventh review of the Fund's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program is on slow burn, with virtual talks between IMF staff and Pakistani officials underway since 4 March 2022.

In the wake of the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly against incumbent Prime Minister Imran Khan, the ongoing parleys between Pakistan and the IMF teams might remain inconclusive until the political situation settles down.

Now it will be the biggest challenge for Pakistan's economic wizards to strike a balance between their endeavours to dole out subsidies, relief packages, and cheap loans through the politically motivated Kamyab Pakistan Program (KPP) and keeping the IMF program afloat.

But pursuing two different objectives will not be an easy task so they will have to pass through a roller coaster to achieve the desired goal. If the balance tilts in favour of doled-out packages having no economic rationale then the IMF program might go into suspension mode but the worsening balance of payment situation does not allow Islamabad to say goodbye to the IMF easily.

The economic managers are really in a catch-22 situation having no clue

where to go because every move will have repercussions either on the political front or deepening of economic crisis by pushing relief measures without improving the macroeconomic fundamentals.

Pakistan and the IMF continued virtual talks from 4 March 2022, for completion of the 7th review under the USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and it might continue for an indefinite period for time being because in the presence of a fluid political environment the IMF showed reluctance to conclude review talks with any borrower country.

Although Pakistani officials believe the ongoing 7th review under EFF would not prove as tough as the 6th review was but their belief could be erroneous. There might be not many tough pieces of legislation on the menu of the IMF talks for completion of the 7th review but the emerging macroeconomic and fiscal realities might necessitate some prior actions concerning the notorious twin deficits – budget deficit and the current account deficit.

Further complicating the situation is the fact that the government has missed all the targets set in budget 2021-22 announced by the Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin by massive margins, leading to the re-emergence of the twin deficits.

The PTI-led regime had always blamed that it inherited Pakistan's economy in shambles mainly because of increased twin deficits whereby the current account deficit (CAD) had touched USD 19 billion mark in 2017-18. The fiscal deficit on average was over 8 percent in the twilight of the PML (N) led regime in 2017-18.

The government therefore made much of it when the deficits vanished after a year of industry closures and suppressed economic activity. However, the structural ills of our economy in the form of twin deficits re-emerged as soon as the economy recovered.

After rising sharply since, the current account stood at USD 11.6 billion in the first seven months (Jul-Jan) of the current fiscal year against the revised target of USD 12.2 billion for the whole financial year 2021-22.

Pakistan's renowned economist Dr Hafeez A Pasha had predicted that the current account deficit might touch USD 20 billion mark, highest ever, in the country's history, pushing the gross external financing needs beyond USD 30 billion for the current financial year.

The budget deficit was initially envisaged at 6.3 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year with an assessment that the one percent of GDP will be standing at PKR 538 billion. Now with the rebasing of

national accounts done by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), Pakistan's GDP size was jacked up to PKR 55.5 trillion for the last fiscal year.

Now it is assessed that the size of the economy will be standing at PKR 63.8 trillion so one percent of GDP will go up to PKR 638 billion for the current fiscal year. The budget deficit will now reach 7 percent of GDP, equivalent to PKR 4.466 trillion by end June 2022.

The most worrisome indicator for the IMF will be rising primary deficit as the revised fiscal framework envisaged that it will be revised upward from -0.7 percent to -1 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year.

Owing to rising political temperatures, the incumbent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf led government adopted path of doling out relief packages and subsidies in order to bring a sigh of relief among inflation-stricken masses who are forced to face torturous inflationary pressures.

So far, the IMF had sternly opposed doling out of PKR 380 billion relief package on account of slashing down POL prices by PKR 10 per litre and electricity prices by PKR 5 per unit for the remaining period of the current fiscal year (March to June 2022).

The IMF team also asked Islamabad to withdraw tax amnesty for industrial sector. Pakistani authorities argued before the IMF team that it could not be labelled general tax amnesty but it was carefully targeted and announced after placing a lot of ring fencing.

The IMF side took the stance that it was the

permanent structural benchmark under the Fund program and would necessitate a waiver from the IMF's Executive Board for approval of 7th review and release of over USD 900 million tranche.

The POL prices in international markets rose to around USD 130 per barrel but then decreased sharply indicating about increased uncertainties. The going for Pakistan will be tough enough if POL prices remained over USD 120 per barrel. If the figure goes beyond USD 150 per barrel, Pakistan will suffer disastrous effects on internal and external accounts.

With prevailing increased prices of petroleum products in the international market, the oil sector's price differential claims (PDCs) might go up to PKR 60 billion per month on both petrol and diesel so in the four months period it could touch PKR 240 billion.

The ongoing virtual meeting between the IMF and Pakistani authorities, the Fund raised several questions on the PM's Relief Package and argued that the subsidy amount was expected to go up to PKR 380 billion with the existing prices of POL in international market and electricity subsidy. On electricity, the ECC has approved PKR 136 billion subsidy for reducing power price by PKR 5 per unit from March to June 2022.

Now the government will have to walk a tightrope to devise short-, medium- and long-term strategies to steer the economy out of dire straits. There is no easy solution available to our economic ills, which require tough structural reform sustained over the next two to three years.



Pakistan's top winter travel destinations in 2022

Country prepared to welcome tourists with certain COVID-19 restrictions in place



By Sana Jamal

Pakistan's scenic north has long been a favourite destination for mountaineers from across the world in all seasons but the country is now looking to establish itself as a winter tourism destination.

Winter sports and cultural festivals are being organized annually in the snow-covered valleys of Pakistan to promote adventure and winter tourism and attract domestic and international tourists. Pakistan is prepared to welcome tourists to popular winter destinations with certain coronavirus restrictions this year. The visitors must carry a physical or digital proof of vaccination as the new variants of the virus are still posing concerns.

Winter destinations

Pakistan is famous for its hospitality, exquisite cuisines, historical sites, and most importantly its majestic mountains. Pakistan is home to five peaks with altitudes of over 8,000 metres, including K2, the world's second-highest mountain.

The government is gradually investing in facilities and infrastructure to offer more attractions for sightseers, skiers, trekkers and mountaineers by organizing adventurous sports as well as cultural festivities. Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has also resumed its air safari flight and the flight to Skardu is known as "the most scenic and exciting flight" with stunning views of the world's highest mountains.

1. Hunza and Skardu in Gilgit-Baltistan

Spread over 72,400 sq km, Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region is where the three mightiest mountain ranges, Himalayas, Karakorams and Hindu Kush, meet. The scenic valleys Gilgit, Hunza and Skardu in the shadows of towering snow-clad peaks have attracted travelers for decades. Hunza valley offers exception-

al views from lofty peaks to historic buildings to unique culture and heritage including the 1000-year-old Altit fort and 700-year-old Baltit fort.

The famous crystal clear Attabad Lake is also near Hunza. British mountaineer Eric Shipton called the Hunza valley "the ultimate manifestation of mountain grandeur" with the iconic Rakaposhi mountain as the valley's star attraction. The region offers splendid views of Pakistan's loftiest peaks and unforgettable sunrises, according to visitors. Some of the winter sports attractions in Gilgit Baltistan include the snow marathon in Khunjerab, ski traversing in Deosai, skiing in Naltar and Astore and ice hockey in Hunza.

2. Swat, Galiyat and Kumrat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is known for its diverse natural beauty and magnificent valleys including the Swat, Kaghan and Kumrat valleys. Swat Valley, with its green pine trees, snow-capped peaks and glistening lakes, is also known as the Switzerland of East.



The remote valley of Kumrat is called the “hidden gem of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa” due to the valley’s fairytale ambience, deodar-forested mountains and waterfalls. Another worth visiting region in KP is the Galiyat area which includes Nathiagali, Donga Gali, Changla Gali and Ayubia. Snow festivals with thrilling adventure activities are the key attractions for tourists in the Galiyat region.

3. Neelum Valley

The 144 km-long bow-shaped Neelum Valley is located in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The valley is home to lush green terrain and mountains, sparkling freshwater streams and dense forests. Neelum Valley is known as the “blue gem” is popular as a summer tourist spot but is now emerging as a new winter destination as the local administration is encouraging tourists to visit the valley with vibrant festivals and sports activities.



4. Quetta and Ziarat in Balochistan

Balochistan is a land of remarkable geological and topographical wonders with golden deserts, dramatic mountain ranges, and the splendid coastal region which includes Gwadar beach and Astola Island. The deserts of Nushki and Kharan are among the most beautiful in the region. Ziarat Valley is the most popular tourist destination and home to the world’s second most extensive Juniper forest. The valley remains cool in summers and snow-covered in winters. Hanna Lake is another gorgeous place to visit near Quetta city which is covered in snow in winters. Hingol National Park in Balochistan is popular for its unique rock formations and numerous animal species.



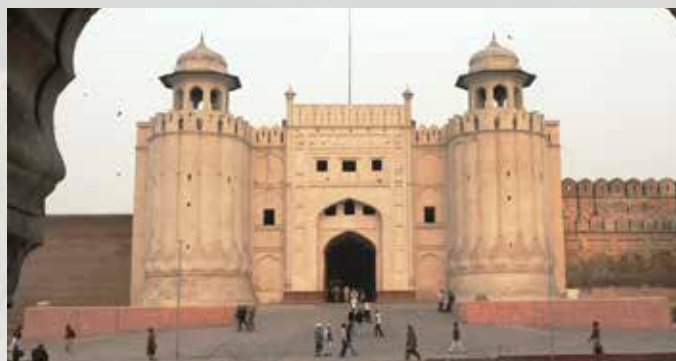
5. Forts, deserts and beaches in Sindh

For those not fond of the snowy valleys, there are sandy deserts and incredible landscape stretches and green fields in central Pakistan and sparkling beaches and the Arabian Sea in the south. The province of Sindh is the home to the ancient city Moenjo Daro, a well-preserved relic of Indus Valley Civilisation, and several heritage sites and forts, as well as stunning beaches and the commercial hub city of Karachi. Winter is the best time to explore the culture in interior Sindh where temperatures in summers range between 40 and 50 degrees Celsius. The forts of RaniKot, Umerkot and Kot Diji reveal the grandeur of Sindh and are reminiscent of the ancient times when Pakistan was the cradle of civilisations.



6. Mughal era monuments, culture and heritage sites in Punjab

The Punjab province is home to many heritage and cultural sites and comprises rich agricultural lands, an extensive network of rivers and channels, shrines, and Mughal-era forts and gardens. It is a melting pot of religions and cultures with Sufi shrines, Buddhist monasteries Sikh gurdwaras and Hindu temples spread across the province. The rich culture of the walled city of Lahore, sacred shrines in Multan, glorious palaces in Bahawalpur and Derawar Fort in the Cholistan Desert are some of the most attractive tourist destinations.



After the Murree tragedy, the police have strictly asked tourists to come fully prepared by storing extra fuel, charged batteries, tow and snow chains, and be extra careful while snapping selfies and check the weather conditions before travelling. Meanwhile, the visitors have urged authorities to improve food and lodging standards, keep a check on the local tourism industry and ensure sustainable tourism by introducing littering fines and proper waste management and recycling facilities.

Pros and Cons of New Amnesty Scheme



By Javed Mahmood

Tax Incentive schemes are often introduced to promote tax culture, documentation of economy, boost investment, and economic activities in the country. Recently, some general amnesty schemes were offered like the Foreign Assets (Declaration & Repatriation) Act, 2018 and Voluntary Declaration of Domestic Assets Act 2018.

Moreover, the Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Act, 2017 became operational in 2019 on issuance of relevant rules, whereby, benami assets were declared illegal. It was, therefore, imperative to bring a transitional declaration mechanism for providing an opportunity to bring these assets into the documented economy. Therefore, another amnesty scheme was given in the form of Asset Declaration Ordinance, 2019. A number of other amnesty schemes were also introduced earlier in 1958, 1969, 1976, 1997, 2000, 2008, 2012, 2013 and 2015.

The main parking venue for the informal economy in Pakistan is the construction sector and it is also the major driver of economic activity. Therefore, a specific amnesty to this sector was given in Section 100D of the Income Tax Ordinance. However, it was criticized that a specific sector was given a favour and other

industries were not given such incentive. So, to incentivize capital investment to all geographic areas and to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in industrial undertakings out of their undisclosed assets, so that employment is generated and Sick units are revived, a Promotion Package for Industry (PPI) is now being introduced through certain amendments in the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 (ITO).

A document has been circulating on social media today i.e 2nd March 2022, setting forth the PPI/amendments proposed to be made by the Federal Government. These comments are based on the document being circulated on social media, hence, we disclaim the accuracy of our comments made and the proposed amendments stated herein. We also disclaim any discrepancies that may arise between the proposed amendments stated herein and the actual Ordinance that will be promulgated by the President of Pakistan. Nevertheless, should you have any queries in relation to this document, do not hesitate in contacting us. Tola Associates (Tax & Corporate Advisors) have developed this informative document for the use of our staff, clients and intended readers, based on available public information.

CARRY FORWARD OF BUSINESS LOSSES OF SICK INDUSTRIAL UNITS - SECTION 59C

A new Section 59C has been inserted to the Income Tax Ordinance 2001 (ITO), whereby, an incentive has been provided to the companies acquiring 'sick industrial units' to revive them. This incentive has been provided in form of adjustment of business losses by acquiring company.

SICK INDUSTRIAL UNIT

The "sick industrial unit" has been defined as a company being an industrial undertaking, which –

- Has accumulated losses equal to or exceeding its entire capital and reserves at the time of acquisition, for a continuous period of three years prior to 1st July, 2022; or
- Has defaulted towards repayment of outstanding debts owing to banking companies or non-banking financial institutions for a consecutive period of three years immediately before acquisition, or

- Has been declared as such by the Federal Government in a notification published in the official Gazette.

LOSS ADJUSTMENTS

Where a company acquires more than 50% share capital of another company being a sick industrial unit,

- The acquiring company shall be entitled to adjust loss for the latest tax year and brought forward assessed business losses (excluding capital loss of the acquired company)
- The loss will be allowed to be adjusted by the acquiring company for a period of three years.
- Where the losses surrendered by the acquired company are not adjusted against income of the acquiring company in the said three tax years, the acquired company shall carry forward the unadjusted losses in accordance with section 57. The maximum carry-forward time period under section 57 has been provided as 10 years for banking company, 8 years for a hotel company and 6 years for others.

CONDITIONS FOR LOSS ADJUSTMENT

The above benefits are subject to fulfilment of below conditions: (a) there is continued ownership for five years starting from the 30th June, 2023 and there is no change in share capital of the acquiring company; (b) the assets of the acquired company shall not be sold upto 30th June, 2026; and (c) the acquired company continues the same business till 30th June, 2026.

CALCULATION FOR AVAILABLE ADJUSTMENT OF LOSS

The loss of the acquired company shall be adjusted against income under the head “income from business” of the acquiring company as per following formula, namely:- $(A/100) \times B$ where— A is the percentage share capital held by the acquiring company of the acquired company; and B is the loss of the acquired company. For example, Company X acquires 60% shares of Company Y being a sick business unit having accumulated business losses of 100 million. The losses available to Company X for adjustment will be (Rs. 100 million x 60/100) Rs. 60 million only. Moreover, if the acquiring company fails to revive the acquired company by tax year 2026, the acquiring company shall, in tax year 2027 offer the amount of profit on which taxes have not been paid due to adjustment of losses surrendered by the acquired company. For e.g. if, by 2026, the Company Y is still in the definition of Sick Unit, then all the losses adjusted will become taxable in Tax Year 2027.

TAX CREDIT FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT FOR INDUSTRIAL PROMOTION - SECTION 65H

A new Section 65H has been inserted in the ITO, whereby a one-time 100% tax credit against tax liability will be available against foreign investments to the following: ELIGI-

BLE PERSONS (a) a non-resident Pakistani citizen having continued non-residential status for more than five years; or (b) a resident individual having foreign assets declared in terms of section 116 or 116A by the 31st December, 2021, (meaning it is not an amnesty for undeclared assets).

CONDITIONS FOR THE CREDIT

- Investment is required in equity of a company incorporated on or after the 1st March, 2022;
- The company shall be an industrial undertaking in Pakistan;
- Equity shall be at least Rs 50 million with funds remitted into Pakistan through proper banking channel as per the procedure to be prescribed by the State Bank of Pakistan, at any time up to the 31st December, 2022;
- The company shall be entitled to a onetime tax credit equal to 100% of the amount remitted and credited in rupees in the bank account of such company against tax liability for the tax year in which commercial production commences;
- Commercial production should commence by the 30th June, 2024;
- The credit will not be applicable to a company or an industrial undertaking established by splitting up or reconstitution of a company or an industrial undertaking already in existence or by transfer of machinery or plant from an industrial undertaking established at any time before 1st March, 2022.





CARRYFORWARD OF TAX CREDIT

Where no tax is payable by the taxpayer in respect of the tax year in which the commercial production has commenced or where the tax payable is less than the amount of credit, the amount of the credit or so much of it as is in excess thereof, shall be carried forward and deducted from the tax payable by the taxpayer in respect of the following tax year and so on, but no such amount shall be carried forward for more than five tax years.

REVOCATION OF TAX CREDIT

Where any credit is allowed under this section and subsequently it is discovered by the Commissioner Inland Revenue that any one or more of the conditions specified in this section was or were not fulfilled, the credit originally allowed shall be deemed to have been wrongly allowed and the Commissioner shall re-compute the tax payable by the taxpayer for the relevant year.

AMNESTY TO INVEST IN NEW INDUSTRIAL UNDERTAKING

A general amnesty is given to all persons to declare assets by paying a general tax rate of 5% by investment in new industries.

PERSONS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR AMNESTY

- Holders of public office (a person as defined in the Voluntary Declaration of Domestic Assets Act, 2018. Their spouses and dependent children; A public company;
- A person who has filed a declaration under the Voluntary Declaration of Domestic Assets Act, 2018, the Foreign Assets (Declaration and Repatriation) Act, 2018, or the Assets Declaration Act, 2019;
- A person that has been declared a bank loan defaulter by a bank or a financial institution within the last three years; or
- a director of a company who has been declared a bank loan defaulter by a bank or a financial institution within the last three years.

FUNDS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR AMNESTY:

- (a) any proceeds of crime, corruption, money laundering and terror financing;
- (b) any amount which is subject of any departmental or court proceedings.

SECTORS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR INVESTMENT:

- (i) arms and ammunitions;
- (ii) explosives;

- (iii) sugar;
- (iv) cigarettes;
- (v) aerated beverages;
- (vi) flour mills;
- (vii) vegetable ghee; and
- (viii) cooking oil manufacturing excluding extraction units.

CONDITIONS AND BENEFITS OF AMNESTY

- The person may file a statement by the 30th September, 2022, (to be notified by FBR later) declaring therein the amount of funds (which have not been declared in any of the returns of income upto tax year 2021 filed by the 31st December, 2021) for investment in a new company formed for establishing and operating an industrial undertaking.
- The amount shall be deposited in rupees in a dedicated bank account in Pakistan as equity of the newly formed company, incorporated under the Companies Act, 2017, before the filing of the statement and such funds shall only be used for purchase or import of plant and machinery through letter of credit or for construction of building and structure for the industrial undertaking.
- The minimum amount of investment shall be Rs 50 million.

- Investment should be in equity and does not include borrowed funds and investment in land.
- The tax to be paid on the above amount invested shall be 5% (non-refundable, non-adjustable) and source of such funds cannot be investigated under Section 111.
- The new industrial undertaking in which such investment is made shall commence commercial production by the 30th June, 2024 and a certificate to that effect, duly issued by Engineering Development Board, is submitted to the Commissioner along with the return filed for tax year 2024.
- The amount declared shall be confidential and cannot be disclosed to any authority or court, FIA or NAB by FBR.
- There shall be no change of ownership of industrial undertaking company prior to the 30th June, 2026 • There shall be no disposal of assets prior to 30th June, 2026.

INCORPORATION IN BOOKS

The declarant shall be entitled to incorporate the amount of investment and tax paid thereon in his wealth statement in case of individual, and in financial statements or books of accounts in case of companies.

AMNESTY TO INVEST IN EXISTING INDUSTRIAL UNDERTAKING

The amnesty shall also be available for investment in existing Industrial Undertak-

ing through mode of investment in expansion and modernization from amount of funds. This benefit was also available in Section 65B for investment made in BMR upto Tax Year 2019, in the form of a tax credit at the rate of 10% upto Tax Year 2018 and 5% for Tax Year 2019. 3.2.1 Conditions and benefits of the amnesty.

- The amounts of investment have not been declared in any of the returns of income up to Tax year 2021 and filed by 31st December 2021.
- Such company opens a dedicated bank account to deposit the said funds before the filing of the statement and such funds shall only be used for expansion and modernization by way of purchase or import of plant and machinery including IT hardware through letter of credit, or software and IT services or for construction of building and structure for the manufacturing premises of the existing industrial undertaking.
- That the expansion and modernization shall be completed by the 30th June, 2024, and a certificate to that effect, duly issued by the Engineering Development Board, is submitted to the Commissioner along with the return filed for tax year 2024.
- The person may file a statement by 30th September, 2022, (to be notified by the FBR later) declaring therein the amount of funds for investment.
- “modernization” includes acquisition or upgradation of IT hardware, software and IT services. • The minimum amount shall be Rs 50 million.
- The tax to be paid on above amount invested shall be 5% (non-refundable,

non-adjustable) and source of such funds cannot be investigated under Section 111 of the ITO.

- The amount declared cannot be disclosed with any authority or court, FIA or NAB by the FBR.
- There shall be no change of ownership of industrial undertaking company prior to the 30th June 2026 • There shall be no disposal of assets prior to 30th June 2026.

POINTS TO PONDER

Following are some points which require some explanation or reconsideration to avoid unnecessary litigations in the future:

- The newly inserted Section 59C of the ITO provides for adjustment of losses of the acquired company for 3 three years and provides that remaining losses to be adjusted in accordance with Section 57 of the ITO. However, Section 57 provides that losses cannot be adjusted for more than 6 years. An explanation will, therefore, be required whether the periods provided under Section 57 are in addition to the period available in section 59C or is the total period inclusive of the period under Section 59C.
- The period allowed to acquiring company for the revival of the sick unit is also very short and suggest the same should be at least till 2028.
- Moreover, it has also been provided that in case the acquiring company fails to revive the sick unit by Tax Year 2026, the adjusted losses will become taxable in TY 2027. This provision should also cater for the opportunity of being heard for the acquiring company.



The IMF Program is a Political Program, says Dr. Ishfaq Hassan

Veteran economist laments his earlier exhortations were ignored by the authorities at the helm



By Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan

Pakistan is ill equipped to deal with the economic shock from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one of the country's top economists has said. Dr. Ishfaq Hassan told a television interviewer last week the Ukraine-Russia war would inevitably have an impact on the global economy, and there was nothing to insulate Pakistan from this.

While countries with more robust economies may have some cushion to weather the storm, Pakistan, with its economy already in dire straits, will take a hit, he told Ali Nasir in his show Rupiya Paisa at Abb Takk News channel.

"For the last four years, I have been repeating the same advice to solve our trade deficit issues: aggressive and selective import completion policy", Mr. Ishfaq said, regretting nobody had listened to him.

The latest figure of USD 2.6 billion current account deficit for January particularly alarms him. He expects it to reach USD 17-18 billion by the end of the FY.

Economic planning in Pakistan

Asked to explain the process of economic planning in Pakistan, Mr. Ishfaq placed the Ministry of Finance at the forefront. Other platforms include the economic advisory wing whose main task is to publish the economic survey, and the economic affairs division, which acts as a post office. It keeps a track of loans acquisition and repayment. Hence, economic affairs division is our face to international financial institutions, he said.

If the PM needs economic advice, there is a group called the macroeconomic advisory council for obtaining pure economic professionals' views on different issues.

To a question about the level of knowledge required for a Finance Minister, Mr. Ishfaq said the Finance Minister's understanding of the country's economy was critical.

"Shaukat Tarin knows what is going on and

consults the top economists of the country through the macroeconomic advisory group whenever any critical issue arises. There is a discussion, the agenda for which is circulated beforehand so everybody is well prepared.

"And then we have a discussion where rather than one man making the decision, a consultative decision takes place and afterward the recommendations that emerge, are conveyed to the Prime Minister by the Finance Minister," he added.

Mr. Ishfaq considers bureaucracy in the driving seat of the economic policy of the country. Secretary Finance has the most crucial role. He is part of the macroeconomic advisory group and is the principal accounting officer. All the responsibilities regarding the implementation of the decisions regarding the finances of the country are on his shoulders.

Asked where the country is lacking if a formal mechanism of policymaking is in

place, he expressed his utter regret over the country's troublesome relationship with the IMF. "Pakistan has suffered a lot, and until we remain in the program, we will continue to suffer from these hardships," he said, adding, "It is my prayer and effort that Pakistan does not enter into a 23rd IMF program."

Mr. Ishfaq refused to agree with the host when he referred to the country as moving about like a pendulum going from one to another friend, without reaping any fruits.

"I won't agree with you that we are moving like a pendulum. It is not like that. We have several friends that are always helping us. Many times, the public is unaware of the level of assistance being provided by our friends," he said.

Washington consensus

While labeling the IMF program as a political program, Mr. Ishfaq drew attention toward the Washington consensus between three organizations: the World Bank, IMF, and the US Treasury.

"Whenever a poor country will approach them seeking their support, it will have to meet 4 conditions: tight monetary policy, tight fiscal policy, market-based exchange rate, and raising utility prices. These are well-designed policies universally applied to all countries seeking assistance."

"The purpose is not to improve a country's economy but to weaken it further so that it remains dependent on them," he clarified.

Emphasizing the impact of relations with the US on the IMF program, he claimed that if a country is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the US, the program will become much easier. As an example, he cited Pakistan's 2013-16 program.

US Indo-Pacific policy

Explaining how foreign policy and the economy are interlinked, Mr. Ishfaq cited the China containment strategy of the US that has placed Pakistan on the wrong side of America.

"They have the policy to encircle China

which they call Indo-Pacific alliance. It consists of US, India, Japan, and Australia. We cannot perform this duty. We have a longstanding relationship with China," he said.

Earlier, Pakistan was able to keep both alliances intact. Despite Pakistan's closeness with China, the country was accorded the status of a major non-Nato ally. However, at that time China was not the target.

"It was in 2012 when America finally realized that we have wasted several years waging wars, which China utilized for its growth and expanded its footprint all over the world."

"They realized that by 2030 China would emerge to become the single largest economy in the world. Hence, they pursued a policy of encirclement of China. We could not become a part of that since we had a strategic relationship with China. During this time America only kept a transactional relationship with us," he added



Pakistan aims to Spur Economic Growth to 6%

Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin confident of 6% sustainable GDP growth to reduce dependence on IMF; Aims at over \$100 billion exports in next five years; 'Super cycle' is a serious threat to global economic recovery



By Muzaffar Rizvi

Pakistan economy is on the right track to post 'an inclusive and sustainable growth' of up to five per cent this year that will help the country to get rid of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September, its top official says.

Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, who steers tough economic reforms, is confident of accelerating the country's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to six per cent in the next fiscal year starting in July.

"We don't need the IMF if we achieve sustainable growth of six per cent. I don't think we need another IMF programme once we complete the ongoing extended fund facility (EFF) in September," Tarin told Khaleej Times in an exclusive interview in Dubai.

Pakistan, which secured more than 20 bailouts from the IMF in the past five decades, signed a \$6 billion loan programme in July 2019. It completed the fund's six reviews and drew \$3 billion so far to support the country's foreign exchange reserves, which currently stood firm at \$23 billion.

"We are going to start a two-week process of seventh IMF review of Pakistan economy on Monday [March 7, 2022]. The successful review will help draw another \$1 billion tranche as we have already achieved the targets in December," Tarin said, and adding that the eighth and ninth reviews will bring the remaining \$2 billion to the national kitty by September.

The IMF, which forecasts four per cent GDP growth for Pakistan, said the EFF programme had strengthened Pakistan's fiscal buffers before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and a strong economic recovery has taken hold since the summer of 2020. It also warned that Pakistan's economy remains vulnerable to flare-ups of Covid-19, tighter international financial conditions, a rise in geopolitical tensions and delayed implementations of structural reforms.

No more IMF help

"The sustainable growth of five to six per cent is the only way to reduce dependence on IMF and other multinational donors, and we are confident of achieving this

target under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan," the finance minister said.

Elaborating, he said the government's economic reforms had revived sick industries, improved the agriculture sector and boosted exports despite commodity price shock in international markets. However, the country still needs to increase saving rates and revenue collection to sustain the growth momentum in coming years.

"We are working very hard to increase saving rates and tax collections as well as bridge the gap between exports and imports. Revenue collections have already hit Rs6 trillion, and next year we will achieve Rs8 trillion taxes," Tarin said.

Economic experts said the rate of savings, which is currently around 15 per cent, should be increased to 25 per cent in Pakistan. They also said the tax-to-GDP ratio should also be increased to 20 per cent from 10 per cent to sustain higher growth momentum.

"Pakistan's information technology has an immense potential to grow, and the govern-

ment is keen to revolutionise this sector to boost exports in coming years. We can double our traditional exports in next four to five years and lift IT exports by providing incentives to the sector and building a strong ecosystem for startups in the country,” the finance minister said.

“In the next five years, our traditional exports will touch \$60 billion plus while IT exports could be at \$50 billion, pushing the tally to over a \$100 billion annually. In addition, \$30 billion remittances per annum will help ensure a sustainable current account surpluses,” he added.

Plan for 10 million jobs

Tarin, an industry veteran, said the government is also focusing on improving productivity by reviving industries and improving the agriculture sector with the help of China.

“We would like to consolidate our industrial sector and attract foreign investment in key industries. China will move its part of industrial units in Pakistan’s special economic zones that will generate more jobs opportunities in the country,” the finance minister said.

“China has planned to shift up to 85 million jobs to foreign countries in next 10 years. We have requested Chinese leadership to move at least 10 million jobs to Pakistan by relocating its key industrial units to special economic zones in the country,” he said.

In reply to a question, the finance minister said China would increase imports from Pakistan that will also improve productivity and generate more opportunities for jobs in the country.

“The Chinese move will be helping us to create 1.5 million to two million jobs annually in next five years. It will be a game-changer for Pakistan, whose 60 per cent population is under the age of 30,” Tarin said.

“Prime Minister Imran Khan have successful meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, and they promised to resolve Pakistan’s economic problems,” he said.

In reply to a question about challenges ahead, the finance minister said ‘super cycle’ poses a serious threat to global

economic recovery, and Pakistan has no exception.

“No one should have a doubt that Pakistan economy is on a growth path as agriculture, industries and services sectors are performing well, but this super cycle is putting pressure on prices and causing unrest and frustration among the masses. Our challenge is to make sure that this frustration doesn’t spill on the street, and if we sustain this pressure in the next six to nine months, then we will be fine for the next general elections in 2023,” the finance minister said.

Inflation check

About the inflation, he said commodity prices in international markets are on the rise, and the government is making all-out efforts to minimise its impact on common man.



“Crude prices crossed \$100 a barrel while edible oil also traded in the high territory. We have reduced petroleum development levy to a minimum and introduced stringent measures to absorb price shocks of the super cycle,” Tarin said, adding that the prices will drastically come down in coming months after freezing petrol rates and electricity tariff at present levels until June.

“We are oil importing nation and providing petrol in the country at prices charged by oil producers with no subsidy,” the minister said.

Pak rupee stability

To a question about the Pak rupee outlook, the minister said it is stable at the current levels, and no more devaluation is on the cards.

“The rupee-dollar parity reflects the market trends and is unlikely to face serious volatility. It should trade in present range with some normal fluctuations against the US dollar and other major currencies,” he said.

Tarin, 68, further said the government would continue to test bonds and the sukuku market to raise funds to support foreign exchange reserves.

“We have planned to raise \$1 billion through an ESG-compliant Eurobond in March,” he said.

Realise RDA potential

The finance minister reposed trust in Roshan Digital Accounts and its future

scope to attract over nine million overseas Pakistanis worldwide and said the banks should come forward to realise the true potential of this revolutionary scheme.

“Banks should adopt a ‘push strategy’ to tap more overseas Pakistanis by creating awareness about RDA and its products. The banks in UAE are doing an excellent job with an aggressive approach, and the other lenders should adopt a similar strategy in Saudi Arabia, Europe and the United States,” Tarin said.

“We need to strengthen sales team in Gulf and other developed markets to realise the true potential of RDA,” he said.

Time to Brace for the Economic Impact of Ukraine Crisis

Soaring international oil and commodity prices are set to majorly squeeze Pakistan's dilapidated economy



In recent days, the international crude oil prices have rocketed to record high levels touching USD 126 a barrel on 7 March 2022, amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and Western countries' decision to impose more sanctions on Russia.

Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and at that time, the international crude oil prices were fluctuating below USD 90/barrel. However, as the Russia-Ukraine conflict lingered on, oil prices soared every day. Thus, from 24 February to 8 March 2022, the Brent crude oil price increased by at least USD 35 a barrel.

Russian invasion of Ukraine is being considered the largest conventional military attack in Europe since the World War II, which has created an uncertainty in international markets, boosting prices of essential commodities such as crude oil, petroleum products, gas, wheat, edible oil, tea and other countless consumer items.

On the one hand, the crude oil prices are staying to a record high level, while on the other, the stock markets have become vulnerable throughout the world as investors have adopted a wait and see strategy.

Like many other countries in the world, Pakistan too will face serious financial issues in the backdrop of growing prices of commodities in the international markets. In addition to a further increase in the current account and trade deficits, the foreign exchange reserves and dollar-rupee exchange rate would further deteriorate, creating more challenges for the government and the consumers alike.

For example, the PTI government has reduced petroleum prices by 10 rupees per liter with effect from 1 March 2022, and has promised with the nation to cap oil and electricity prices till next budget, to be effective from 1 July 2022. Prime Minister Imran Khan has also reduced electricity tariff by five rupees/unit since the begin-

ning of the month of March and long-march of the opposition parties.

In other words, from March to June 2022 period, the government will neither increase domestic oil prices nor raise electricity tariff.

However, the record high international prices of oil, gas and other commodities would indeed put extraordinary financial burden on the government and it will further widen the current account imbalance.

A few days ago, the federal government had already allowed increase in the gas tariff because of its surging international prices while value of edible oil, tea and all other imported items has increased significantly from the day the Russian troops have invaded Ukraine.

PSX in a tailspin

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) experienced a blow on 7 March as the benchmark KSE-100 index lost 1,300

points in intra-day trading at one point with the rising oil prices amid geopolitical tensions, and no-confidence talks against government.

The KSE-100 recorded a fierce selling pressure, falling below the 43,400-point mark on 7 March. Experts said that the market has shed over one thousand points just because of rising oil prices in the international market and growing political uncertainty in the country.

Oil prices soared more than 9 percent, touching their highest since 2008, as the United States and European allies mull a Russian oil import ban and delays in the potential return of Iranian crude to global markets fueled tight supply fears.

Meanwhile, gold prices also surged to USD 2,000-level for the first time in 18 months in the wake of escalating Russia-Ukraine conflict. The fears about the supply disruption have sent palladium to an all-time high mark.

Analysts expect that the stock market is likely to remain under pressure unless clarity emerges on the oil and political fronts.

Deficits, challenges

In seven months of the ongoing financial year (July 2021 to January 2022), the current account deficit of Pakistan has increased beyond USD 11 billion. During July 2021 to January 2022, the current account deficit of Pakistan has expanded to

USD 11.58 billion in comparison with USD 1.05 billion surplus current account balance in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal year.

In the month of January 2022, Pakistan's current account deficit (CAD) rose to USD 2.6 billion, from USD 1.9 billion in December 2021, largely due to imports in kind that are fully financed. The State Bank of Pakistan said last week the deficit would have been around USD 1 billion lower in January 2022.

The country recorded CAD of USD 11.58 billion in the first seven months of the ongoing fiscal year as opposed to USD 1.03 billion surplus recorded in the same period last year, as the national imports reflected a robust growth.

The trade deficit in goods also edged up by 8.5 percent MoM and mounted to USD 3.93 billion in Jan-2022 while exports of goods declined by 15 percent. Surprisingly, on annual basis, the trade deficit in goods expanded 45 percent in January 2022.

Overseas Pakistanis home remittances declined by 15 percent (MoM), amounting to USD 2.14 billion as against USD 2.5 billion in December 2021.

During July-Jan FY2021-22, on a cumulative basis, remittances edged up by 9 percent YoY, settling at USD 17.95 billion in comparison with USD 16.46 billion home remittances during the same period of FY21.

Forex reserves

The foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan have improved by USD 1.63 billion in the week ended Feb 5, 2022, mainly because of the disbursement of USD 1.05 billion loan by IMF and USD 1 billion income from the sale of Sukuk bonds.

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the total liquid forex reserves amounted to USD 23.72 billion as against USD 22.08 billion in the previous week.

Thus, the IMF loan and sale of Sukuk bonds have strengthened the forex reserves of the country for the time being and the international spike in prices would soon have its negative impact on the reserves and the dollar-rupee exchange rate as well from the March 2022.

The data of current account balance, trade deficit, exports, imports, and foreign exchange reserves for the month of March 2022 will become available in April, which will indicate the future direction of the economy of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, as of 8 March 2022, the dollar-rupee parity in the interbank was moving around 177 to 178 rupees while in the open market it was around 180 to 181 rupees, while analysts believe that dollar will get more value in the coming weeks because of the factors mentioned above.

By Javed Mahmood



Will her Legal Woes Keep Maryam Nawaz out of the Next General Election?

Maryam Nawaz Sharif's electoral pretensions are well known, but she remains mired in a legal battle to win back her eligibility to contest



By Asadullah

Irrespective of whatever the result of the opposition's no confidence move is the million dollar question right now is whether Maryam Nawaz can contest the next general elections.

In the current scenario, the answer is obviously in the negative because she is a convict and had been disqualified by the Accountability Court of Islamabad as of 6 July 2018 along with her father former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and spouse retired Captain Mohammad Safdar.

She was also sentenced to a seven-year prison term. She also got sentenced in Avenfield Apartments reference with Mr Sharif for ten years and Capt. Safdar for one year.

The property was disclosed in Panama Papers. Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan, and Sheikh Rashid Ahmed had petitioned the Supreme Court seeking investigation into the money trail of the said apartments. The probe finally culmi-

nated in the filing of references against Sharif family that resulted in their conviction.

Although Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) never accepted the conviction, they still adopted the appropriate manner of challenging the said conviction.

Mr Sharif was also convicted in Al Azizia reference and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment. In September 2018, the sentence of Sharif family was suspended. However, the conviction still stands.

According to the charge sheet issued to Maryam Nawaz, she had been accused of being the beneficial owner of the offshore companies (Nielson and Nescol) that owned the apartments, failing to justify the purchase of the said property, submitting a fake trust deed in Calibri font to mislead the investigation and concealing material facts from the investigation officers.

The Accountability Judge Mohammad Bashir also "disqualified" Maryam Nawaz, her father and spouse to contest election or to hold public office for a period of 10 years to be reckoned from the date she is released after serving the sentence and they shall not be eligible for or be allowed any financial facilities in the form of loan, etc., for a period of 10 years.

Nevertheless, Maryam Nawaz's appeal against conviction has witnessed many 'ups' and 'downs'. However, as the arguments are about to be completed, the two member bench, comprising Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), has raised multiple questions, which the prosecution of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) appeared unable to answer.

The bench asked NAB's prosecution to elaborate on the evidence on the basis of which the bureau wanted the court to uphold the conviction of Ms Sharif and Capt. Safdar. The bench also asked

the prosecution to explain who the actual owner of the London flats was. If Nawaz Sharif is the owner, how can Maryam Nawaz be a beneficial owner?

The court also questioned if purchasing an apartment was a crime and whether a father required the consent of his daughter to transfer a property in her name.

While the prosecution is still relying on the revelations of Panama Leaks, it stated before the court that Maryam Nawaz's name had emerged from one of the 11.5 million leaked documents, adding that a correspondence from 2012 disclosed that Maryam Nawaz was the beneficial owner of the two offshore companies Nielson and Nescol.

The prosecution stated that the joint investigation team (JIT) constituted by the Supreme Court had verified the letter from the British Virgin Island (BVI) authorities regarding her ownership.

Another evidence that prosecution relied upon is the trust deed executed by Maryam Nawaz and Hussain Nawaz in connection with the Avenfield properties, which NAB has termed as forged.

However, now we look at the questions raised by the bench regarding admissibility of NAB's evidence.

Perhaps the most interesting question posed by the court is about the trust deed. The question is "How the trust deed be termed forged or fake if the signatories still own it?" The bench is of the view that the trust deed could be termed as back-dated or that the font used in the said document was different, but this cannot be called forgery.

Another question of the court is how the investigator could rely on a letter from the year 2012 to substantiate Maryam Nawaz as the beneficial owner. The trial started in 2018, therefore, the letter should be from the relevant dates.

The prosecution told the court that in her statement recorded under section 342 of the criminal procedure code, Ms Nawaz had stated that the flats were transferred to the Sharif family under an agreement with the Qatari Al-Thani family. The properties belonged to the Al-Thani family and were settled against shares of Sharif-owned steel mill which was sold in 1980.

However, the bench is of the view that since this was a criminal case, the standard of

evidence should be higher than that of civil cases, adding that the bureau should discharge basic burden and establish ownership of Maryam Nawaz as the court cannot go on conjectures.

Perhaps, these were the questions the NAB's prosecutor was unable to answer. Subsequently, he sought successive adjournments and finally disassociated himself from the case.

NAB has now brought in Muhammad Azhar Siddique, a lawyer famous for his pro-government vlogs and social media posts. It is said that he has been brought to drag on the case.

However, despite the fact that the court has apparently expressed dissatisfaction over the evidence on the basis of which the Accountability Court had convicted the Shari family, mere dissatisfaction cannot end Maryam's disqualification.

Her conviction and disqualification can be reversed with the court's decree only. This may be why she has repeatedly requested the court for swift disposal of her appeal reminding the bench justice delayed is justice denied.



Can Pakistan Tackle IS-K?

Denying terrorists space – including safe harbour and recruiting grounds – will be the key



By Ghulam Dastageer

The dreaded Islamic State – Khorasan (IS-K) has struck in Pakistan again, taking a deadly toll on unsuspecting worshippers at a Shia mosque in Peshawar. The atrocious attack has once again accentuated the importance of denying terror groups recruiting grounds and safe harbour.

The people of Peshawar first heard about the dreaded Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh in November 2014 when graffiti showing support to the militant outfit surfaced overnight in the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Three months before the appearance of those graffiti, a booklet titled *Fatah* — published in Pashto and Dari languages — was distributed in Afghan refugees' camps on the outskirts of Peshawar. The pamphlet made an appeal to people for support in their struggle to establish a caliphate.

Later, in January 2015, Daesh released a video in which they announced their chief for Pakistan and Afghanistan and ten other

sub-regional emirs in both the countries. The Shura gathered in an area somewhere along the Pak-Afghan border and formed IS-K, the Khorasan chapter of Daesh, an operational wing of the ISIS for Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran.

They pledged oath of allegiance to Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi through Hafiz Saeed Khan as their supreme leader for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Former TTP spokesman Shahidullah Shahid was also present in the Shura meeting.

In the same meeting, Sheikh Gul Zaman al-Fateh was appointed as emir of Khyber Agency, Umer Mansoor was given the assignment to lead the militants affiliated to Lal Masjid group, Obaidullah al-Peshawari of Al-Tauheed Wal-Jihad to lead his group in Peshawar, Jawad of Abtalul Islam to lead his group for ISIS, Talha as emir for Lakki Marwat, Hafiz Daulat for Kurram, Khalid Mansoor for Hangu, and Sheikh Mufti Hasan for Peshawar.

The first in Pakistan attack by Daesh came on 13 May 2015, when terrorists shot dead 45 Ismaili Shias in an armed attack on a bus in Karachi. This was followed by an attack on the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, Afghanistan in January 2016. IS-K has, since its inception, kept on carrying out terrorist attacks in Pakistan.

The recent suicide attack on a Shia mosque in Kocha Risaldar, Peshawar is in fact the deadliest-ever attack launched by IS-K in Pakistan. The lone suicide bomber — basically hailing from Afghanistan whose family migrated to Pakistan around three decades back due to the constant mayhem in their homeland — killed as many as 65 worshippers while leaving another 185 injured, some of them critically.

In a statement posted on ISIS-linked Amaq News Agency, the ISIS claimed responsibility for the gruesome attack, stating: "Islamic State fighters are constantly targeting Shi'ites living in Pakistan and Afghanistan despite intense security measures adopted

by the Taliban militia and the Pakistani police to secure Shi'a temples and centres.”

Four days later, it accepted responsibility for another terrorist attack in Sibi, a district of insurgency-hit Balochistan province — which left six Pakistani law-enforcers dead and 19 other security personnel injured.

So far as Afghanistan is concerned, IS-K terrorist operations are not confined to targeting Shia community. For instance, on 26 August last year, a suicide bomber of the IS-K blew himself up at Hamid Karzai Airport in Kabul. The gory incident left 183 people dead, 13 of them US troops.

Bearing in mind the fact that soon after capturing Kabul in August 2021, the cash-strapped Taliban government in Afghanistan made a request to the international community on 14 September for the provision of humanitarian aid. Also, there is no denying the fact that foreign aids is never unconditional.

The Afghan Taliban would definitely have to make some compromises on their pledg-

es vis-à-vis the establishment of their self-defined strict Shariah rule. This might trigger a wave of anger among the Taliban fighters who are fighting for generations for the establishment of an orthodox religious rule in Afghanistan. Such disaffected foot soldiers would be potential IS-K recruits in Afghanistan.

Once the IS-K succeeds to achieve some gains in Afghanistan, their next target would, obviously, be Pakistan. Through the recent two attacks launched within the short time of five days, the IS-K has conveyed a clear message to the Pakistani authorities that they don't have any dearth of capability to hit both soft and hard targets in Pakistan.

With regard to finding manpower in Pakistan, it would not be a big issue for IS-K to find likeminded radicals to carry out its terrorist operations. It is a known fact that the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) — a hard-line splinter group of the banned sectarian outfit Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan — turned out to be one of the most terrible

terrorist organizations after it joined hands with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

But the sustained military action against terrorist organizations in Pakistan badly dented LeJ's command-and-control system and its capability to hit targets in Pakistan. The LeJ, in collaboration with the IS-K, may unleash a spree of terrorist attacks in Pakistan, mainly focusing on hitting security forces and their installations and Shia community.

With a strong anti-Shia ideology, LeJ is closer to the ISIS than any other terrorist organization in Pakistan. In the coming days, there are strong chances that LeJ may grow stronger by joining hands with IS-K.

Our security and intelligence apparatus would have to evolve an Argus-eyed security plan to avert any such alliance, which would definitely cost more lives, especially from the marginalized Shia community of Pakistan.



Media's Great Responsibility

Questioning the media's unquestioning allegiance to the forces of regression and obscurantism



By Zainab Umer

We form our behaviour patterns through different forms of imitation and learning, our primary caretakers being our first role models and society exerting secondary influences. What we fail to realise is that the media plays a very important role in shaping a modern individual's behaviour.

Media's main aim consists of three main components: connect, comfort and uplift; and it serves its purpose to a great extent. However, ideals portrayed through our films and dramas have caused a crack in our societies that to some extent seem irreparable.

Today's media, be it legacy or online, still hugely influences our perceptions and ideas about the role of girls and women in society. Unfortunately, both legacy and online media have proved to be the leading advocates for gender

inequality in our already flawed society.

The question we need to answer is how the media helps instil these flawed ideals into society. Pakistani media has content that promotes 'gender appropriate' behaviour, traditional perceptions of gender roles, occupations, personality traits, expectations and aspirations for future trajectories of life.

Pakistani television is strangely obsessed with the idea of a damsel in distress who gets married to a 27 year old financially strong man who is so emotionally constipated that it is unhealthy. The same storyline has been overused to the point where you can tell the entire idea of the upcoming dramas just by reading their names.

An ideology named "the cult of true womanhood" arose in the 1820 and 1860s that put forth four cardinal

virtues that each woman should have and without them a woman was believed to be incomplete: Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.

Scriptwriters all around the world seem to have clung onto this ideology for dear life ever since as they pick up their pens and sit down to write stories for their audiences. A man or woman belonging to the middle or lower middle class, that is in most cases the target audience, will view these dramas as manuals to how they are supposed to behave in societies according to their respective gender.

An overworked mother who doesn't want to stand in the kitchen all day is indirectly pressured into loving her plight when she watches high paid actors like Mahira Khan and Iqra Aziz in dramas, standing in their kitchens all

day, being miserable but continuing to do so since their mothers-in-laws and husbands repeatedly tell them it is their job and their gender role demands such behaviour of them.

Similarly men feel the exact same gender role strain when their wives tell them about actors like Feroz Khan who own big cars and big businesses while sporting a gym body and a mane of jet black hair in dramas.

But the effects of media are not only restricted to Pakistani media. Major international entertainment industries too overly promote behaviour that is congruent to one's gender identity. Famous movies like Mr & Mrs Smith shows the 'perfect' household where the wife stays home and cooks the perfect meal and the husband goes out to earn for the house.

The movie was quite successful in showing Angelina Jolie as the timid, domestic, and pious symbol of purity and Brad Pitt as the epitome of masculinity as he shows no form of interest in the way the household works and his complete indifference towards how his wife feels since emotional connection isn't exactly a man's forte.

The Indian film industry also released movies and shows that particularly romanticized toxicity in relationships, sugar coating it with the idea of "love that never ends". A show that gained popularity

almost immediately was "Sacred Games".

Mugdha Mahalanabish, a freelance writer said: "'Netflix's 'Sacred Games' Wins at the Expense of Women". It does not come as a surprise that a male-dominated show like Sacred Games gains popularity in a male-dominated society.

In recent years the cases of work based harassment has increased tenfold. It puts the common man in deep thought as to how gender based violence seems to be common and is normalised to such a great extent.

When prestigious actors like Nawazuddin Siddiqui use curses that revolve around the female body and behaviour then the common man finds it amusing to use the same derogatory terms and soon forms a subconscious resentment towards the other gender, cementing the idea that one gender is inferior than the other.

Pakistani television has normalized domestic violence to lengths that seem dangerous for the society that eats and drinks dramas. Domestic abuse is put on display where people do not interfere in such matters calling it a "family matter". Numerous dramas have shown people standing by as their daughters-in-law get beaten up for the simplest of reasons.

Pakistani media also portrays men as emotionally unstable beings since their

behaviour lies on two ends of the spectrum. A man will either show extremely aggressive behaviour or an emotionally cut off response that shows no underlying feeling behind words since aggression according to society is directly linked to masculinity. This has created unrealistic expectations of a man as to how he has to act in front of people.

Similarly, a woman's unrealistic expectation built by the media is to be physically attractive and desirable for a man. A report by the IMF wrote: "Women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical and hypersexualised roles in advertising and the film industry, which has long-term social consequences. And 73 percent of the management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27 percent occupied by women."

The media industry having the capability to influence overall societal behaviours needs to be encouraged to produce gender transformative content to develop self-regulatory equality policies, including access to decision-making positions.

As the famous Uncle Ben in Spiderman said and I quote: "With great power comes great responsibility." Media holding influence as a weapon in its hands has the responsibility to produce content that does not cause any more deviance in the society and does not create unrealistic expectations of genders.



Introducing Six of Pakistan's Top Powerful Female Leaders

TTI Report

This list of influential female business leaders paves the path for more women to hold positions of power and influence. For most Pakistani women, role models include Malala Yousufzai, the Nobel Peace Prize winner at the age of 16, or the late human rights activist and lawyer Asma Jahangir, the prolific poet and former CSS officer Parveen Shakir, or even Pakistan's first female prime minister Benazir Bhutto. They usually come to mind when we think of role models in Pakistan.

However, there are a number of women in the corporate world who should be recognised. At global corporations, banks, computer firms, shipping and logistics organisations, the dairy sector, and other male-dominated professions these women have built a name for themselves.

For International Women's Day, we're profiling six Pakistani women who are inspiring a new generation of female leaders.

Aruna Hussain

Managing Director of Sealand Europe



You're losing out on Aruna Hussain, if you haven't heard of her. She is a legend in the male-dominated logistics and shipping sector. In 2000, she began her work as a Maersk International Leadership Program trainee. Hussain rose through the ranks of the company, both domestically and internationally, as she gained experience and knowledge.

As CEO of the shipping company's logistics business in Pakistan, she made history as the country's first woman to hold the position. She returned to Maersk in 2016 after a two-year time off.

As CEO of their logistics division, she later became COO of the Middle East division. As of January 2019, she had been appointed as Maersk's Managing Director for the Pakistani market. She now serves as managing director of Sealand Europe, a Maersk subsidiary.

She said that Pakistan can only flourish if women are properly represented in all areas of the country's presence. Men and women in Pakistan must work together to change the unfair pressures women face in Pakistani society, according to the author. As women continue to strive for equal rights for men, it is critical that both groups step up their efforts. Everyone has a responsibility to break the bias "every day, at home, in our communities, institutions and workplaces."

Aisha Sarwari

Deputy Country Manager for Pakistan and Afghanistan at Coca-Cola International



After completing her undergraduate degree at San Jose State University in the United States, Sarwari went on to work for a number of prestigious organisations, including USAID, USIP, the World Bank, Adam Smith International, CNN, NPR, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and DFID. She presently serves as the director of public relations, communications, and sustainability for the Coca-Cola Company in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Speaking about her success, she attributed it in part to the fact that she was fortunate enough to have excellent mentors who were able to open doors for her while many others were shut. "Hard effort and integrity are the only currencies that can succeed. They'll eventually guard you," she added.

"Because I'm so sensitive to power dynamics and will not tolerate males who pull rank in the workplace, it's been difficult. In addition, society does not provide adequate protections for women seeking gainful employment. As a parent and a member of the community, you bear the brunt of the responsibility. There is a general misconception among the public that you are motivated solely by financial gain. Young ladies who aspire to enter the sector should be aware of their surroundings," she said.

A career in Pakistan is fraught with peril and anxiety. No, it's true that the benefits are high, and independence is a virtue worth aiming for, but the cost is considerable since women are typically underpaid, the wage gap is real and if conflict happens, few organisations have the maturity to respect the law.

Nausheen Ahmedjee

Managing Director of Human Resources at Siemens



It's been less than two decades since Ahmedjee's varied career in pharmaceuticals, finance and accounting saw her gain knowledge in the creation of two critical components for any company's success - organisational procedures and practises as well as human capital. Siemens Engineering Pakistan Limited presently employs her as the company's head of people and culture. She is a specialist in assessing the needs of an organisation as a human resources manager.

She described her job as "interesting," noting that she was a chartered accountant with experience in business development, strategy, and financial planning before taking on the role of HR director at a well-known company. Among more developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, Ghana has been my favourite place to reside. While taking time off for family obligations, "I made sure that I didn't stop learning and improving," she said. "Family has been crucial to my success," she continued.

Ahmedjee attributes her good fortune to the presence of strong men in her life, beginning with her father, who made certain that his three daughters had the greatest possible education and provided them with unwavering support. She credited her success to her spouse, claiming that he served as a mentor to her. The majority of our employees are guys, and I've discovered more nice individuals than bad ones. In order to earn the respect of our male colleagues, it is critical that we, as women, conduct ourselves professionally in the workplace. She replied, "I learned very early on that if you show respect, you get it back," and she was right.

This Women's Day, Ahmedjee wants to make a point of reminding young women that success does not always entail climbing the

highest peak. It is crucial to define "success" in all aspects of one's life, including one's work as well as one's family, friends, health, and happiness, she added.

Moneeza Butt.

Partner at KPMG



In the auditing world, Moneeza Usman Butt is a celebrity. She's a partner at KPMG Pakistan — one of the biggest audit and advisory firms in the world. She joined KPMG in 1996 and qualified as a chartered accountant in 2000. Eight years later, she became a partner at the firm.

She was also the first woman to be made partner in one of the big four CA firms of Pakistan. She said that chartered accountancy was primarily a male-dominated field and she used to stick out like a sore thumb in teams and boardrooms.

According to Butt, the struggle is real for working women. "It is difficult to manage personal and professional lives. However, if you have the grit and determination, nothing can stop one from overcoming the obstacles that surface in one's journey, as where there is a will, there is a way," she said.

"Women are the architects of our society and we need to encourage, nurture and pave the way for them to ascend to leadership roles. Women often tend to be unassuming and unsure about their true capabilities. They tend to be dismissive about their skills and talents and since they do not see enough women in leadership roles they are not able to visualise themselves in those roles.

"I strongly believe that if one has sincerity of purpose and excels in their respective field then they must display the confidence to imbibe the success that comes their way. If women don't exude that conviction and self belief, it is difficult for others to place reliance in their abilities. Hence, embrace your gender with fortitude and celebrate it rather than thinking of it as a drawback to your dreams."

Umber T Ansari

Head of Marketing, Comms and PR at Engro Corp



Umber Tanya Ansari is a Pakistani-American who has been working in Pakistan for 16 years. Before joining her present job, where she is head of branding and communications for a major conglomerate, she worked her way up to heading a number of departments in Pakistan's asset management industry and was a member of the management committee of one of the most prominent AMCs in Pakistan. Ansari is a creative individual who is also certified in Global Diversity & Inclusion Benchmarking and is a Silver Shadow trainer, allowing her to train in 80 different countries.

Talking about her journey, she said that working in Pakistan has been amazing. "It's challenging, fruitful, and sometimes downright frustrating — but these are parts of the sum. The sum is worth it. The sum is financial independence, empowerment, confidence, interacting with such a diverse set of people and learning from all of them. The sum is definitely worth it," she added.

According to her, as a woman working in a male-dominated corporate sector, her experience had been like that of most women who work: fulfilling but not always fair. "The reality, being a woman, is that you have to deal with conscious and unconscious biases. Fortunately, I work in a company that hears women if they flag issues and has a zero tolerance policy on discriminatory behaviour and harassment," she explained.

To young women stepping into the corporate sector, Ansari has one message — challenge the stereotypes around what roles women "can" have. "Break biases around women working with other women. Be the kind of professional you would be pleased to work

with so you inspire others. And don't get frustrated when you see clearly that you have to work harder than a man to get the same recognition, because it will happen...and you have to keep going to make it easier for the women who come after us," she said. "Trust me, the women before us had to go through a lot more for us to be where we are today. Finally, have mentors and advocates across genders — at the end of the day, we all just need to realise that a world free of biases is a world worth living in."

Sania Sattar

Head of Corporate Communications, Sustainability and Special Projects at FrieslandCampina



She previously worked at Unilever in brand activation and communications before moving to digital recruiting and development at FrieslandCampina in 2018, where she is currently in charge of corporate communications. Sattar asserts that doing what you love is the only labour you'll ever have to do.

"Our colleagues at FrieslandCampina have created a wonderful working atmosphere that they all enjoy." It's a joy to be a part of this team. This attitude is only surpassed by the wonderful people I've met and continue to meet in my campus community. As a result, "I could not be prouder" of the company's commitment to "uplifting [women] and developing a community," she said.

According to Sattar, 50 percent of the talent pool presently consists of female employees. A company with a focus on talent quality, depth and breadth should rebalance the scales to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources. "It also helps to match incentives between businesses and local communities," she added.

Courtesy Dawn Newspaper

Commercialization of Higher Education in Pakistan

The majority of educational institutions devolved into moneymaking factories for their owners



By Alamgeer Abbas and Syed Ali Abbas

Education has become an indispensable commodity. With capitalism encompassing the world today, higher education institutes are dependent on their balance of payments instead of the quality of education. And the privatization of education under neoliberal capitalism has further added fuel to the fire by creating a significant divide between the rich and the poor as we witnessed during the pandemic. The more capital you have, the better the education as compared to the underprivileged class of our society.

Similarly, in Pakistan, the situation is rather worse. With the increasing number of private academic institutes, education is being commercialized in Pakistan and is becoming increasingly difficult for the underprivileged class to access even primary education. Simply put, education and capital are interlinked; the former is dependent on the latter.

Without governmental oversight, privatized educational institutions are administered as business organizations, resulting in the accumulation of wealth, as Karl Marx would put it. Not only have the majority of educational institutions devolved into money-making factories for their owners but have also devolved into degree-awarding factories, resulting in a significant rise in the quantity of knowledge at the expense of quality.

To add fuel to the fire, the influx of undereducated corporate elites into the system has further eroded the quality of higher education. More significantly, with the commercialization of higher education, higher education has become a scarce commodity for the bulk of the populace, particularly the poorer classes. It has devolved into a privilege reserved for the privileged few.

The damage caused by the exponential

rise of private institutions in the field of higher education over the last few years is truly enormous. It manifested itself primarily through the commercialization of higher education in the country. Commercialization has had a severe negative impact on the quality of higher education.

With the exception of a few, higher education institutions in the country are a dismal picture of failure. Education's quality has been eroded in the name of the business. The fact that the owners' ultimate purpose is profit accumulation has transformed the institutes into moneymaking factories. Profit is the yardstick by which all decisions in private institutions of higher education are measured.

The fact that the owners are fundamentally businesses demonstrates the commercial element in the private higher education industry. Owners are eager to take any means necessary to

further their commercial interests. Inherent economic interests, of course, result in violations of merit and standards.

This explains why it is relatively easy for students with below-average grades to gain admission to private colleges and universities if they can afford the expensive tuition fees.

Furthermore, the commercialization of higher education has resulted in a slew of other worrying expressions in the industry. One of them is the country's appalling lack of equitable access to higher education.



It is a well-established truth that privatization of higher education increased the cost of higher education dramatically in the country, making it a scarce commodity for the masses in the lower strata of society. It has been observed that in order to recoup the enormous costs associated with higher education, most notably the expense of attractive buildings, owners will turn to whatever means imaginable.

The most significant way is through the imposition of excessive tuition costs. Admission criteria are set extremely low in these institutes in order to attract the maximum number of students. Additionally, evening sessions are introduced to serve the business motive. To be completely candid, such a profit-driven model renders higher education expensive to the vast majority of gifted underprivileged students.

Due to a lack of resources, underprivileged students who may be more talented than their wealthy peers are marginalized by this privatized system of education. This form of prejudice breeds inequities within society, resulting in a generation of people with greater resources than the marginalized people with limited opportunities.

Another pitiful expression of the commercial mentality prevalent in privatized higher education institutions is the lack of adequate physical facilities. The majority of private higher education institutions lack libraries, laboratories,

cutting-edge scientific equipment, instructional aids, roomy classrooms, and high-speed internet access on their campuses.

Without these resources, the learning process will be ineffective. Needless to add, quality-based knowledge generation and innovation cannot occur in the absence of adequate infrastructure.

Additionally, the profit-driven strategy is a crucial factor in the emergence of standard research in the majority of private higher education institutions. With the exception of a few private universities in Pakistan, the caliber of research in private colleges and universities is pitiful.

There are two internationally recognized standards for assessing the quality of research. Firstly, the number of publica-

tions published by academics or researchers at a private university, and secondly, the number of patents registered by private higher education institutions. Pakistan's private higher education institutes fare poorly in each of these areas.

The reasons are self-evident. Quality-oriented research costs a lot of money, and the owners' business mindset prevents them from reducing their earnings in any manner. That is why they are unconcerned about conducting high-quality research.

There is no denying that the lack of qualified and well-trained teachers in the majority of private colleges and universities is also a corollary of the commercial component of private higher education. The heart and soul of an institution of higher education is its highly qualified and skilled faculty. Without it, no institution of higher learning can reach the peak of brilliance.

The owners of private institutes, on the other hand, appear unconcerned about it as long as their business interests are preserved. As a result, private colleges and universities compromise on this requirement in order to advance their commercial interests by hiring low-paid, under-qualified, and unskilled faculty. Thus, the commercial mentality of the owners contributes to the quality crisis in these institutions.

Apart from the lack of qualified faculty, rampant plagiarism also contributes significantly to the decline in the quality of private higher education institutions. Nobody can disagree that adequate knowledge cannot be generated in an institution where students are stealing others' work and passing it off as their own.

In addition to plagiarism, the absence of standardized assessment procedures in private institutes has a detrimental effect on the private sector's aspect of quality.

The status of higher education in Pakistan is dismal. If Pakistan is to do away with this crisis, it has to get rid of the commercialization of educational institutes as merely moneymaking entities. One wonders, however, if such a thing is possible under the profit-driven capitalist system that has occupied our world.

New Champions in Town: Qalandars Outperforms Sultans to Win Maiden Title

By Ali Abdullah

The theory of probability at long last found Multan Sultans, who after setting the seventh release of PSL ablaze with some of the highest totals, lost the game to Lahore Qalandars. Batting first, Qalandars amassed a whopping total of 181, which proved to be too tall a target for Sultans that struggled from the very outset, eventually falling short of 42 runs. It was a fairytale ending for Lahore Qalandars to win the maiden title at home. Veteran all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez's splendid performance (69 and 2-23) proved to be a game-changer.

After choosing to bat first, Lahore Qalandars were in a tough situation early on when they lost their best three batsmen inside powerplay for a mere 25 on the board. However, Hafeez stepped up exactly when it mattered the most, hitting a 46-ball 69, while sewing two useful 50-run partnerships, before Harry Brook (41* off 22) and David Wiese (28* off 8) gave the last touches in an explosive finish.

Asif Afridi struck twice to leave Qalandars at 25 for 3, two balls into the fifth over. Mohammad Hafeez provided the much-needed stability to his side as he held firm with Kamran Ghulam (15) to add 54 runs for the fourth wicket stand. However, Asif Afridi once again pulled a breakthrough with Kamran's wicket. Multan Sultans was once again in command. Hafeez held his ground this time with Brook turning the table on Multan Sultans once again.

Hafeez scored his maiden fifty of the season, off 36 deliveries, in the fifteenth over. Brook took responsibility quickly thereafter, beginning with a 4, 6, 6 hitting 20 runs off Rumman Raees in the seventeenth over. Shahnawaz Dahani hit back for Sultans with a wicket. The celebration did not last for long as David Wiese picked right from that point and struck three transcending sixes and a four in the last two overs, driving Qalandars to a



mammoth 180/5 in the allotted overs. The upwards of 87 runs came off only the last six overs.

In the second innings, Mohammad Hafeez once again proved crucial for his team sending in-form Mohammad Rizwan and Aamer Azmat back to the pavilion with the new ball in hand. Sultans found themselves reeling on 46/3 soon after the powerplay. The top-order collapse not just sucked the momentum off Sultans' chase but left no room for recuperation. Before long, halfway through the eleventh over, they were reduced to 63 for as Zaman Khan pulled two wickets in his subsequent overs.

Tim David (27 off 17) partnered with Khushdil Shah (32 off 23) for a 51-run stand in 5.3 overs to reignite spirit into the chase as loss seemed almost imminent with the asking rate climbing to 17 for the last four overs. Tim David tumbled to an impressive forward-diving catch by Fakhar Zaman at deep midwicket.

Shaheen Shah Afridi made it a double-wicket over when he dismissed David Willey with a brilliant delivery. He picked up one more wicket in the penultimate over, becoming the season's top wicket-taker holding 20 wickets. Khushdil's departure in the

past over was the final nail in the casket for Multan Sultans – a side that outperformed in the league stage with nine wins in ten matches.

Pakistan Super League has rapidly grown to become one of the best leagues in the world. Current and former cricketers and journalists are all-praise for the league. Former England captain Michael Vaughan compared the marquee Pakistani T20 tournament with other leagues around the world and said that "it leaves you wanting a little bit more at the end".

Pakistan Super League was established in 2015 and the first season was played in 2016. The league provided a global stage to the emerging talent of Pakistan to play and learn in the company of the game's stars.

Initially, the league used to take place in UAE as foreign players were reluctant to travel to Pakistan because of security reasons. However, gradually the league returned to Pakistan generating immense interest amongst the masses.

PSL was a long time coming for the cricket-crazy fans of Pakistan who previously had no other option than to fill their appetite with the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Eva B: The Hijabbi Rapper

She insists today's Lyari is a far cry from the gang-infested shumland it once was



By **Kaukab Jahan**

In Pakistan, women are springing from areas not exactly known for women empowerment. One woman who checks this box is an ethnic Baloch rapper from Karachi's Lyari, an urban slum once notorious for rampant gang warfare.

Eva B rose to prominence after appearing in the Coke Studio Season 14. She did the rap part in the song 'Kana Yaari' alongside Kaifi Khalil and Abdul Wahab Bugti.

Eva B also negates the perception about Lyari, generally known for its violence, gang wars, and drugs.

After teaching herself the basics through the internet, Eva B began her journey as a rapper in 2014 by starting her YouTube channel. Her first official song 'Gully Girls' was released on music streaming platform Patari in 2019.

The same year, Eva B collaborated with the Pakistani singer Momina Mustehsan to perform "Gully Girls" at the Lux Style Awards. Besides doing music, she is completing her Bachelor of Arts.

TTI magazine had a conversation with this young enthusiastic rapper in detail.

TTI: How did Kana Yari happen which won you fame not only in Pakistan but also worldwide?

EB: One fine day I got a call from Zulfiqar Jabbar Khan aka Xulfi the producer of Coke Studio Season 14, who asked if I would like to work with him. I asked him about the project for which he wanted to hire me. He said, 'Coke Studio'. Then it did not take another second for me to reply 'Yes'. Which artist would not want to work in Coke Studio? Every artist in the world wants to work on such a big platform.

TTI: Did you have an inkling your song would become the talk of the town?

EB: No. As new artists, we thought our song would get a million views maximum and that too only because of Coke Studios but honestly. We did not have any idea that it would win hearts and cross 10 million views.

TTI: Is Eva your real name?

EB: It is my stage name. There are many hip-hop artists who work with their nicknames or stage names. I did the same. Some just decide their name randomly while some choose it with the meaning and purpose. I have chosen Eva from Eve (Bibi Hawwa), and B represents Baloch that is my identity.

TTI: How did you get into rap and decided to be a rapper?

EB: It all started when I bought a second hand computer (from my friend). It had many hip-hop albums downloaded and that included Eminem as well. The first one, which I played, was Eminem and I totally immersed in it.

At that time, I did not know what genre of music it was. Later, when I researched and asked my friends, I came to know that it was rap. Then, I tried to find the concept behind this music like why people rap and how it originated.

In the beginning, I could not even understand the lyrics properly so I used to translate them. Then I found out that rap artists usually represent/ put forward the problems, the social issues and political turmoil in their music.

I thought I could also emphasize the problems of women in Lyari, and other issues of the area specifically and the rest of Pakistan through my music. Therefore, I started writing about these issues and composed them in rap style.

TTI: Being a woman who belongs to an area like Lyari, what problems did you face when you decided to become a musician?

EB: Too many. When I started, people like my relatives and friends tried to dissuade me. They were not ready to accept that a woman could be a musician and that too a rapper.

They said it was a boys' thing and I should leave it to them. They even said if I keep on doing it, I would not be able to get a good rishta (match).

However, I was determined and now my relatives who once opposed me say that they are proud of me. Yes, I have become a celebrity now!

TTI: We see a rebellious streak in your

music, there are glimpses of willful provocation. Where does it all come from?

EB: It is not rebellious! It is me. I want to explore myself through music. I want to tell the world what hardships I and many other girls and boys of my area or other parts of Pakistan have gone through. We are still facing the same problems, which are hindering our progress.

TTI: Tell us a little about the current hip-hop scene of Lyari.

EB: There are many hip-hop artists in the area. The overall scene has changed now. Before, children used to say that they would become Lala (we call a gangster Lala) when they grow up. Now they say that they want to become a rapper, or a footballer, or a boxer.

TTI: Many say the privileged and well-off class should leave rap to those coming from the marginalized sections of society. Do you agree?

EB: Yes, it is true. Rap music originated from the under-privileged and working class. We have become psychologically disturbed because of our daily problems like the unavailability of basic utilities like gas, electricity and water.

In our area, the bio-gas is available only

from 6am to 8 pm, electricity outages are unscheduled and long, most of the time we get undrinkable and hard water. We have to manage and adjust our cooking and other chores in accordance with these irregularities.

[These circumstances are] definitely disturbing our sleep, our eating, and our thinking process. Therefore, we rappers from the area want to highlight these problems through our music.

A privileged and well-off person has it all at a time without even acknowledging them. So if they want to tell how much money, drugs, and sex they have in their lives, let them do it.

TTI: Rap music is a kind of pop culture, which gives you fame and name but you prefer to hide your face with a veil. Why?

EB: First, it is a part of Baloch culture. Moreover, when I discussed my music with my family, my younger brother advised me if I wanted to continue it, I should keep my veil on. I also do not want to show my face.

[The veil] was not a hindrance for me at all as I have been putting on my veil since my childhood. I even made my music videos in veil, interviewed in it and gradually it became my identity. Now I do not find myself comfortable without it.



The Truth International organized an article writing competition for young researchers and students, to provide a platform to test their writing skills and to progress in the field of journalism and social sciences. We decided on three winners, to get featured in the magazine and receive prizes. Ezza Tariq received the first prize in the competition for the article published below.

The World's Lurch Right in the New Millennium

Democratic public discourse and freedom of expression cannot go hand in hand with right-wing populism



By Ezza Tariq

The mid-2010s saw a swift rise in the fortunes of right-wing populism around the world. With democracies falling to right wing populism like dominoes, free expression came under assault in country after country.

It went to the point that democracies all across the globe that once (although perhaps not wholeheartedly) stood for international cooperation, diplomacy, and globalization now stood in sharp contrast to these international norms and values.

In hindsight, it is fair to say the silver lining of the rise and rise of right-wing populism in country after country is that the authoritarian nature of this political ideology has become plain to see.

Right-wing politics is subscribed to by those leaders who want to maintain their traditional and cultural values, class system within the society and protect the interests of the state, its sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Those who advocate for notions such as authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction, and nationalism.

To quote Norwegian political scientist Prof Bernt Hagtvet: "Right-wing groups tend to perceive nations as unequal. They rank nations by worth, placing theirs on top. They insist on the excellence of their own nation, they emphasize its history as partic-

ularly glorious, they include allusions to its past in their political discourse."

On the other hand, the Left ideology is subscribed to by those who want to establish liberal values, freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform, internationalism, and ethical decisions within a state. They advocate ending class system, racism, and dominion of one over another.

In the 21st century, the rise of right-wing activism and politics has played a pivotal role in the world. Electoral results in country after country demonstrated how the right-wing populist parties are rising nationally and internationally, especially in Europe.

The rise of such right-wing parties has had negative effects on the economy, politics, and social behaviour of the world. If we view the rise of right-wing populist parties through the mid- and late-2010s elections all over the world, we can clearly see how the activism and politics of right-wing populist parties and their ideological struggles are shaping our world.

The victory of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton with 77 electoral college votes in the presidential election of America, Narendra Modi's rabidly nationalist BJP party's victory against the Indian National Congress, populist Imran Khan's victory against his opposition, Turkey's leader

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's success against a coup attempt to overthrow his government in 2016 who later won the President's seat by gaining 51 percent public votes, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Boris Johnson in the United Kingdom, and Angela Merkel's election as the chancellor of Germany are evidence of how it is not only rising in Europe but all across the world.

However, its rise in European states, and generally in the West, can be seen as a critical juncture for international politics because the international power centres reside in the West and this lurch to the right is in stark contradiction to the West's much-supported liberal values abroad. The hypocrisy is striking!

The aim of these parties and their victories are to protect the tradition, culture, religion, sovereignty, and linguistic identity of a nation but it has had some significant impacts on the economy, immigration, and politics of a state or among the states.

Economic crisis

The most devastating effect of the rise of right-wing politics is the economic crisis all over the world. The neoliberal globalization or capitalism led to the financial crisis of 2008 and the Eurozone crisis which had reverse effects on the global economy.

Right-wing politics emerged in contention with globalization.

The rise of populist parties, far and wide, therefore, harms the global economy. This reflects the contagious nature of the global economic crisis and extends Marx's critiques on capitalist politics.

For example, due to the destabilization effect of the oil industry in many states like Libya, Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, and Syria, these developing nations depended, by and large, on stable oil prices during the financial crisis since the Great Depression of 1929.

Moreover, the US government pushed its housing and mortgages market and in return got further financial crashes and instability. Looking at them, many other states implemented similar policies with the same results as the United States. The then US President George W. Bush signed the USD 700 billion relief for banks, corporations, and authorities to overcome the global financial crisis.

However, although the economy was stabilized, it reflects the inability of neoliberal capitalism to provide a reliable system for the world. While the big corporations were funded heavily by the US administration, the public living standards have declined.

After Trump's election and the rise of right-wing politics in Europe, privatization, authoritarianism, and neoliberal trade further aggravated the human rights situation as witnessed in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the US. Living standards have plummeted, good wages have become ever harder to come by as Bernie Sanders has continuously reiterated, and uncertainty has engulfed the present and future.

Right-wing populist parties woo masses with false promises to overcome all the challenges. They cash in on a state of crisis to cement their authority.

On the other hand, European populism of is different from Latin American populism. Europe has exclusive policies that have a socio-cultural dimension. Latin America, on the other hand, has inclusive policies that are designed to help the poor.

The populisms practiced by Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi, Brazil's Jair

Bolsonaro, and the United Kingdom's Boris Johnson's are also exclusive in nature.

In Pakistan's political history, right-wing politics was first supported by President Zia ul Haq, against the left-wing government of the Pakistan People Party (PPP). He established Islamism as the ideology of Pakistan and institutionalised conservative economic and foreign policies.

The current Prime Minister Imran Khan has also changed his politics from liberal left to the conservative right, has marginalized dissent and critical voices, and encouraged nationalism, Islamic ideology, and indigenous culture.



Moreover, the ascendant right-wing nationalist parties in Europe and Asia are largely supported by working and anti-elite classes due to their perceived immigration problems and their fear of cultural changes, economic instability, low wages, etc., because of refugee influx. These parties tend to be anti-refugee and pay lip service to poverty alleviation.

Democratic public discourse and authoritarianism

Public discourse is essential to the development and long-term progress of a state in which people have the right to have their opinions and voice their concerns. But some current developments are problematic for democracy.

The right-wing forces interrogate certain speeches and restrict freedom of expression to safeguard their own parochial interests. Whatever falls outside of this narrow ambit is considered treason – as witnessed in Pakistan and India where critical voices against state oppression are met with sedition charges.

The suppression of dissent under these parties lays bare their authoritarian nature, which leads us to conclude that democratic public discourse and freedom of expression cannot go hand in hand with right-wing politics.

Even in the US, the Black Lives Matters movement was met with hostility by the Trump administration. In fact, Trump went out of his way to call the protestors 'thugs.'

In the world's most populous democracy, India, resistance broke out in Delhi when the BJP government legalized the marginalization of the Muslim community in India. In response, the government used brutal tactics against students to suppress critical

voices. In Pakistan, students and academics are facing sedition charges by the state for demanding their constitutional rights.

This pattern all over the world brings us to another conclusion: This is a systemic problem and it does not vary from state to state.

If we are to progress as a free society, we need to get rid of the right-wing politics that is pushing us back to the medieval times when any criticism of the Emperor would result in persecution – times when, in Foucault's words, "it was forbidden to say that the emperor had no clothes".

Today, there is an urgent need to understand that the economic crisis due to the capitalist system. Equally, there is an urgent need to deconstruct political propaganda churned out by right-wing populists, who prey on the working and anti-elite classes by pretending to respect or care for them.

For, unless that propaganda is deconstructed and defeated, authoritarianism in the guise of right-wing populism will continue to dominate the world.

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