

The Truth International

15th - 30th April 2022

PML-N and Allies Govt

Change of Govt may not bring political stability

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New divisions are taking place among nations

Pakistan Economy

Revival of economy needs tough decisions

Sharifs are Back



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The triumph of the Constitution

By Hammad Ghaznavi



At the end of a month long political rollercoaster, the Imran Khan government fell, the first through a no-confidence vote in our national assembly. Mr Khan who came into power with the blessings of the 'institutions', couldn't hold on to power for long once the institutions stepped back from political arena. With Imran's departure, another experiment of the Mighty of the land, called Hybrid Regime, officially failed. Annoying all his political and apolitical allies, Imran Khan proved his own worst enemy.

He never was considered a huge fan of the constitution, but during his last couple of weeks in office proved him a man who actually had zero respect for the supreme law of the land. When a motion of no confidence was submitted against him in the NA, the constitutional requirement of convening a session within 14 days was flouted under a flimsy pretext, indicative of the foul mood in the PTI camp. On 3rd April, deputy speaker Qasim Suri blatantly violated the constitution to reject voting on the no confidence motion and prorogued the NA session. The Supreme Court came to the rescue of the constitution itself, and declared Mr Suri's decision ultra vires. The sad part was that Mr Khan still remained defiant. The NA session on April 9th, the deadline set by the Supreme Court for voting saw worst filibustering for over 13 hours by the treasury benches.

It was around 10 PM that day when the state institutions came into action to unequivocally express their resolve to implement the court's orders. The Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court doors were opened and the men in black robes started to arrive; a prisoner van was

seen parked outside the parliament building; and the rangers took positions nearby. Sources insist that the PM was advised by the senior military personnel 'in their trademark style', to follow the court orders. It was just before midnight, in brief, that the NA speaker finally resigned, and the voting was conducted, leading to the ouster of PM Imran Khan. He dragged his feet till the last moment, until he realized that the army was strictly standing behind the courts and the constitution.

A list of failures sums up the Imran rule. Despite unprecedented support from all state institutions, the IK government failed to meaningfully deliver on any count. His prime slogans were accountability, zero tolerance for corruption, and bringing back of the looted money. His accountability drive turned into pure witch-hunting as NAB-Niazi nexus jailed almost all his political opponents without proving a single case in the courts. Around a dozen mega corruption scandals, reportedly involving IK's aides, were ignored without a serious probe. Little wonder then that Pakistan slid down 16 spots in the world corruption perception index. Economy crashed under Imran, with unprecedented inflation, unemployment, multiplying debts and plunging growth rate.

Bad governance and price-hike caused general discontent and the wrath of the common man was not only directed towards the PTI government but also its facilitators. The lowest point for the Establishment-IK relationship came when over a key appointment the former felt that IK was trying to interfere in the internal matters of the institution, purely for his political gains. This point, many argue,

proved the beginning of the end, finally convincing Rawalpindi to take a step back and go 'neutral' to protect the institution from further politicization.

IK's political allies who had been complaining for long for being ignored noticed the change of heart in Rawalpindi and in the absence of the pressure to side with IK, deserted him. The rest, as they say, is history. Dictatorial streak of the PTI government was perhaps its worst feature, as 'difference of opinion', against all democratic tradition, was treated as treachery – the media was muzzled, political opponents were jailed, the judiciary was blatantly snubbed through presidential references against independent judges, Election Commission was attacked, and so on. IK, many argue, wanted the next general elections to be a replica of the Elections 2018, hence, his insistence on a key appointment last year.

IK's new political narrative sounds incredulous – it's a US conspiracy against his government for saying Absolutely No to the superpower. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has rightly announced an in-camera parliamentary session of the national security committee, with military leadership in attendance, to look into the conspiracy allegation. The outcome may not support IK's public stance.

Shehbaz Sharif has his work cut out for him. The economic meltdown facing the country needs total focus of the new government and Mr Sharif has sounded fully aware of the challenge in his first address as the PM. With PTI announcing mass resignations from the NA, and IK on the roads in a defiant mode, Mr Sharif task looks even tougher.

What Next for Pakistan's Politics?

How long will the new political dispensation stay, and how it will be defined



By Sarfraz Raja

Finally, it's over for Imran Khan, ousted in a late-night vote on 9 April 2022 after 3 years 7 months and 23 days in power. The former cricket star has become the first Pakistani prime minister to be ousted through a vote of no confidence by the Parliament.

It's unfortunate history of the country that not a single head of government had been able to complete its term but still Imran Khan has become 4th longest serving premier in history of Pakistan after Yusuf Raza Gillani (4 years 2 months and 25 days), first prime minister of the country Liaquat Ali Khan (4 years 2 months and 2 days), and thrice prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif (4 years 1 months and 23 days in his last term).

Although outgoing Prime Minister Imran Khan had lost his majority soon after a no confidence motion submitted in National Assembly secretariat as dozens of his party members became dissidents and announced to vote against him and later two major allies like MQM and BAP too parted ways, leaving no moral grounds for him to remain in power, but former cricket captain kept insisting to fight till the last ball and in-fact he remained in power till the very last minute he could get.

Although whole month before the final push produced a political drama, the

last few hours were most thrilling and full of suspense where situation kept changing dramatically with every running hour and finally minutes before apex court's deadline of 12 o'clock midnight for a vote count, a constitutional requirement for the vote of no confidence.

The process could only be completed after a two-minute adjournment on the next day which was 10 April 2022 – incidentally the date declared as the Constitution Day in remembrance of approval of the Constitution of Pakistan 49 years back in 1973.

But dramatic events happened before that including a last-minutes resignation by speaker national assembly Asad Qaiser, who refused to initiate voting against his party leader and allowed opposition MNA Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, a member of Panel of Chairs, to preside and carry forward the agenda. Imran Khan was ousted with 174 MNAs showing no confidence in him.

The new set up and its term

New set up would be a kind of new experience as well where about seven parties of different ideologies having different kind of support base considered as political rivals would work together and a big question to which

still didn't have any clear reply is for how long new government continues.

Would it complete its term? Are we hoping to see an early election? From what we know, there is difference of opinion among the allied parties about the tenure of the new government. Even if Shahbaz Sharif, the unanimous candidate of premiership from opposition allies replacing Imran Khan, gets to rule the remainder of the National Assembly's tenure, it promises to be a one-and-a-half year full of numerous challenges.

Initially, the majority opposition party PMLN was not in favour to oust Imran Khan from power just before election year, fearing this would make him a political martyr, providing excuse for his performance and incompetence. However, the joint opposition changed its strategy later on and agreed on his removal through a vote of no confidence. Fresh election through the dissolution of the assemblies immediately after electing their leader of house was on the PDM agenda initially.

JUI chief Molana Fazalur Rehman and a majority in PMLN was in favour of early and immediate elections while Asif Ali Zardari and his Pakistan People's party views differently favouring completion of assembly tenure, but later opposition parties convinced that



they should go for some electoral reforms before entering election phase.

There is another issue with regard to new elections that constitutional terms of all five assemblies including National and four provincial assemblies would complete in August 2023 and for simultaneous elections all the assemblies have to be dissolved at same time otherwise there would be different dates for all five elections which create some technical, managerial and financial issues with many political complications too that is if any province having government of specific party, when hold National Assembly elections neutrality and transparency would be highly questioned and election process could easily be influenced by party who would be in power in that province.

The electoral reform agenda

Reforms in elections laws with unanimity are called as the main agenda for new government before going to next general elections countrywide. Previously electoral reforms and laws had amended in 2017 but there is much more to be done.

Electronic voting machines (EVMs) and internet voting (i-voting) for overseas Pakistanis is used as a political card by PTI government taking credit of modernizing electoral process, although both measures were under considerations for many years previously.

There were some reservations by some stakeholders regarding privacy and transparency in EVMs and i-voting mechanism. As this has become a political issue, the new ruling alliance would have to decide the matter unanimously to avoid any controversies, taking on board all the stakeholders besides addressing all other flaws in electoral system and that would be the major assignment for new setup and it is obviously a time taking process might take many months.

On other hand, as total number of seats of National assembly are reduced from 272 to 266 after merger of previously Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, new demarcation of constituencies are necessary to be done on priority basis.

Challenges ahead

There is certainly much to worry for the new government, the economic situation of country being top of the list. They criticized Imran regime for its economic policies and now it's their turn to address these issues or face the music. Immediately, they have to get ready for upcoming budget, due to be presented in June – as well as tackling public issues like increasing fuel prices, exchange rate, inflation, and unemployment.

Although economic indicators are not trending very well but Shahbaz Sharif government have to perform some miracles

to get public support before entering into new elections.

To run an allied government is itself a great challenge, especially when you have a thin majority. It's almost a seven party's alliance with everyone expecting a better share to keep them on broad especially when all these parties have to go for elections after a short period need to use term in office as their elections campaign too.

Opposition pressure

It is quiet obvious that the ousted prime minister Imran Khan would now go all out to pressurize the new government for an early election with country-wide protest, rallies, and possible resignations from assemblies. How much public pressure Imran Khan can mount and how the new allied government manages to handle it, especially in case of possible mass resignations from assemblies, would be important.

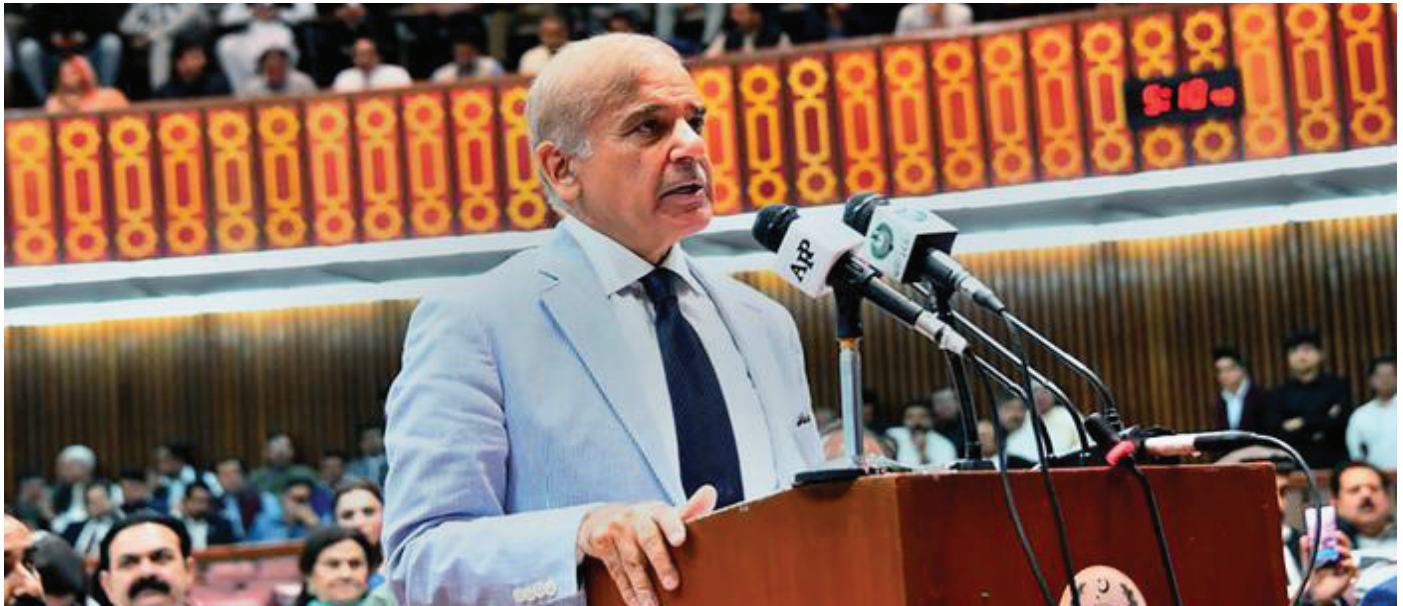
The incumbent parliament is due to complete its five years term in mid August 2023, just 16 months away, and the task of unanimous electoral reforms, preparations for elections and to prove abilities in betterment of economy to sell something in election campaign, these 16 months seems a short period to deal with for the new ruling alliance. But how effectively can PTI pressurize the new regime with its protests strategy would actually define this period.





The Flight of Shahbaz

Does the younger Sharif have what it takes to tackle the herculean labours at his hands?



By Wajih Safarish Khan

A tough taskmaster and a workaholic who rises early and retires late, Shahbaz Sharif has a reputation for efficiency. But does he have the works to deliver what is being expected of him as the head of a ragtag coalition of convenience bringing together parties of all stripes?

The sheer size of the new coalition – it consists of nine diverse political parties including PMLN, PPP, JUIF, MQM, ANP, BAP, BNP, JWP, PDM (and some independents) many of whom have a history of mutual antagonism – makes Sharif's job look more like a challenge than an opportunity. Clearly, he will have to use his best of abilities to keep the alliance together until they decide to hold next general elections.

Shahbaz is in the hot seat replacing former Prime Minister Imran Khan, whom the opposition alliance ousted in a vote of no confidence. It was made possible basically by the Khan's coalition partners and some independents switching sides to join the PPP-PDM alliance.

Although about twenty members of National Assembly belonging to PTI have also changed their loyalties to the new ruling alliance, they have not asked to vote either in vote of no confidence against the

former Prime Minister or the election of the new one – apparently to shield them from possible de-seating under article 63A of the constitution for defection.

The biggest partners in the new coalition – PPP and PMLN – have a history of strong mutual rivalry. Although they have worked together in different opposition alliances and on some issues, they have usually been each other's target for most of last three and half decades.

Just in last March, they were targeting each other with all sorts of verbal attacks after a brief anti-government alliance. Their only experience of a coalition government in 2008 lasted for just over a month. How long will they stay together this time around is anybody's guess.

PPP and MQM have an acrimonious history of their own. The parties representing rural and urban Sindh respectively have mostly been at the opposite ends of the political spectrum. This time around, they have made an elaborate pact on Karachi and other issues concerning the governance of Sindh province. However they have a long list of such agreements signed between them two in the past proved more sacrosanct in violation than their implementation.

Then MQM, PTM and Balochistan National Party and some other groups have some issues, especially those related to missing persons and security situation in Karachi, Baluchistan and the merged (former FATA) districts of KP, which are beyond the power of the civilian government. The PTI's inability to resolve these issues was the prime reason for disassociation of these parties with Imran Khan's party. Shahbaz Sharif will have to use a lot of suasion to resolve these issues failing which it will be difficult for him to keep these partners placated.

The new coalition has achieved its first objective to vote out Imran Khan and replace him with Shahbaz Sharif but the tasks of forming a government, successfully running and managing it, and providing relief to the people of Pakistan – tasks at which its predecessor failed – are crying to be tackled.

The PDM/PPP have been saying that the new government will be short lived and new elections will be called after making some changes in the electoral laws. However, Election Commission says that its needs about six months to do fresh delimitations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, mandatory after the merger of the former tribal areas in the province.



The districts that previously formed the FATA had twelve seats in the present National Assembly but after their merger, their quota, according to their share in national population, has been halved. KP's seats in National Assembly have thus increased from 39 to 45. That quota has to be equally distributed in the whole province, which will need slight adjustment in all constituencies from the province.

It's the responsibility of the coalition to do the reforms which they intend to do as quickly as possible and with as much consensus as they can muster and pave the way for free, fair and independent elections, without an iota of interference or engineering from any side whatsoever.

While doing the election reforms, some institutional checks will have to be put on the working of caretaker government so that the interim period between dissolution of parliament and oath-taking of new one is not used to take decisions which only a elected government should take or for managing the election process in a way to favour or disfavour any political group during the exercise.

During the last two weeks of his rule, Imran Khan and his ministers built their narrative around a cable from the Pakistani ambassador to US in which he allegedly talks about meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu. According to Imran Khan, during the meeting Mr. Lu threatened of consequences if the government in Pakistan was not changed.

Routine meetings of diplomats with members of different society including politicians were put as part of some conspiracy and evidence of foreign interference. Apparently it seems that Lettergate, as it is being referred to, is an afterthought to garner nationalistic fervour in support to a cornered and unsuccessful government.

The debate has done the damage it could and now keeping the secrecy of the cable will not serve any purpose. The new government must make public the original cable as well as the document the former prime minister has been waiving at different forums and ask a Supreme Court judge to investigate the whole issue including allegations regarding members of now ruling coalition taking any money from the

United States to remove the Imran government. Any culpability has to be punished.

If the letter is not what it has been propagated to be then Imran Khan and all those involved in defaming the whole leadership of the opposition of treachery against the country should be taken to task. Imran Khan has a habit of making wild and unsubstantiated accusations against his opponents.

It may be useful to recall how he for years drummed about the so called '35 punctures', but when brought to court said he it was a political statement. Then he started calling everyone a thief and a dacoit. When that did not work he has come with a new game so as to dub everyone of his opponents a traitor conspiring against the country. He must be taken to task before he can further destroy the society by creating civil commotion in the country.



The slogans raised and social media trends started against the military leadership and judiciary after the Supreme Court decision against deputy speaker's ruling and show to the extent to which Imran Khan can go in his blind quest of power. The leadership should be wary of such dangerous thoughts and will have to do something to discourage it.

Besides moral issues and return of divisive politics what Pakistan witnessed the most during last three and half years was economic meltdown. Pakistan's GDP had dropped by ten percent within one year of the taking over of previous government international aid and concessions during

coronavirus epidemic stemmed the slide a bit but the conditions started worsening again as the epidemic subsided.

The US dollar was trading at close to 190 rupees the day when National Assembly was to first take on voting on no confidence on 3rd April. Pakistan is expecting record foreign trade deficit this year. Inflation is in double digit for some years now. Exports though have slightly increased this year, are still far from where the country's potential is and where should have been after such a drastic fall in Rupee-Dollar parity.

The positive vibes, despite PTI's decision to resign from assemblies and start agitation in the country, which the coalition government has generated have already token effect. Rupee has appreciated eight rupees to the US Dollar during last two working days. The stock exchange recovered more than 1700 points on the day Shahbaz Sharif was elected Prime minister.

Prices of crude oil, which were at about \$100 a week, have slightly eased to around 94. Any further decrease will give more relief to the economy. Still on the short term government will have to take measures to control commodity prices so as to give some relief to the people.

In the long term policies would have to be adopted so that industrial and farm production is increased. This will be necessary to create jobs, augment income of the people, increase exports and decrease reliance on imports especially on food items to ease the pressure on foreign exchange and better manage our dependence on international lenders including the IMF.



A Dream Gone Sour

Here's what led to the downfall of arguably Pakistan's most powerful leader



By Zarghon Shah

Sworn in as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan on 18 August 2018, Imran Khan was probably the most powerful prime minister in the history of Pakistan, not least because he enjoyed a pliant military – a luxury no other prime minister has enjoyed. Yet his government came to a premature and forceful end on 10 April 2022. Do you wonder how and why?

A number of factors contributed to Khan's fall from power – including failed promises of Naya Pakistan, personal inflexibility, high cost of living, Buzdar factor and an unnecessary rift with the security establishment.

During its three and half years in power, the PTI government instead of a constructive legislative debate in the parliament, indulged into an endless series of hurling accusations and mudslinging on the opponents. In a reflection of his personal stubbornness, Imran Khan refused to shake hands with, sit down, or talk with the opposition leaders throughout these over-three years.

Imran Khan's prime slogan was to steer the country through a new era of economic and social progress and development. His other towering pledges included salvaging the country from foreign debt, making Pakistan stand on its own feet, strict and thorough accountability and recovery of stolen national wealth from abroad, but none of these promises could ever materialize.

On the economic front, Pakistan went through a series of crises: Inflation almost doubled, prices of electricity, petrol, gas, medicines rose up amid lack of effective price control mechanism. Delays in bureaucratic decisions and cover-up of flour and sugar scandals further undermined the PTI government's credibility.

Amid high cost of living, dollar flew high and crossed the 180 mark, in addition to increase in internal and external debt. Above all the IK government that had pledged to stay away from IMF borrowing had to seek loans from the same financial institution, besides taking loans from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and China. Although the

government and its supporters blamed global conditions for domestic economic miseries, public resentment against Khan simmered with the passage of time.

Accountability for trumpeted recovery of plundered national wealth from opponents, mainly the Sharif family and Asif Zardari, turned out to be a mere victimization exercise. Through National Accountability Bureau, the PTI government targeted and sent opposition leaders behind bars for months without trial. It allegedly used institutions like Anti-Narcotics Force and Federal Investigation Agency for political arm-twisting — Rana Sanaullah being one example.

Imran Khan's own finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, during a cabinet meeting, had referred to 'fear of the NAB' as a key factor behind lack of decision making by the bureaucracy.

The Asset Recovery Unit headed by Shahzad Akbar failed to prove anything in line with his long list of money laundering etc. A disgruntled Imran Khan fired



Shahzad Akbar as a consequence of the latter's inability to accomplish the task. Claims to bring back billions in looted wealth from abroad remained unfulfilled until Khan's last day in office.

According to experts, one of the significant factors behind displeasure and distance of many allies and PTI leaders from Imran Khan was the appointment of Usman Buzdar as the chief minister of Punjab and his poor performance. Imran Khan would rather strongly defend Buzdar at every forum despite huge party pressure and bad provincial governance. Speculations frequently ascribed this unwavering support to Khan's spouse Bushra Bibi's steady backing for Buzdar.

Imran Khan's failure to manage better relations with security establishment is largely believed to be one of the key reasons behind his downfall. His withholding a formal notification approving naming of the new DGISI for nearly three weeks led to cracks in civil-military relations. Khan's dubbing the 'neutral' as animals, in a public

rally further fueled the fire. And now without the support of the establishment, media and others, many fear if IK would be able to run his protests.

On the foreign front, it is largely believed the PTI government could not advance Pakistan's traditional diplomatic relations with important countries of the world. Imran government appeared to be isolated on many important foreign fronts, i.e., the US, EU, Middle East and even China. Imran Khan's recent pubic address at Mailsee, in which he challenged the European Union trying to enslave Pakistan, has displeased many European capitals.

Contrary to Khan's initial claims, universities were not opened in the Prime Minister's House and Governor's Houses. Short official protocol claims turned out to be long queues of cars. The dreams of 10 million jobs and 5 million houses have soured.

Imran government's major performance has had been the daily meetings of its

spokespersons, mostly Shehbaz Gill, Fawad Chaudhry, Shahzad Akbar, Shibli Faraz, Hamad Azhar and others with their targeted propaganda statements.

The PTI government's social media brigade, cabinet members, and spokespersons continued to target critical voices from across the country on social media platforms. In this drive, they never spared media personalities. Trends full of abuses and derogatory remarks remained a hallmark of the PTI's social media campaigners.

Analysts believe opposition benches are more suited to Imran Khan, who has proven that he is a born opposition leader. Even being a prime minister for last three and a half years, he acted more like a leader of opposition. As a fast bowler of the past, Imran Khan relishes in scaring his opponent. In the dire economic straits Pakistan is facing right now, he may find ideal conditions for a fiery spell.





The Future of PTI and Q League

The tables may have turned but there is still fight left in the ruling parties of the yesteryears

By Ahmad Waleed

The recent events in the political history of Pakistan have been marked with utter disregard of the Constitution and the Parliament. The ouster of former Prime Minister Imran Khan was made disgraceful by none other than Imran Khan himself. A dictator in him with no regard to the opinion of his fellows and his critics brought to a clumsy end his own struggle of 22 years to make Naya Pakistan.

His unfaltering support to Usman Buzdar, Chief Minister of the largest province of Punjab, caused a bigger damage to his government than all other follies he committed. The shallowness in his claims and promises remained the hallmark of his performance during his over three-year tenure. He preferred political victimisation over fulfilment of his tall claims and fancy promises.

What does the future holds for his party? Multiple challenges await the PTI leadership in the months ahead. The biggest one is within the party itself after Tareen and Aleem Khans have come out in the open with a serious challenge to none other than Imran Khan. While a significant number of defectors have been promised tickets by the PPP and PML-N in the next elections, many of the deserters in Punjab have reposed unconditional trust in the leadership of Jahangir Tareen to take the reins of the party. These two groups alongside the smaller Chheena Group are likely to win a big number of seats in Punjab.

Though the PTI has been able to maintain a very solid ground in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province despite losing support in many key areas in the recent local bodies elections, it seems Punjab has slipped out of its hands not only due to a very poor performance of his Wasim Akram plus – Usman Buzdar – but also due to bad governance and poor economic management at the centre that led to an unprecedented price-hike. It has failed to dent the popularity of its rival PML-N which has furthered its hold in the province during the PTI rule instead.



The party leadership decision to go for awarding tickets to the electables in order to reach power corridors in 2018 elections annoyed dozens of party's founding members. Many of those members committed to the ideology and philosophy of the party either left the PTI or went into oblivion while the newcomers managed to get closer to the party chairman. The same electables ditched Imran Khan to join the opposition at the crucial time of no-confidence motion. It hurt the core leadership more than anything else.

"I will not repeat the same mistakes in future. I've learnt the lessons well and will award tickets to only those loyal to the party in future," Khan remarked while admitting that the PTI has paid a high price for committing mistakes in the past. "But, now our first decision is to give tickets after a great deliberation," he said.

However, it will require a much bigger effort to gain the space lost in the last three years especially in Punjab which is the stronghold of PML-N. Sans electables, the party faces a new herculean task to help the ideological workers win back the desired number of seats in Punjab to pose a considerable challenge to the likely winner – PML-N. With a few exceptions majority of its candidates will need to learn the constituency politics.

If it fails to win a sizeable number of seats in the province, the party may not be able to give a tough time to the upcoming

government in the Punjab Assembly. Nonetheless, it has an experienced and seasoned ally – PML-Q in Punjab. Though weakened lately after it rushed to join hands with the crumbling PTI, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi has the potential to forge an election alliance that can help win a couple of more seats for the PTI.

On the other hand, Chaudhry Shujaat and other leaders strongly resented the move of Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, and the party is clearly divided as Salik Hussain and Tariq Bashir Cheema voted against Imran Khan

But, the first and the foremost question is what would be the fate of Punjab Assembly? The politics in Punjab Assembly has taken an ugly turn after it was locked by the outgoing government to stop the opposition from holding a session for the election of new chief minister after Usman Buzdar stepped down.

The PTI candidate Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi seemingly does not have the required numbers to be elected as the Chief Minister which has prompted the party to create a centre-like crisis in Punjab too. His rival Hamza Shahbaz has claimed the support of over 200 Members of the Punjab Assembly in a 'mock' session at a local hotel besides seeking the IHC help in holding elections for Punjab's new chief minister in a 'fair and transparent' manner.

After the nail-biting sequence of events in the centre, all eyes are now on the Punjab Assembly.



Tough Times Ahead for Imran & Co

The forces that aligned to oust Khan from power have no intention of letting him be a martyr



By Naveed Miraj

After the Supreme Court judgment nullifying the deputy speaker's ruling to dismiss the no confidence resolution, it appears an easy sailing for the PDM and the PPP to collectively form the next government in the center. On the other hand, tough times await former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his close associates, who up to now have put on a brave face amid their plummeting fortunes.

Well informed sources told this correspondent that the new government will not allow Imran Khan to ride on the popularity wave that he will try to generate by playing the card of 'foreign conspiracy'. Imran Khan in his speeches is already alluding to the collusion of foreign and internal characters against his government.

Citing the recent statements of some dissident members of PTI especially Aleem Khan, the sources said that cases will be initiated against Imran Khan and some of his loyalists in the party. Political analysts also believe the new government, likely to be led by PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif, will immediately target Imran Khan and put him behind the bars. The aim is to

restrict him from holding the public gatherings as well as tarnish his image of an honest personality.

The sources said that the matters will be made worst for Imran Khan in order to compel him to enter into a deal or compromise under which he has to leave the country. "If this happened that will be the political death of Imran Khan," analysts commented.

When questioned about the plan of PDM-PPP alliance, the sources within PTI told this correspondent that Imran Khan will never make any compromise under any circumstances on his principled position, no matter what kind of political victimization he is subjected to. "He will continue to wage his struggle against this gang of corrupt politicians," they added.

After removing PM Khan from his seat, the PDM and PPP also have plans to oust Speaker Asad Qaiser and Deputy Speaker Qasim Khan Suri from their seats. No confidence motion has already been submitted against the Speaker. This will be followed by the impeachment of President Arif Alvi in order to pave the way for

installation of new government's candidate at the presidency.

There is also a general perception that the new government will also work towards abolishing corruption cases against the opposition leaders and ground will be prepared for the return of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to the country. As is apparent from the remarks of several of their leaders, their prime and first target will be National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Sources within PDM and PPP also confirmed that before the next general elections, they will also do necessary electoral reforms aimed at doing away with the use of Electronic Voting Machines. In addition, under some pretext, the right of franchise given to overseas Pakistanis may also be taken back, keeping in view the popularity of Imran Khan amongst them.

These sources further stated that the programs initiated by PTI government such as Sehat Card and Naya Pakistan Housing Authority will be shuttered whilst that of Ehsaas will be named after Benazir Bhutto or Begum Kulsoom Nawaz.



Who Conspired Against Imran Khan?

In the final analysis, Khan's own ineptitude and naïveté may be to blame for his downfall



By Umer Farooq

It was the then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who directly threatened Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to make a “horrible example” of him and his country, according to a widely believed popular myth in Pakistan. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan made this myth the foundation of his case that he built to denounce Washington as a plotter to dislodge him from power.

He told a rally that just like Bhutto, his government was also facing a threat and a conspiracy hatched in the US State Department. The real inventor of this myth was Benazir Bhutto and not Zulfikar Ali Bhutto himself. Benazir Bhutto was said to have given an interview to an American television channel in which she claimed that she was an eyewitness to the heated exchange between her father and Secretary Kissinger in which the latter threatened the former with the words, “We will make a horrible example out of you”.

Despite my best efforts, I could not get a hand on the transcript of this interview. However, a famous Indian magazine, India Today, in a cover story in 1994 reproduced

excerpts from Benazir Bhutto's statement to the TV channel.

According to India Today, in an interview with NBC News, Benazir Bhutto said that she remembered the heated exchange between her father and Kissinger quite vividly: “I was in the hall at the time Henry Kissinger came in and said, ‘We will make a horrible example out of you.’...”

“He said that you should either delay this program [import of a reprocessing plant from France] or you should scrap this program, and if you don't delay this program and you don't scrap this program, we will make a horrible example out of you. And my father said, ‘That's no way to talk to the head of an elected government in a country.’”

Interestingly, the elder Bhutto had a different story to tell about what exactly happened. In his 10 June 1977 speech during the National Assembly debate on the continuing US pressure for a cancellation of the reprocessing plant deal, Prime Minister Bhutto disclosed that in September 1976, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had warned the Pakistan Ambas-

sador to Washington that a Democratic administration would make a “horrible example” of Pakistan if it did not cancel the deal; and regardless of which party won the US elections, there were “troubles galore” in store for Pakistan.

So apparently there are two differences between Benazir's and elder Bhutto's version of events, a) Benazir Bhutto says Kissinger directly threatened her father, whereas elder Bhutto says the threat was conveyed through Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, b) Benazir apparently said that Henry Kissinger used the word “We” when he threatened Bhutto, whereas elder Bhutto says Kissinger said that it was the Democrats in White House that would make a “horrible example” of Pakistan.

However, just like a Chinese whisper the myth now exists as if Henry Kissinger directly threatened Bhutto and as if Bhutto's hanging was directly related to the threat allegedly hurled at him by Kissinger.

The fact of the matter is that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited Pakistan in August 1976 and met Prime Minister Bhutto in Lahore. Thirty years later, the



memos about the meeting released by George Washington University's National Security Archive, in May 2006 doesn't contain the words, "Horrible example".

The transcript of the meeting referred to Kissinger telling Bhutto that it was offensive to US intelligence when Bhutto insisted that Pakistan needed the reprocessing plant for its energy needs. Bhutto responded by demanding that the US should also not insist that Pakistan give up the reprocessing plant.

Kissinger made it clear: "What concerns us is how the reprocessing facilities were used at a certain point." After the meeting, Bhutto told the reporters that he was satisfied with the talks. Now Prime Minister Imran

Khan wants to use this dubious if popular myth to provide a base to his own case, wherein he alleges that presumably a foreign power has threatened him and his government with dire consequences. What he means to say is that just like elder Bhutto he also wanted to run an independent foreign policy and now was facing the music.

Past political discourse in Pakistani media and political circles make it clear that political elite in our country used to equate independent foreign policy with freedom to pursue a jingoistic foreign policy vis-à-vis India, right to go nuclear – this was before we declared our nuclear status – unabashedly and with freedom provide material and military assistance to Muslim freedom causes around the world especially to Kashmiris and Palestinians.

According to this narrative, former PM Khan is running an independent foreign policy or is planning to do so in future, wherefore the world powers are using opposition parties to dislodge him from power. What they have so far failed to explain is what exactly on foreign policy front Imran Khan or his government had done that attracted the wrath of foreign powers.

Maybe because he said "Absolutely not" in response to American requests to provide airbases to the American military after they left Afghanistan? Let us analyze this: The

Pakistani government asked Americans to vacate military bases in November 2011, when PPP was in power in Islamabad—one of the most pro-American governments in the post-Musharraf period.

Pakistan started its life as an independent country when the Cold War was heating up in this region and we were facing a much bigger and threatening neighbor on our Eastern border. The then Pakistani leaders formulated a foreign policy that put all our eggs in the American basket—we wanted to bring an extra-regional power to balance and neutralize the military threat from much bigger India.

This extra-regional power was Washington in the initial decades and when America put us under military sanctions after the 1965 wars we shifted to another extra-regional power, China. This was deemed an unsatisfactory answer to our military and economic needs as China was a poor third world power in those days. We turned to Arab sheikhs.

The Pakistani elite failed to create a self-sustaining economic base for the society and state to run an independent foreign policy. This ruling elite is too weak politically to even dream about a foreign policy which is independent.

Pakistani politicians, especially the incumbent rulers, are extremely fond of projecting themselves as victims of international conspiracies—showing themselves as players in international power games to earn them stature in their respective constituencies at the popular level. This is almost a paradox that former Prime Minister Imran Khan only few months back wasted a lot of his precious time waiting for a phone call from US President Joe Biden and then too ardently started projecting opposition's no-confidence motion to dislodge him from Prime Minister's office as part of an international conspiracy.

How interesting, then, that a person who wanted to show to his constituency that he is important enough to receive a call from the US President, would take a U-turn in a short span of one month and start projecting himself as a victim of an international conspiracy.

In fact, it appears that the important thing for Imran Khan and his media managers is not whether he is portrayed as a "friends" with the American President or someone who is perceived as a victim of American intrigues. The important thing is that he should appear or be projected as the center of international power politics. This would paint him as a hero in the eyes of his domestic constituency.

Robert Jervis, the acclaimed American expert of political psychology, has described this phenomenon as an abnormality and he calls it, "Overestimating your importance as a target". Imran Khan is not the only Pakistani politician suffering from this psychological abnormality. None of the Pakistan rulers from elder Bhutto to Nawaz Sharif could seriously claim that he didn't suffer from this abnormality.

In the particular case of Imran Khan the story doing the rounds in Islamabad goes like this: Imran Khan defied "international establishment" by going to Moscow and meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin and now the "powerful and the mighty" wanted to get rid of Imran Khan as a punishment for this defiance.

Imran Khan even triggered a whispering campaign in Islamabad by telling a public rally that the "European Union" cannot dictate Pakistan what to do with "our diplomacy". This he said with reference to a letter of EU Ambassadors to the Pakistani foreign office in which they demanded that Pakistan should condemn Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Prime Minister wanted to ask the EU ambassadors why they didn't condemn India for what it was doing in Kashmir. So the Prime Minister came all out to make it look like a complete story—a conspiracy where he is shown as a true nationalist and Americans and EU are shown as villains with perfect political timing, when opposition parties were giving final touches to their plan to dislodge him through a no confidence motion.

There is no denying that Americans have always played a central role in Pakistan's domestic politics. This role became too intrusive during the nine years rule of military dictator General Pervez



Musharraf. Primary reason behind this overly intrusive role is financial and military assistance Americans have been providing to the Pakistani state over the years since Pakistan came into being. This gives them a certain level of leverage within the domestic power structure.

However, it is also true that Americans have never been in a position to control the mechanics of Pakistan's politics. The mechanics of Pakistani politics have always been in the tight grip of the institutions that have been the prime beneficiaries of American financial generosity.

Americans have always been more in a position to bolster the legitimacy of their favorites in Islamabad or Rawalpindi by providing financial and military assistance to Pakistani state institutions. But they have never succeeded in stopping their favorites going down the slippery slope of power structures. Neither have they succeeded in creating an enabling environment to dislodge those whom they dislike.

Consider this: Americans increased the acceptability of military dictator General Musharraf by providing generous military and financial assistance to his government,

which clearly lacked legitimacy, in the eyes of different power centers in Pakistani power structure. But when Lal Masjid happened and when lawyers' movement happened, they could do nothing to protect their protégé.

Similarly, financial and military assistance under the Kerry-Lugar Bill to the PPP government could not save it from the wrath of those institutions which discernibly are in control of the mechanics of Pakistani politics. Lal Masjid, Lawyers' movement and so-called Memogate scandal are the instances which show who is in control in Pakistan.

On the other hand, the institutions which control the mechanics of Pakistani politics are extremely vulnerable to any move to deprive Pakistan of financial assistance that it has been receiving from its generous "masters" since its inception. As far as the Imran Khan Government was concerned, it failed to register itself with Western capitals in any meaningful way at the diplomatic level.

Western capitals' main concern with Islamabad remained the internal security situation. The question they pose to

Pakistani interlocutors is none other than how successful the Pakistani state would be in stemming the tide of extremism and how successful it would be in controlling its protégé in Afghanistan, the Taliban.

In these affairs, despite his some very unsavory remarks with regards to Afghan Taliban, Imran Khan has remained a non-entity. Not surprisingly Western diplomats were more interested in visiting GHQ during their stay in Islamabad than meeting the Prime Minister.

The role foreign financial assistance plays in a country's politics cannot be ignored in any analysis one does of the political situation. After all, it's a country's finances that in the final analysis determine the attitude of powers that be towards any civilian government.

How that financial situation of the country and the corresponding attitude of the powers that be towards civilian government translate into political mechanics at any given time depends largely on the skillful handling of the political forces by the incumbent political leader. Imran Khan proved himself to be particularly inept and naïve in this connection.





Imran Khan is arrogant but not a renegade

Imran Khan is a millionaire but not a traitor



By Fatima Bhutto

My grandfather Zulfikar Bhutto had repeatedly said that there was a huge global conspiracy against Pakistan in which the US was investing through Mufti Mahmood, the father of my political rivals (Fazlur Rehman) and General Zia, the spiritual father of Nawaz Sharif. I will be fired.'

However, his adopted son Nawaz Sharif was first made Finance Minister, then after his death he was made Chief Minister of Punjab and then Prime Minister so that Benazir's government could not be formed. Meanwhile, Zia also formed the MQM.

My grandfather Zulfikar Bhutto had said, "I sided with the Arabs inside Vietnam not to support the United States and to destroy Israel, for which the United States will not forgive me."

(Exactly the same situation today, the United States is asking Imran Khan to support Ukraine and oppose Russia)

In a speech, my grandfather also showed and waved a letter written by the then US Secretary of State Cyrus Venus threatening to kill Baba Zulfikar Bhutto and hit Pakistan with bricks.

Dada Jan had told the public that not only me but also Pakistan is in danger.

My grandfather was falsely accused of killing Nawab Muhammad Ahmad Khan Kasuri. In his statement to the court, Dada Jan said, And despite my Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's warning, when my grandfather refused to back down from the nuclear program, Henry Kissinger made a blunt threat. Bhutto, you will be made a terrible example.

Pakistanis then you saw that my grandfather was hanged by the fathers of today's patriots Fazlur Rehman and Nawaz Sharif and carried the medal of American service on his chest for the next several decades and it is still worn today then he met the patriots

Zardari assassinated my father Murtaza Bhutto and my aunt Benazir Bhutto in order to seize his wealth and political legacy under a fake will and he has done so.

Earlier, Bilawal's new relatives Nawaz Sharif and Fazlur Rehman poisoned my other uncle Mir Shahnawaz in France and I was forced to stay out of Pakistan to save my only brother Jr. Murtaza Bhutto from being killed. Gone

Although I have millions of political and ideological differences with Imran Khan, but I am sure that he is not like other traitors. He himself is honest but his team is dishonest which has also met with other parties.

The way Imran Khan waved the letter in the meeting on March 27, 2022 is one hundred percent true in which the United States threatened Imran Khan.

Nawaz Sharif, Zardari and Fazlur Rehman to want end the cases and announce new elections or resign.

He should sever ties with Russia and China and provide air bases in Pakistan to the United States.

Word by word, the same letter as was written to my grandfather Zulfikar Bhutto. Only time and officials have changed.

Pakistanis, wouldn't you like to change? Will you be the slaves of America's oppressed slaves or ... Pakistani owner of proud nuclear power? The decision is yours.

But remember, the judiciary was in the forefront in killing grandfather Zulfikar Bhutto. Pray that today's judiciary will not repeat that mistake on Imran Khan.

Note. I do not run my Facebook account directly but run Twitter. My team is posting my approval on Facebook which is why I am unable to reply to your private messages.



Open Secrets, Unwritten Rules

The making and unmaking of political alliances in Pakistan: The case of MQM



By Jafar Rizvi

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan lost power to his Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) opponents chiefly because his coalition partners switched sides. One of these coalition partners was Karachi's Muttahida Qaumi Movement or MQM. But what are the unwritten rules governing these machinations? Taking a look at the political trajectory of MQM through history may help us glean some insights.

The MQM becomes a parliamentary power

After the death of President General Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash on 17 August 1988, the MQM was recognized as a parliamentary power for the first time on 16 November 1988, when the country held party-based general elections after a long period of martial law.

The MQM then won 25 urban Sindh seats

including Karachi and Hyderabad, and 13 National Assembly seats, and emerged as the country's third-largest political party. Neither of the major political forces – the Pakistan People's Party and the opposition Muslim League-N and its allied Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) – managed to secure a clear majority in the National Assembly. Both needed someone's support and help to form a government. In such a situation, the 13 seats of MQM had become very important.

The PPP, which won the largest number of seats in the country in these elections, signed a power-sharing agreement with the MQM to form a government, and so MQM became part of a political alliance for the first time.

Eventually, the agreement with the PPP was broken because, as per Amin-ul-Haq, "the PPP met only one of the 51 demands". Actually, things may be more complicated.

Insiders say this switching of sides was part of an larger effort backed by the establishment to dislodge Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

The move would fail and President Ghulam Ishaq Khan had to use the notorious 58(2)b to sack Bhutto. When the IJI government was formed again on 24 October 1990, as a result of general elections, the MQM won 15 seats in the National Assembly and 28 seats in the Provincial Assembly and allied with IJI.

But the Operation Clean-Up was launched in Karachi on 19 June 1992, MQM separated from the Nawaz Sharif government. On 18 April 1993, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed Nawaz Sharif's government under Article 58 (2) b. Although the Supreme Court restored the Nawaz Sharif government on 26 May 1993, a standoff began which ended only on 18 July 1993 when both President Ishaq and Prime



Minister Sharif resigned under the Kakar Formula.

The MQM boycotted the National Assembly election on 6 October 1993, but won 28 seats in Sindh in the Provincial Assembly election. Faisal Sabzwari said that Benazir Bhutto became the Prime Minister again while Abdullah Shah (father of the present Chief Minister of Sindh) became the Chief Minister of Sindh. This was the time when the MQM remained out of power for almost four consecutive years.



The law-and-order situation in Sindh remained extremely poor during this period and during the Karachi operation, hundreds of MQM workers were killed in alleged extrajudicial killings and controversial police encounters. A large number of police and law enforcement officers were also killed in ambushes.

The PPP-appointed and close ally of Benazir Bhutto, President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari, fired Benazir Bhutto's government on 5 November 1996. The National and Provincial Assemblies were also dissolved. General election was held on 3 February 1997, and the MQM won 12 seats in the National Assembly.

When Nawaz Sharif was re-elected Prime Minister in 1997, the MQM once again became an ally and joined Nawaz Sharif's government. Liaquat Jatoi was appointed Chief Minister of Sindh with the help of MQM.

When former Sindh Governor Hakim Muhammad Saeed was killed in a targeted

attack on 17 October 1998, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held a press conference and accused his own coalition party MQM of the killing. The MQM once again split from the government.

On 12 October 1999, (then Army Chief) General Pervez Musharraf overthrew Nawaz Sharif's government and seized power. Elections were held again on 10 October 2002, and the MQM won 19 seats in the National Assembly and 51 seats in the Provincial Assembly.

Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali became the Prime Minister, and Ali Muhammad Mehr and then Arbab Ghulam Rahim became the Chief Minister of the province. The MQM once again joined the government in the federation and the province and remained in power until December 2007.

Senator Faisal Sabzwari admits that "when we joined the government of Pervez Musharraf, it was the government of the Establishment."

"At that time, on the one hand, the MQM needed a breathing space, on the other hand, what was happening on the streets of Pakistan after the US [invasion of] Afghanistan, General Musharraf also needed liberal partners."

"General Musharraf was both the army chief and the president of the country, so it was a 'marriage of convenience with the Establishment for the MQM."

In the 18 February 2008 elections, the MQM won 25 seats in the National Assem-

bly, including 18 general and seven reserved seats, and a total of 42 seats in the Provincial Assembly. PPP formed the government at the center, Yusuf Raza Gilani became the prime minister, but politics took such a turn that this time the PML-N remained in a power-sharing agreement.

This majority coalition did not need the support of the National Assembly. The PPP also successfully formed its government in the province without any help or support.

MQM first left this coalition government in December 2008, but when Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani visited their head office, it returned to the government. But after much protest and disagreement, MQM parted ways with the government again in June 2011. Ishrat-ul-Ibad, the governor of Sindh, also resigned, but his resignation was not accepted. The divorce became final on the third time in February 2013, just two and a half months before the election.

In the 11 May 2013 elections, the MQM won a total of 25 seats in the National Assembly and 51 in the Sindh Assembly. The winner, the PPP, again invited MQM to join their provincial government, but the MQM held a workers' referendum on whether it should join the government. The majority ruled against joining the PPP-led government.

Faisal Sabzwari, opines that "powerful circles in Pakistan have been involved in forming, overthrowing, decorating or corrupting the political government. The Establishment itself has never denied this."

"An atmosphere is created. In the past, when the no-confidence motion was presented, horse-trading, Changa Manga, midnight jackals, PML-Q, Patriot, everything happened."

"The task of overthrowing the government would have been possible in the time of 58.2 (b) (constitutional clause). Now since it's no longer there, so instead of overthrowing the government, the other side is aided"

Faisal Sabzwari said, "These are big open secrets of our history!"



From a Pampered Child to an Estranged One

The curious case of a threatening diplomatic cable and why Imran Khan is pressing for early polls



By Ghulam Dastageer

The recently ousted Prime Minister of Pakistan – indeed the first said functionary in the parliamentary history of the country overthrown through a vote of no confidence – has chosen Peshawar to kick off his push back.

To begin with, one can't say for sure whether it is a deliberate move or otherwise that Imran Khan wants to exploit the situation by taking the line of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who parted ways with the military dictator Gen Muhammad Ayub Khan.

The move was prompted by the Tashkent Agreement – signed between the then Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani President Ayub Khan on 10 January 1966 in the aftermath of Pak-India war of September 1965.

After parting ways with Khan, Bhutto hit the street, mobilising the masses against that pact. That indubitably paid dividends in the next general elections when his newly-formed Pakistan People's Party emerged as the major political force in

Western Pakistan, comprising present day Pakistan.

Later on, the myth of United States threatening to make Bhutto a “horrible example” also augured well for the popularity of his party.

It is widely believed – though never substantiated with by solid evidence – that owing to the unflinching commitment of Bhutto to making Pakistan a nuclear power, the then US secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned him of dire consequences in a meeting in Lahore in September 1976.

That, apparently, is exactly the path to popularity PTI Chairman Imran Khan has very deliberately plotted for himself. Does he realise Bhutto ended up dead – according to the myth because of standing up to the United States?

In any case, Imran Khan has chosen Peshawar to kick off his campaign, solely relying on his anti-US narrative for having been ousted “through an American intrigue” for his “uncompromised” foreign policy.

Presently, the anger of the PTI has two manifestations: The leadership is posing itself as an anti-US political force, while its supporters are directly blaming the Army chief in their protest demonstrations.

So far as the US conspiracy is concerned, the main question is, would Imran Khan keep pushing the same narrative if it was based on hearsay rather than irrefutable facts?

There is a perception among the party leadership that their narrative has been well received in the masses, leading to higher approval ratings. As far as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is concerned, the thumping victory of PTI in the second phase of the local bodies' elections held on 31 March, at least, lends credence to their claim.

In essence, the Peshawar public meeting of the PTI would draw its future line of action and being in power in the province it would not be an uphill task for the party to put on a massive power show.

But for how long would the PTI be able to



maintain the momentum is the main question. What would be their course of action, if their narrative of US intervention is neutralized through a probe by a high-level inquiry committee or a judicial commission constituted by the Supreme Court to which the deputy speaker of National Assembly, Qasim Khan Suri, has already dispatched the controversial letter to delve into?

Another, perhaps more important question may be, would PTI be able to maintain its self-perceived popularity graph even in the wake of any inquiry by the Supreme Court, declaring it mere a political stunt? Given this fact, the PTI is pressing for an early general election.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was demanding the same since the very outset of PTI government in August 2018. But they had to reluctantly agree to topple the government through vote of no confidence just to divest Imran Khan of the powers to appoint the new army chief of his choice in November this year. The new Army chief, in return, could have managed to catapult them in power corridors once again by hook or crook.

The PTI government apparently does not face any untoward situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly where it has 94 seats out of 146 — around two-thirds of the total membership. While the Opposition, comprising six parties, have 48 seats.

But one must bear in mind the fact that the profound differences between the sitting chief minister Mahmood Khan and provincial minister for ST&IT Atif Khan is a major fault line in the party.

Meanwhile, the Formation Commanders Conference has taken strong exception to the “recent campaign by some quarters to malign Pakistan Army...” through an aggressive anti-Army campaign on social media.

There are reports that the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested a PTI activist from Lahore who was running 2,100 twitter accounts, all spewing venom against the army and its chief. In addition, the FIA has started raids on a number of PTI supporters involved in the malicious campaign against state institutions, including superior judiciary.

Under these circumstances, any resistance by the PTI workers’ may land them in jails and trigger legal actions against them. They have been spared such complications up until now because, since PTI’s emergence as an effective political force in October 2011 when it first held an impressive power show in Lahore, its members have always remained the blue-eyed boys of the Establishment and the superior judiciary, with all their highhandedness always ignored.

But is the situation same this time around? Absolutely not. It’s time to test the genuine resistance capabilities of pampered PTI activists because real political struggle is far different from keeping a hashtag trending on social media.

Nevertheless, it is a complex web of opportunities as well. The much-resisted departure from the position of prime minister — even at the cost of venturing to violate the Constitution more than once — may prove a blessing in disguise for the PTI. It has provided it an opening to turn itself into a genuine political force, a far cry from its current image as an Establishment-nurtured political entity.



The Arrow of Time

Where is Supreme Court's handling of constitutional crises taking us?



By Asadullah Khan

The recent judgment of the Supreme Court that struck down the dissolution of the National Assembly by President Dr Arif Alvi on 3rd April and ordered Prime Minister Imran Khan to face the vote of no-confidence has been welcomed by the opposition parties. The Prime Minister Khan, though not happy with the decision, has accepted it.

The five member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial held contrary to the Constitution and set aside the ruling of Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri that had blocked — under Article 5 — voting on the no-confidence move.

In consequence, the court declared, Prime Minister Imran Khan was under the bar imposed by the explanation in Article 58(1) of the Constitution which states that in case of a no-confidence motion, the prime minister cannot advise the dissolution of the assembly.

Consequently, the court declared that the advice tendered by the prime minister to the president to dissolve the assembly was contrary to the Constitution and of no legal effect.

The Supreme Court also set aside that

the order of the President issued on 3 April to dissolve the assembly, and made it clear that the assembly was in existence at all times and continues to remain so.

Historically speaking, the Supreme Court has intervened several times during constitutional crises throughout the country's 75-year history.

There have been instances when the courts were made to put their seal on the most controversial executive actions, including abrogation or suspension of the Constitution. Other times, judges refused to succumb to pressure from the executive.

The direction of judiciary-executive relations was set by the 1955 verdict of the federal court, the highest court in the country back then, in *The Federation of Pakistan versus Moulvi Tamizuddin*.

Governor general Ghulam Mohammad's decision of 24 October 1954 to dissolve the assembly was declared illegal by the Sindh High Court, which held that the governor general had the right to dissolve the legislative assembly under the interim constitution, but the assembly dissolved

by him also served as the constituent assembly, whose dissolution was not within his competence.

This landmark judgement was authored by Sir George Baxandall Constantine who was an English and Pakistani jurist who served as the Chief Justice of Sindh High Court and was later elevated to the Federal Court later the Supreme Court.

However, the historic decision was overruled by the federal court which observed that the constituent assembly, by not being able to furnish the constitution in seven years, had lost its legitimacy. Pakistan's judiciary, therefore, derailed the country's constitutional and democratic journey with this decision.

The top court gave a unique reasoning that the order of governor general was similar to a "Royal Prerogative" that was introduced in the UK in 19th Century to give monarch an absolute authority. The court was of the view that since the governor general is the viceroy of the monarch therefore his order has the same force as of the Royal Prerogative.

The Royal Prerogative is one of the

most significant elements of the UK's constitution. The concept of prerogative powers stems from the medieval King acting as head of the kingdom, but it is by no means a medieval device. The prerogative enables Ministers, among many other things, to deploy the armed forces, make and unmake international treaties and to grant honours.

In modern times, Government Ministers exercise the majority of the prerogative powers either in their own right or through the advice they provide to the Queen which she is bound constitutionally to follow.

The second test of the independence of the judiciary came when the apex court was called upon to adjudicate on the legitimacy of the 1958 martial law regime in *The State versus Dosso and Others*.

The court, again headed by Justice Munir and drawing inspiration from Hans Kelsen's doctrine of necessity, held that a successful revolution or coup d'état was an internationally recognised method of changing a constitution.

The doctrine of necessity was first expounded by the 13th century English jurist Henry de Bracton, who stated 'that which is otherwise not lawful is made lawful by necessity'.

Necessity is a doctrine which bridges the sometimes considerable gap between what the law allows the government to do and the government's actual response to an emergency. It has no relevance where emergency state action is taken pursuant to specific statutory or constitutional authorization.

The law, Kelsen maintained, is basically a scheme of interpretation. Its reality, or objectivity, resides in the sphere of meaning; we attach a legal-normative meaning to certain actions and events in the world.

In Pakistan, the doctrine of necessity paved way for military coups and toppling of successive regimes. The Laws (Continuation in Force) Order 1958 promulgated by Gen Ayub constituted the new legal regime from which all legal instruments and institutions, including courts, derived their validity and legitimacy.

The decision in the Dosso case came in for

sharp criticism from the apex court itself in *Asma Jilani versus Government of Punjab* in 1972. The Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Hamoodur Rehman declared martial law imposed by Gen Yahya Khan as unconstitutional and incapable of being validated.

The court observed that it was difficult to appreciate under what authority martial law could be proclaimed. A military coup or a legal regime put in place by a military ruler was not legitimate by itself, and instead it acquired legitimacy only when courts recognised them as *de jure*.

The judgement created the hope that in future the judiciary would not put its seal on unconstitutional actions of the executive.



However, the hope was short-lived. In *Begum Nusrat Bhutto versus Chief of Army Staff and Federation of Pakistan*, the apex court in 1977 again declared a military coup, this time by Gen Ziaul Haq, legitimate on the basis of state necessity and welfare of the people.

In the *Haji Saifullah vs Federation of Pakistan* case of 1989, the apex court declared that the dissolution of the assembly and removal of Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo in 1987 was illegal. However, since a new government had been elected by the time the judgement was pronounced, the court did not reinstate the dissolved assembly.

The Supreme Court upheld the dissolution of the assemblies and ouster of the then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto under Article 58(2b) of the Constitution in 1990 and 1996. However, in 1993, the Supreme Court reinstated Nawaz Sharif, striking down the dissolution order.

The 1999 coup, which brought Gen Pervez Musharraf at the helm, was also indemnified by the judiciary, again under the doctrine of necessity. One of the judges who sat on the Supreme Court bench that validated the coup was Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who later became the chief justice of Pakistan.

On 3 November 2007, Mr Musharraf declared an emergency in Pakistan and suspended the Constitution. However, in one of the boldest judicial decisions in Pakistan, a seven-member bench of the Supreme Court issued a unanimous two-page order, declaring the action illegal. The bench was headed by Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

The judges who delivered that verdict,

along with more than 50 other members of the superior judiciary, were deposed by the military ruler, who imposed a provisional constitutional order (PCO).

A few days later, on 24 November, a seven-member bench of the newly constituted Supreme Court validated the imposition of emergency and the promulgation of the PCO. The bench was headed by Chief Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar.

On 31 July 2009, the Supreme Court declared the steps taken on 3 November 2007 by Mr Musharraf as illegal and unconstitutional under Article 279 of the Constitution.

In sum, although the history of Pakistan's judiciary exercising its independence is a mix bag, the assertiveness that began with Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's seems to continue for now.

Special report: Wasteland foretold

Unchecked sand mining and excessive extraction of groundwater will have devastating long-term consequences



By Naziha Syed Ali

Qadir Baloch went into hiding on the night of Dec 3, 2021. That, he alleges, was after the henchmen of a powerful feudal lord tried to break into his home in a village in district Jamshoro, adjoining Karachi's district Malir. He only just managed to flee under the cover of darkness. Knowing what the men had come for, he took his land ownership papers with him. They are evidence of his right on the 11 acres of survey land that belonged to his great-grandfather, upon which he grows tomatoes, gourd and marrow. The documents clearly bear the stamp of the Sindh revenue department, and also the names of his grandfather Soofan and great-grandfather Taaru.

"First the sardar's men tried to offer me Rs70,000 per acre, but I refused outright," he says. "The land is like my mother and I won't sell it." It is now over two years since he has been resisting the pressure to sell; first, he says he was paid a visit by people from Bahria Town, the real estate giant whose sprawling project, Bahria Town Karachi (BTK), is coming up nearby.

This, say locals, is the modus operandi now being employed by the land mafia to acquire real estate for building housing projects in an area that falls within what is colloquially known as Kohistan, comprising Jamshoro and Hyderabad districts along with portions of Karachi's Malir and West districts. Qadir Baloch is one of the few that have dared to speak up so openly; defiance of the waderas is rare in these parts. As chief of the Burfat tribe, the biggest of the four tribes in Kohistan with around 100 sub-tribes, Malik Asad Sikan-der is known as the 'king of Kohistan'. But this 'sardar of sardars' — and PPP MPA from Jamshoro — rules over a diminishing kingdom. Indigenous communities are being forced to give up land where they have lived for generations and engaged in barani (rain-fed) agriculture or poultry/live-stock farming, to make way for the housing aspirations of the middle and upper classes.

But there is another disaster with long-term consequences brewing in these suburbs of Karachi. The devastation is on two levels. Firstly, unchecked mining of sand, or reti

bajri, is taking place here to meet the insatiable demands of the construction industry. Secondly, overexploitation of groundwater is depleting the aquifer to dangerous levels. Both phenomena together are a 'perfect storm' that will hasten the impact of climate change and increase desertification in what is known as Karachi's green belt, and imperil the quality of life for millions.

Not a blade of grass

A visit by Dawn to an area north of BTK revealed a scene of utter destruction: one could see massive sand mining sites, known as dhakkas, where excavator machines had removed the top layer of soil, tossed it to the side where it lay in huge mounds and gouged out tons of earth from beneath. Swathes of Malir have already been ravaged; now Jamshoro is being similarly plundered.

Large-scale mining is also taking place outside the river bed, reducing vast areas to what resembles a moonscape of sorts

without a blade of grass in sight. Hills have also been ground down, and carted off to 'crush' factories nearby to make gravel used in road construction.

Illicit profits

The illicit profits are said to be divided up as follows: the contents of each dumper sell for Rs27,000 inside BTK, for Rs30,000 at Sohrab Goth and more if sold further afield depending on the distance. Sometimes, if sand is being lifted from private land, the contractor pays the owner between Rs2,000-2,500. The owner of the loader ('shawal') that fills the dumper pockets Rs6,000; local waderas, known as kumdar, in the goth closest to the boundary between deh Mole in Jamshoro district and deh Bolari in Malir district charge Rs1,300 as 'zilla bandi tax' to allow vehicles to cross over while Bahria charges a 'road tax' of Rs500-700 per dumper going through BTK. The rest — minus fuel and maintenance expenses — goes to influential stakeholders up the hierarchy, including the police and allegedly the tribal chiefs.

Sand mining is a hugely lucrative business and the gains far outstrip the slap on the wrist that the law stipulates: for the first conviction up to three months' imprisonment and fine not exceeding Rs10,000; and for any subsequent conviction, imprisonment up to one year and fine not exceeding Rs20,000.

In Malir and Jamshoro, average yearly

precipitation has varied wildly during the years between 2000 and 2021. But ruthless sand mining has exacerbated the impact. Excessive mining in the river bed disrupts the water's natural flow and increases its velocity to such a destructive extent that it erodes any structures it encounters.

Moreover, the damage to the area's biodiversity is enormous and irreversible. The top layer of soil is exposed to the environment. There is atmospheric pressure on it; plant seeds transported on air currents from elsewhere are deposited on it, and rainfall sparks biological activity in that top layer.

There are at least 14 small dams and check dams in the area. Check dams interrupt the flow of water, flatten the gradient of the channel (the 'prism') in which it flows and thus reduce its velocity. This reduction in velocity allows the water to seep through the sand and recharge the groundwater, which is one of the many uses of check dams.

26m gallons of water in 24 hrs

While most types of vegetation cover declined between 2013 and 2017, moderate, dense and highly dense vegetation increased between 2017 and 2021. But this is not evidence of any encouraging news. It can be explained, say experts, by the fact that ground water is being overexploited.

Construction also requires water, and a

humongous project like BTK in the vicinity needs millions and millions of gallons of it. During the hearings of the bench set up by the Supreme Court to implement its May 4, 2018 judgement in the Bahria Town case, NAB submitted several confidential progress reports to the court. The Third Progress Report noted that "Bahria Town was extracting sub-soil water to the tune of approximately 1.77 million gallon per day from 59 bores without any legal cover or payment of fees to government."

The massive extraction of groundwater inevitably gives rise to another insidious development: seawater intrusion. Overexploitation of groundwater also causes portions of the land to sink.

Interestingly, some farmers in Malir found the water in their wells rising in the mid to late '90s because, due to population pressure, sewage water was being diverted into storm water drains. It too flowed towards the sea but some was absorbed by the river bed and started recharging the aquifers. But this was contaminated sweet water which is not only residential sewage but commercial and industrial sewage as well, and it cannot hold back the seawater.

Nature is stealthy. It is a process, whereby it gives people many opportunities to set things right. But it seems we are unwilling to see what lies ahead, choosing short-term pecuniary gains instead of a viable future. Dispossessed farmers like Qadir Baloch are not the only ones facing impending doom.



Mushahid Hussain's take on the Pak-U.S. relationship

By Mushahid Hussain

Mushahid Hussain, a Pakistani Senator, believes that the U.S. has taken two strategic decisions that have disrupted its relationship with Pakistan: In this region [South Asia] their best friend and strategic partner is going to be India – and China and Russia are its enemies. The NATO 2030 Initiative that came out in November 2021 also mentions this, he said. Although China is not a part of the North Atlantic, it has been considered a threat to NATO's interests.

Discussing the tilt towards India as the U.S.'s leading strategic ally in its Indo-Pacific strategy, Mr. Hussain said, "their Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) are all strategic agreements." Mr. Hussain believes that India and the U.S. are de facto military allies. When China and India clashed in Galwan, the U.S. provided them with intelligence.

While conceding that every country has a choice when it comes to foreign policy decisions, he commented that it shouldn't follow an either-or foreign policy. "We made a choice of strengthening our friendship with China but we kept our doors open to America as well," he said.

Thankless alliance

Mr. Hussain believes the U.S. has not treated Pakistan well in the last year. Pakistan, upon their insistence, arranged talks with the Taliban. While narrating his prediction about the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the eventual need for Pakistan, he said: "I remember in August 2017 President Trump announced his South Asian Strategy. CNN sought my opinion on the announcement. Trump had criticized Pakistan and said that they will strengthen India vis-a-vis Afghanistan. I responded that my view of South Asian Strategy is the same as Dr. Albert Einstein who said 'trying to do the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome is either stupidity or insanity.' This a tried, tested, and failed formula."

While adding that, "I also wrote a column on CNN titled 'Afghanistan a view from Islamabad.' After 6 months, I argued, please note down, you will call Pakistan from either your State Department, White House, or Pentagon, and say: Please help us in Afghanistan. After exactly 6 months, the President of the U.S. wrote a letter to the PM of Pakistan, asking for help in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has made numerous sacrifices for the U.S. Upon their request, we released Mullah Baradar, who was languishing in Pakistan's jails for the last decade, and arranged their talks with the Taliban, Mr. Hussain said.

"When they signed an agreement on February 31, 2021, for withdrawal, we facilitated their evacuation. Pakistan



International Airlines (PIA) was the only plane at Kabul Airport. We evacuated around 27,000 people from more than 40 countries. There were American strategic assets as well. CIA Chief visited Pakistan twice to seek our support," he added.

Expressing dismay over the unfair treatment meted out to Pakistan, Mushahid Hussain discussed the comments made by Wendy Sherman, U.S. deputy secretary of state on October 8, 2021, in India, before undertaking a visit to Pakistan, who said, "we do not want a broad-based relationship with Pakistan. I am only coming for a narrow and specific purpose to visit Pakistan." So, Pakistanis felt that there was ingratitude from the U.S. side. They could've appreciated our efforts. We went out of the way to help them, he added.

U.S. reservations over Pak-China relations

Mr. Hussain then turned to the U.S. reservations over the growing Pakistan-China ties. Labeling it as unjustified and double standards, he said Washington demonizes Pakistan-China relations, meanwhile, there is no criticism directed toward the Indian side for their human rights violations.

Commending the incumbent government for its decision to not participate in the Democracy Summit hosted by President Biden and top-level attendance in the Olympics hosted by China, he said: "The world is transforming. This is the Asian century. There is a shift in the global balance of economic and political power away from the West to the East. America is in decline. Europe is in decline. Now they are preparing for a new Cold War. Asia cannot be a part of this.

That the four major American allies in the Middle East: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar were all present in Beijing for the Olympics confirms this global realignment, he added.

What is the Secret of NATO's Longevity?

Adaptability is the key to survivability in a challenging environment, but surely, there is more?



By Shahmir Niazi

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been tried and tested time and time again from Bosnia to Kosovo, from Libya to Afghanistan – and most recently during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Time and time again, this transatlantic body has shown how institutional resilience remains its hallmark. With the 2022 Strategic Concept all set to be adopted this June, the alliance is recalibrating its approach to future security challenges emanating from its longtime adversary Russia – and an emboldened China.

While other Cold War era alliances, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) ceased to exist in the late 1970s, NATO has not only survived for more than three decades since Soviet Union's disintegration but also has constantly adjusted itself to changing circumstances.

What makes NATO unique?

Mark Webber, a Senior Eisenhower Fellow at the NATO Defense College, highlights two aspects that make NATO truly unique and are the key to its longevity. The first is its portable institutional assets which include bureaucracy, alliance force, command structures, integrated militaries, and mechanisms of political consultation.

This, Webber argues, has inculcated in NATO an ability to adapt to the most pressing challenges. It is precisely why the alliance withstood the fallout of the defeat in Afghanistan, defying historical traditions of alliances falling apart after defeats.

The second important feature is its democratic culture. NATO's internal deliberations are characterized by bargaining, consultations, consensus building, and lobbying. Contrary to the widely held view,

the alliance does not operate under the US's dictation; it encapsulates a balance of transatlantic interests. While the American leadership is reflected in the alliance's overwhelming dependence on its defense guarantees, Europe does not always fall in line with the American foreign policy.

A remarkable spectacle was witnessed in the weeks and months ahead of Russia's planned invasion of Ukraine when the US struggled to muster a unanimous response from the bloc in the form of sanctions. Germany resisted the US's suggestion of halting the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project that will bring Russian gas to Europe.

There have been other instances, such as the 2003 Iraq crisis, and the Trump years bashing when the intra-alliance tension has come to the fore. However, NATO has demonstrated extraordinary unity in dire situations. "NATO's transatlantic character along with the military and political

features described above exist in combination nowhere else,” Webber argues.

No better alternative

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has once again proved that there is no better substitute for NATO. The unprecedented unity of resolve, interoperability, command mechanism and resource pooling demonstrated by the alliance in the face of the crisis has revealed its sheer strength and character. While previously there were growing calls emanating from certain quarters in Europe and the US, for NATO’s abandonment and a shift toward an alternative mechanism for ensuring the security of the region, the powerful response to Kremlin’s actions has quelled all such suggestions.

The Readiness Action Plan adopted in the face of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, operations in the Balkans, Libya, and Afghanistan, and the bolstering of defenses on the eastern flank during the ongoing war in Ukraine – are actions that could only be mounted by an alliance as unique and powerful as NATO.

The US’s 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance defines NATO as America’s greatest strategic asset. It voices a resolve to invest in and modernize the organization against shared current and future threats. This 180-degree policy reversal from the Trump years proves how deeply ingrained the support for the bloc is

within the US foreign policy establishment.

Webber explains this characterization in the following words: “NATO doesn’t simply entrench American influence in Europe. It also helps furnish a reliable pool of interoperable armed forces and keeps the peace at one end of the Eurasian landmass, so allowing the US (the Ukraine crisis notwithstanding) to prioritize the threat from China at the other.”

Strategic adaptation

NATO has constantly adjusted its strategy to the changing security environment. Its strategic concepts are reviewed and updated regularly. The Secretary-General leads the effort of drafting a new strategic concept – updated every decade. Internal and external consultations take place among the allies on the evolving environment, approach, and priorities, and other partners including international organizations, experts, civil society, youth, and the private sector.

Once the consultation phase concludes, NATO member states, after reaching a broad-based consensus, confirm the next Strategic Concept in the Summit.

Webber considers such documents NATO’s public face in the world. “Internally, they are important exercises in consensus building among the Allies. But while significant in their own right, the Strategic

Concepts are only one expression of NATO’s strategic coherence. Beneath them sit obscure, often classified but, nonetheless, operationally significant “statements of purpose”.

For any organization, a good strategy is paramount for ensuring longevity. It needs to take into account the objectives, allocate the necessary resources for meeting them, and define a timeframe. As Garry Kasparov, a Russian chess grandmaster and political activist said, “Sticking with a plan when you are winning sounds simple, but it’s easy to become overconfident and get caught up in events. Long-term success is impossible if you let your heat-of-the-moment reactions trump careful planning.” The 1990 London Declaration and the 1991 Strategic Concept are brilliant examples of NATO’s commitment to remaining engaged even after the Soviet Union’s demise.

Throughout its history, NATO has paid considerable attention to the formulation of strategy based on constantly updated concepts, political guidance, and military doctrine. In June 2020, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg laid out his priorities for NATO 2030: Making sure NATO remains strong militarily, becomes even stronger politically, and takes a more global approach. The alliance is looking to adopt a more forward-looking approach and NATO 2030 initiative is all about preparing for tomorrow’s challenges.



Deosai's Magnificent Himalayan Brown Bears

Pakistan is home to the subcontinent's diverse flora and fauna. Its wildlife sanctuaries and national parks provide a variety of thrilling wildlife tours



Deosai National Park is one such great national park that provides breath-taking chances of seeing wildlife. The park is not only known for its wildlife but also for its spectacular scenery of snow-capped mountains and flowing streams. From November to May, the park is completely engulfed in a white blanket of snow, and visitors can only visit during the summer months. The park can be reached from both Astore Valley and Skardu in the west and north.

The Deosai Plains are one of the last remaining natural habitats for the Himalayan brown bear, which originally roamed freely over the Himalayas. There are currently seventy-eight brown bears in the park. This park was created to safeguard these seriously endangered bears.

Because of climate change, the temperature has doubled in five decades, affecting not only the monsoon but also causing rapid changes on the Himalayan plateau, making it impossible to spot Himalayan brown bears. So, Himalayan brown bears are in risk of extinction, and that climate change is driving not only starvation but also human-bear conflict.

Around the world, these bears have lost 98 percent of their historical population. As a result of climate change, all Himalayan brown bears will lose another 11% of their current population by 2050.

The Himalayan Wildlife Foundation (HWF) and the Northern Areas Forests, Parks, and Wildlife Department have just begun a study initiative to ensure the brown bear's survival in the Deosai Plains and to monitor their population.

Brown bears are omnivores, and the Deosai National Park in Pakistan is their primary home. Its natural habitat is sub-alpine scrub, where it can also be found in alpine meadows in North America. Some have been observed in the Rama Valley and Biafo Glacier in Gilgit-Baltistan. They are once in a blue moon seen in Pakistan's Chitral and Khunjab National Parks.

Other wild animals found in Deosai National Park include the red fox, golden marmot, Sind ibex, wolf, the Ladakh urial, and the snow leopard. Lammagier vulture, griffon vulture, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, laggar falcon, kestrel, snow cock, and Indian sparrow hawk are among the bird species found in Deosai National Park.

Waqar Zakaria, a wildlife management board official in Islamabad who has spent 38 years working for wildlife conservation and played a key part in the formation of Deosai as a national park, said the brown bear has been protected with great care.

"During a survey over 30 years ago, we only found 17 bears," he stated. We made every effort to turn Deosai into a protected area, and according to a recent study, the number has risen to seventy-eight.

Mehdi Sadpara, a wildlife ranger who has worked in Deosai National Park for almost 22 years, stated that there were only fifteen bears when he first arrived, but that number has since risen to seventy-eight.

It is a considerable success, but the people that live around Deosai Parks are not happy with the expansion. "The bear population has

expanded, but there is not enough food for them," said local veterinarian Ghulam Rasool. As a result, they enter the village areas in search of prey.

Abbas Jan, the proprietor of a Deosai tourism agency in Sadpara village, claimed that the national park's designated acreage is insufficient for the Himalayan bear. As a result, he claims, bears now hunt near nalas (streams) near the settlement, which are suitable for cow grazing. Villagers claim that bears hunted eight goats at Mapelin stream in the previous year, a substantial loss.

"We followed the bear's footprints and discovered its scat at the scene of the incident last year. We gave the park administration all of the evidence, but instead of rewarding us, they ignored it," he stated. In the harsh winter, bears enter the settlement area before the hibernating period begins. The people claimed they had hunted hundreds of livestock last year.

If the villagers get angry at the bears hunting their cattle, they might try to harm the bears.

The chair of the wildlife management board, Anees ur Rehman, said he denies all of the villagers' evidence and concerns. Although the brown bear is an omnivore, it is highly improbable that it will seek cattle as prey. "We studied the bears' faeces and found that they solely consume herbs and voles," Rehman explained.

There is no doubt that cattle are pursued, but various predators must be after them. Wolves and snow leopards can also be found in this park. Since this became a national park, the bear has grown in prominence, so [the other predators] are not being blamed," he continued.

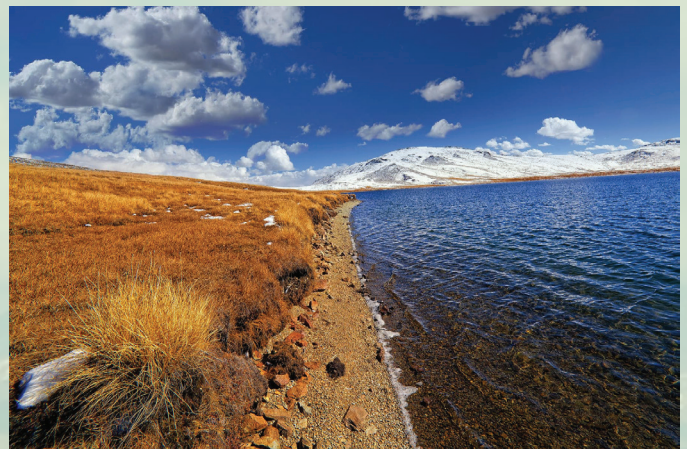
Whatsoever, Pakistan's government has to work on not only saving bears but also saving the settlements around Deosai Park.

Brown bear hunters are a threat.

Hunting is also a threat to the endangered brown bear. According to Fakhar Abbas, director of the federal wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre, the *Ursus Arctos* is not a serious matter of worry due to its global population, but it is critically endangered in Pakistan, where it threatens extinction. It is also listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora's Appendix 11.

Even though there is a ban on trading bears in Pakistan, poachers hunt the brown bear, despite laws prohibiting it. The Makri market in Thana Gulbahar, Peshawar (the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), according to Abbas, is the largest bear trade market. They are also aware of a bear display centre in Gujranwala (a Punjab city) where at least two dozen bears are sold each year, at least four of which are brown bear cubs. They are usually used for a street circus in Pakistan. Others are smuggled out of the nation for their hides and organs, which are sold on the black market.

After the establishment of the national park in Deosai, it took 26 years to implement a management plan, yet conflicts among residents continue to boil. The achievement may not last if there is not a strategic strategy in place that addresses local realities and concerns.



The Fallout of Russia-Ukraine War

The drama unfolding on the edge of Europe has repercussion for the whole world

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

Mass scale death and destruction is synonymous with war. It is very unfortunate that Russia and Ukraine are embroiled in the ongoing war despite the fact that the logic dictated that the full-on war was not in favour of any party. Ukraine has suffered heavy losses in flesh and blood and whole cities have been destroyed beyond recognition. Apparently, a non-stoppable human tragedy is unfolding and the world is watching it with apathy.

Russian attack is unabated and despite commendable resistance, Ukraine is no match for the Russian military power that has been built to tackle NATO's military might. NATO's reluctance to get involved in the conflict rests on the argument that its direct involvement can widen the conflict and can plunge the whole Europe in a war and is testament to the destructive power of Russian army. The military power of both parties is beyond any comparison.

An important point to remember is that the war is being fought on the Ukrainian soil and virtually all the catastrophic destruction is to be borne by Ukraine. It is apparent what Russia wants to achieve from this war: It wants Ukraine to be neutral and free from western influence lessening the threat posed to Russia. The question is what the West wants to achieve from this war.

The West including the US are providing modern weaponry to Ukraine and the Ukrainian resistance is using it effectively to dent the Russian advances by incurring losses to the Russian forces. However, this cannot result in the defeat of Russia; it can only prolong the war on Ukrainian soil and bring more death, destruction and misery to the Ukrainians.

The sanctions imposed on Russia by the West are hitting hard to the Russian economy and the Rouble plummeted in the beginning before recovering to the pre-war levels. The western nations posed a united front, which was not expected by many pundits, giving differing interests.

The Germans who were ambivalent at first came back strongly in imposing sanctions



against Russia endangering their energy supplies from Russia. Most of Europe is heavily reliant on Russian energy especially natural gas supplies.

What are the alternatives for Europe? It seems in a foreseeable future; Europe will remain reliant on Russian supplies. If that is the case, the question is how long it will take to open up rifts among the Western nations about the sanctions especially in the face of counter measures by Russia? Despite very damaging sanctions, Russians didn't turn off the tap of Russian supplies to Europe because Russian economy is heavily dependent on its exports of oil and gas.

However, Russia has started responding to these sanctions by demanding that the payment should be made in the rouble instead of US dollar. The Europeans have refused to meet this demand to which Russia has issued a threat to cancel the agreements with whosoever refused to pay in rouble.

This has very serious repercussions for the world economic order and can result in weakening of US dollar as an international currency of exchange. Whether it happens or not does not matter to the suffering of Ukrainians. Some analysts view that if

Russia feels too cornered as a result of these sanctions or other measures, the use of nuclear weapons by Russia is a possibility. No matter even if it is a remote possibility, if it happens then the world will see death and destruction never seen in the history of human kind before.

The situation right now is that Russia is present on Ukrainian soil and destroying Ukrainian cities and infrastructure with mounting toll of flesh and blood, much more on the Ukraine side than on the Russian side. The US and other NATO allies are alert, supplying more arms to Ukraine, and watching the gory drama playing out in the fields and cities of Ukraine from the fence. Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine are counting the bodies and the losses.

Strangely no-one is taking a serious initiative to put an end to this madness. Sanctions after sanctions, supply of arms and more supply of arms are worsening an already grim situation. This conflict has all the ingredients and potential to deteriorate into another World War. Even if it does not happen, the existing world order is bound to change in a variety of ways.

(To be continued)

For How Long Can the Common European Eat Ideology?

The EU is split and in a jam over a Russia sanctions regime that inflicts pain on the European citizenry



By Aimen Bukhari

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US and its Western allies imposed sanctions against Russia. These sanctions have become tougher every week since the invasion. EU citizens are being asked to make significant sacrifices to support the sanctions system against Russia. The question then becomes how long Westerners will be willing to give up personal comforts in the name of sanctions.

In a month, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the lives of thousands of people. Before the invasion, the Germans were celebrating a pipeline project with Russia. The champagne had been chilled in preparation for an expected ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nord Stream 2, a proposed 1,234-kilometre pipeline connecting Russia and Germany that would have kept Europe warm and cosy for decades if completed.

Now, as calls for decoupling from Russian energy sources grow louder, EU authorities are recommending their citizens reduce their time in the shower and invest in wool jumpers instead.

“There are two things you can do”, says Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission’s Competition Commissioner. “When you turn off the water, you tell Putin, ‘Take that, Putin’, and you take control of your own and your teenagers’ showers.”

Peter Hauck, the chief of the agricultural department of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, concurs, “We have to shut down Putin’s money valve. This means that we must likewise turn off the gas and oil faucets for freedom in Europe to have a chance. In winter, you can survive temperatures as low as 15 degrees [Celsius] if you wear a sweater.”

Small wonder wool prices have also risen in Europe. However, it takes an incredible leap of logic to conclude that “turning off the gas and oil” has anything to do with preserving “freedom in Europe.” It also seems like a fitting inscription for a political career’s gravestone, which, at this pace, may have to be chiselled sooner rather than later.

It is difficult for the Western cancel cult to realise that Russian gas and oil comprise a vast river that runs in a variety of directions, not simply in one. While Moscow is not in any rush to lose its European customers, as seen by its track record of never leaving Europe without energy, even during the darkest days of the Cold War, the Russian government has alternatives. The European Union, on the other hand, does not, at least not at this point in its development.

As Martin Brudermüller, the CEO of BASF SE, the world’s largest chemical manufacturer, broke this hard reality to his compatriots as gently as he could by conceding that “Russian gas supplies have, to date, been the foundation of our industry’s competitiveness.”

Furthermore, if Europe imports liquefied natural gas from the United States (an item that Washington has been pressuring Europeans to buy almost as aggressively as it has been pressuring them to buy exorbitant weapon systems), this will result in a “challenge for the competitiveness of German and European industry,” accord-

ing to Brudermüller, who added that liquefied natural gas is “practically a luxury item.”

To put it another way, the interruption of Russian energy supplies might spell doom for the European economy and the estimated 440 million Europeans whose well-being, or at the very least their level of life, depends on these resources. But it appears to have had little effect on Brussels’ decision to escalate its anti-Russian rhetoric even more.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen revealed that the EU is seeking to restrict coal imports from Russia as well as the entry of most Russian trucks and ships, ratcheting up the ante on sanctions. But within Europe, there seem to be cracks in implementing these sanctions. One brutal winter on the continent without Russian gas and oil would spell disaster for millions of people; one year without a decent grain harvest could mean starvation, and one business quarter without enough energy supplies to meet demand could spell the end of the world economy as we know it for the first time in human history.

That Russia supplies over half of the EU’s coal requirements, which is used to fuel its power plants, which give crucial electricity to millions of power-dependent individuals, is surely not a surprise to Von der Leyen. It is alleged that Russian soldiers committed crimes in the Ukrainian village of Bucha, which is the basis for these currently proposed sanctions, which have not been confirmed.

Moscow has categorically refuted the allegations, claiming instead that the Ukrainian government staged a false flag operation in order to blame Russian military personnel. Given the seriousness of the allegations and the potentially catastrophic implications that may result, the EU and the United States should be pressing for a thorough investigation before assigning responsibility to any party. Instead, Russia has been rapidly found guilty of a crime without the benefit of a trial for the second time in recent history.

Clearly, we are talking about a fast-worsening political scenario that has the potential to have far-reaching effects beyond being obliged to wear an additional sweater

during the winter months. If ties between Russia and the West deteriorate anymore, it could result in very serious life and death repercussions for people. The west has to know that rejecting and cancelling Russia will not keep a house warm in the winter or food on the table if they are virtue-signaling their way through it.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Biden administration appears to be similarly eager to put food and energy security at risk by sticking to its anti-Russian positions. “It is going to be real”, President Joe Biden declared last month at a speech in Brussels on impending food shortages, notably wheat, which is largely sourced from Russian farms.



Not only is Russia paying the price for the sanctions, but the United States is as well. It is being forced on a large number of countries as well, including European countries and our own country.

What is important to understand in this context is that global supply networks had already frayed long before the events in Ukraine became the focal point of attention. American shoppers were surprised to discover emptying store shelves at the same time that hundreds of cargo ships remained chained off at the US coast because of the Biden administration’s major mismanagement of the COVID epidemic, which resulted in harsh restrictions on everything with a pulse.

The misuse of Washington’s energy supply is no less perplexing. Last month, President Joe Biden signed an executive order prohibiting the importation of Russian oil, liquefied natural gas, and coal into the United States, among other things.

One would naturally expect that authorities in Washington had some sort of backup plan in place, such as reopening the Keystone XL pipeline, which was Donald Trump’s idea and would have more than compensated for the lack of Russian supply in the first place. But that did not happen.

It was stated in the Wall Street Journal that officials in the Biden administration are looking into methods to increase oil imports from Canada “but there’s a significant limitation.” The Washington Post writes that “[t]hey don’t want to see the Keystone XL project resurrected, which President Biden essentially destroyed on his first day in office.”

As Brussels and Washington continue to engage in a game of sanctions chicken with Russia, in which the winner is the one who blinks first, one has to wonder how long Western consumers will be willing to put up with the compromises they have already been forced to make.

Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, was not blind to the West’s determination to inflict agony on its own people through a sanctions regime so cruel that it threatens globalism. Essentially, it is populism in reverse—people are being exhorted to eat less, wear warmer clothes to save on heating, and forego travel—all in the name of “abstract North Atlantic togetherness.”

Putin warned that such “solidarity” could “threaten the global economy into a catastrophe,” perhaps leading some of the world’s poorest countries to starve to death. The question is, who is to blame?

That is a question that many Westerners may be asking their governments in the not-too-distant future if they find themselves unexpectedly hungry after decades of consumer excess and luxury. The only difference is that this time, people may be far less ready to accept the tired narrative that the “usual suspect” of Russia is to blame for their suffering.

Africa's Forgotten Epidemic of Military Coups

Are we forgetting how interlinked our world is and how events in one part cannot fail to influence other parts?

By Adeena Tahir

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is undergoing major socio-political upheaval from the Russian invasion of Ukraine up north to the destabilization of governments in Asia, most notably in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

However, in the midst of this all, what has somehow managed to stay largely unnoticed is the serious domino effect raging across the continent of Africa, where the civil governments are being toppled over by the military in several countries. In the past 18 months alone, five African countries of Mali, Chad, Guinea, Sudan, and Burkina Faso saw their military leaders dethrone civil governments to declare a coup.

Global attention towards this new series of events unfolding in Africa comes across as largely inadequate and unfit, given the gravity of risks imposed to civil governments and democracy. Perhaps one reason for this could be the general lack of awareness exhibited by a majority of the world's population on the complexity of African issues and how the impacts of social tension, conflict, and violence in many African countries creates effects impacting us all.

One way of understanding the global impact of Africa's state of peace and war is that in the year 2021, around 30,000 migrants were stranded at the borders in Western Africa, in an attempt to escape violence and conflict.

Most of the migration happens from South to North, where the migrants' ultimate goal is to reach European countries for refuge while straining the resources of the countries in Northern Africa, where as per one estimate, the North Africa alone hosted 1.5 to 2.5 million international migrant workers and refugees in 2021.

Today, some 11 million African refugees live in Europe, 5 million in the Middle East, and 3 million or more in North America. This phenomenon of migration alone has a myriad socio-political and economic



challenges, from the cost incurred on rescue, relief, and rehabilitation, to provision of amenities, decent incomes, and more.

It also leads to social tension, where migrants and host population have to overcome language and cultural barriers for building cohesive societies. Conflict in Africa also causes internal challenges, from difficulty in governance, resource allocation and utilization, to driving the economy. It also causes loss of human lives, with killings of civilians during armed clashes, incidents of terrorism, to civil unrest.

The impact of conflict and violence further compounded during COVID-19 when it aggravated the issues of inequity and inequality, where majority of population is hugely vulnerable due to lack of technical, financial, and knowledge capacity.

A forced presidential resignation

With this in view, the recent wave of military coups where civil governments are being overthrown through intensive civilian and military conflict and clashes should be recognized as a grave threat to the continent's peace and stability.

The first country that experienced this was Mali, back in August 2020, where there was public outrage over a stolen parliamentary election. The protesters were calling for the country's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to resign while also demanding an end to chronic corruption, economic laggardness, and prevalence of jihadist conflict in the north.

Although the regional African Block of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) tried to mediate and get agreement on a 6-member government that would reform Mali, the lack of widespread support for this effort rendered ECOWAS role unsuccessful and on 18 August, a coup began with the forced resignation of the President and dissolution of National Assembly.

Because the coup had come around the same time as the opposition's plan of resuming protests, the initial move of taking resignation from the President was welcomed, exhibited by the celebrations sprawling out in Mali's streets where soldiers and civilians danced hand in hand.

The soldiers running the coup have since regrouped as the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), with the stated intention to facilitate a smooth transition towards a civilian government through elections once the time is right.

Presently, Mali faces criticism from ECOWAS that has closed its borders with Mali and also limited the country's role in decision making bodies coupled with a looming chance of financial exchange suspensions.

A president killed

In April 2021, Chad saw the unprecedented case of its President Idriss Deby being killed by rebel soldiers while visiting his army fighting on the frontlines against rebel factions.

President Idriss Deby has ruled for an impressive period of three decades and had

just recently been confirmed for his sixth term in the office. He was widely viewed in the West as a strong leader in the fight against Islamic extremism.

This sudden death has plunged the country into an environment of volatility, where as of now, a military council has taken over the country to steer defense, direct the ongoing war, and with the promise of holding free, democratic, and transparent elections soon.

Analysts have concerns, fearing a dissent into disintegration similar to Libya, which would increase the trade of arms and hold of Boko Haram, the Islamist terrorist organization, in the region. Although Deby was widely celebrated for his role in peace-building and bringing stability, he was also seen an increasingly authoritarian president during the later years of his regime.

France and United States have expressed their nervousness over these developments and it remains to be seen how the fight against terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and Boko Haram will be impacted by this event, where the French military alone has deployed 5,000 troops to battle Al Qaeda in the Northwest Africa region.

A flurry of coups attempts

In March 2021, Nigeria too faced a failed coup attempt, where the presidential palace was attacked by rebel army groups right before the elections for the new president Mohamed Bazoum took place. It is claimed that the situation has since been brought under control by the newly elected civilian government after what is being heralded as the first democratic transition of power for the country.

However, since this incident took place, violence has escalated in the region, with allegations of fraudulent elections being raised by the former president Ousmane and the increase in extremist violence, some coming from Mali and Nigeria.

In Guinea, President Umaro Sissoco withstood a coup attempt by a rebellious groups of the military led by a high-ranking officer trained in the United States. The failed attempt was bloody, with Sissoco claiming that several members of security

forced were killed but the number of casualties remains unconfirmed.

Here again, is a case of an already weak civil government, where the legitimacy of the government was under heat, including the elections themselves. For public too, this seems to be a recurring event which fails to strike up any strong social sentiments, since for the most part of the country, people are grappling with issues like poverty and economic instability, leaving little confidence in the government for relief.

In October, Sudan saw its military generals seize power shortly before the country was to hold its first free elections in decades.

A majority of the countries where these failed or successful military coups unfolded have a combination of civil-military unrest, rebel army factions, social dissatisfaction with the governments, and ongoing conflict with terror organizations.

Social trust in governments was already low, since many of the South and Western African countries were struggling to develop their economies and build peace, which meant that countries like Guinea were among the poorest in the world.

But these existing conditions of economic deprivation were further compounded by the onset of the global pandemic, where it had very harsh consequences for people in terms of having sufficient resources and equitable distribution to fight against Covid-19.

Jobs in the informal sector died out as lockdowns and curfews occurred alongside the global economic recession, which slowed down businesses and trade. Health workers had to operate in unsanitary and unsafe environments with shortage of medical supplies while schools shutting down meant serious implications for children's rights.

Importantly, human rights violations have escalated, freedom of speech has been curtailed, and there is an ongoing effort to silence opposing voices and news by sticking the label of 'fake news'. These conditions hurt people's confidence and regard for the governments, which is why in many countries, a military coup did not see a strong reaction from the people, who felt

rather relieved that one government had changed and starting hoping for new elections to be held once the army reduces escalation in violence and unrest.

The second reason for the rise in military coup attempts is the ongoing battle against religious extremist organizations where Islamic insurgencies try to build local support. Since these terror elements cause concern amongst civilians and demand for strict military action against them, rebel factions in the army use this as an opportunity to leverage their chance of declaring military coup.

In some cases, the military does have serious grievances, such as in the case of Burkina Faso, where an attack on military left 50 officers killed, causing a huge shift in the military's role and ending in a coup just two months later.

Finally, one could also view this as an aftermath to the shifting global world orders and interests, where there has been a rise in populous political movements calling for policies that prioritize the countries first, such as Trump Chanting America First just a few years back.

This shift towards countries changing their level of engagement in global challenges is driven by rightwing, populous movements sprawling across Europe and the West, and was further fueled when Covid-19 halted the global economy, disrupting global supply chains, and causing countries to prioritize securing their interests first.

This shrinking of global partnership was seen in the case of Covid-19 vaccines, where developed countries kept their vaccine supplies for their respective nations, while developing countries remained deprived, with one estimate that as of now, only 2 percent of the Africa's population has received their Covid vaccines.

With two thirds of Africans wanting to live in a democracy, it is imperative that global leaders take up this crucial moment to ponder over the meaning of democracy for Africa – and how to build safer societies in the region while adhering to the principles of democracy.

New Political Leadership, Old Economic Problems

Shahbaz Sharif is stepping into a mare's nest of economic problems, each more urgent than the other



By Javed Mahmood

With the rupee recouping some of its lost value against the dollar and stocks soaring to five-year highs on the day Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif was sworn into office, the markets seem to have loved the premature transition of power in Pakistan.

The stock market is moving forward by leaps and bounds while the greenback is losing value every day against the Pakistani rupee. From 8-11 April, the dollar-rupee parity has plunged from a record high 180 rupees to 182 rupees in the inter-bank market.

Also, in just two working days (8 and 11 April), Pakistan Stock Exchange gained about 2,300 points amid political developments leading to the transition. On 8 April, the PSX-100 index gained over 700 points while the market recorded another increase of more than 1660 points on Monday morning (11 April till 10:30am) in anticipation of election of Mian Shahbaz Sharif as Prime Minister.

On Monday (11 April), Pakistan Stock Exchange accorded a very warm welcome to the new Prime Minister when the PSX-100 index gained 1437 points after former prime minister Imran Khan was ousted in the no-confidence move in the national assembly late Saturday night.

Earlier, the stock market became bullish when the Supreme Court of Pakistan restored the National Assembly and ordered the PTI government and Speaker to hold voting on the no-confidence motion of the opposi-

tion. The dollar also recorded a big single-day blow when its value fell from 189 to 185 rupees in the open market.

With the transition, the process of improvement in the economic indicators too has begun. However, in addition to giving price-hike relief to the masses, the most important challenges for the new government would be to reign in the trade deficit, current account deficit, falling foreign exchange reserves, and all-time high inflation, very high gas, electricity tariffs and sky-high prices of essential commodities including cooking oil and many other kitchen items.

Pakistan's trade deficit has expanded alarmingly in the first nine months of the ongoing financial year. From July 2021 to March 2022, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has reported USD 35.40 billion trade deficit, 70 percent higher than the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year.

In the current fiscal, the imports surged to USD 58.70 billion as against USD 39.50 billion imports in the same period of the last financial year. Thus, 48.60 percent growth in the imports in this financial year has alarmingly upset the balance of trade of Pakistan.

In monetary terms, Pakistan spent USD 19.20 billion more on imports from July 2021 to March 2022, in comparison with imports recorded in the corresponding period of previous fiscal year.

The current account deficit exceeded USD 12 billion in the first eight months

of ongoing fiscal year, July 2021 to Feb 2022, and amounted to USD 12.32 billion.

A related worry is the forex reserves. In recent weeks, the foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan declined significantly because of repayment of foreign loans and alarming growth in the trade and current account deficits in this fiscal year.

But to the common citizen, inflation is the biggest problem of all. According to data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the national increased by 12.72 percent over March 2021. Urban CPI recorded an increase of 11.94 percent while rural CPI recorded an increase of 13.88 percent.

National CPI for the month of March 2022 increased by 0.79 percent over February 2022, with Urban CPI recording an increase of 0.65 percent and rural CPI recorded an increase of 1.00 percent over the previous month.

The new government, backed by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition mainly comprising PML(N), PPP JUI(F), and MQM-P, will have to evolve prudent policies to manage the trade deficit.

Prime Minister Sharif would do well to devise result-oriented approaches to minimize the trade and current account deficits, strengthening the dwindling foreign exchange reserves and further improve the value of Pakistani currency against the US dollar and other major currencies.

The New Government's First Test Will be Economy

Imagine an economy on life support, imagine the life support suspended, imagine stepping in as a Prime Minister



By Mehtab Haider

Taking the reins of the country at a time when the country's battered economy is settling in stabilisation mode after a foundered recovery, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has his economic challenges cut out for him: Negotiating the revival of a stalled IMF program against the backdrop of current account deficit soaring to historic highs and external financing burden reaching crippling proportions.

Pakistan's budget deficit – the gap between the country's total revenues and total expenditures – is set to escalate beyond PKR 4.4 trillion for the current fiscal year, historically the highest level in absolute terms, latest estimates suggest.

The current account deficit is also projected to witness a new peak by touching USD 20-21 billion by 30 June 2022. The country's total public debt surged by PKR 20 trillion, reaching approximately PKR 45 trillion. It stood at PKR 25 trillion in 2018 under the PML (N) government.

Rising inflation, especially food inflation,

has really decimated the purchasing power of the common citizen of the country in the last three-and-a-half-years of PTI rule.

Now the first and foremost challenge for the newly inducted Shahbaz Sharif regime for revival of the stalled IMF program in the wake of yawning gross external financing requirements.

The IMF in its 6th review staff report shared estimates on external financing requirements which stood at USD 30 billion for the current fiscal year and USD 34 billion for the next fiscal year 2022-23. These estimates were made on the basis of the current account deficit projected at USD 12.9 billion for the current fiscal year.

The current account deficit had already reached USD 12.3 billion so far in the first eight months (July-Feb) period for the current fiscal. It is projected to cross USD 18 billion and probably touch USD 20-USD 21 billion mark.

The foreign currency reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan have also nosedived.

A recent figure (USD 11.3 billion as of 1 April 2022) was sharply down by almost USD 5 billion from about a month earlier (USD 16.2 billion as of 4 March 2022).

Against the backdrop of this increased external vulnerability, the State Bank of Pakistan used two available tools including an exchange rate anchor by allowing adjustment of the exchange rate and the rupee witnessed a steep fall against the US dollar. The rupee touched the lowest ebb by touching PKR 190 against the US dollar in the interbank market but in the last couple of days, it rebounded and now stood at PKR 182 range against US dollar.

The SBP also hiked policy rate by 250 basis points in an emergency meeting and the policy rate went up to 12.25 percent. There has been increased inflationary pressures but the SBP has taken the decision to hike the policy rate mainly to curtail current account deficit and stem the flight of dollar.

Now the economy has again gone into stabilization mode from earlier projection

of moving towards growth trajectory mainly because of weak and unsustainable macroeconomic fundamentals. The low growth will appear on economic horizon of the country resulting into increased unemployment and increased poverty. Now the time has again surfaced when we will have to forget economic growth and creating job opportunities.

The breakdown of the existing foreign currency reserves held by the SBP reveals that they are comprised chiefly of deposits from friendly countries. Such deposits include USD 3 billion from Saudi Arabia, USD 4 billion from China, and USD 2 billion from the UAE. This paints a picture of increased economic vulnerability on the external front.

A recently launched report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) included Pakistan in the list of five countries of the world facing high pressures on balance of payment vulnerabilities including escalating public and publicly guaranteed debt. On the list besides Pakistan are list Sri Lanka, Egypt, Angola, and Colombia.

The UNCTD in its publication titled

“Trade and Development Report Update: Tapering in Time of Conflict” stated that public sector external debt vulnerabilities are substantial, especially in low-income countries.

Independent economists including renowned economist Dr Hafeez Pasha believe Pakistan is facing a severe balance of payment crisis and depletion of foreign currency reserves. The country requires major dollar injections in order to restore confidence and avoiding further depletion of foreign currency reserves.

Other economists argue that there is a dire need to build up the dwindling foreign currency reserves. A Chinese must be pursued for Chinese loans to the tune of USD 2.5 billion must be pursued. The government must actively engage with bilateral and multilateral partners for increased funding. A deferred oil facility from the KSA must be used fully and project financing must be fast tracked.

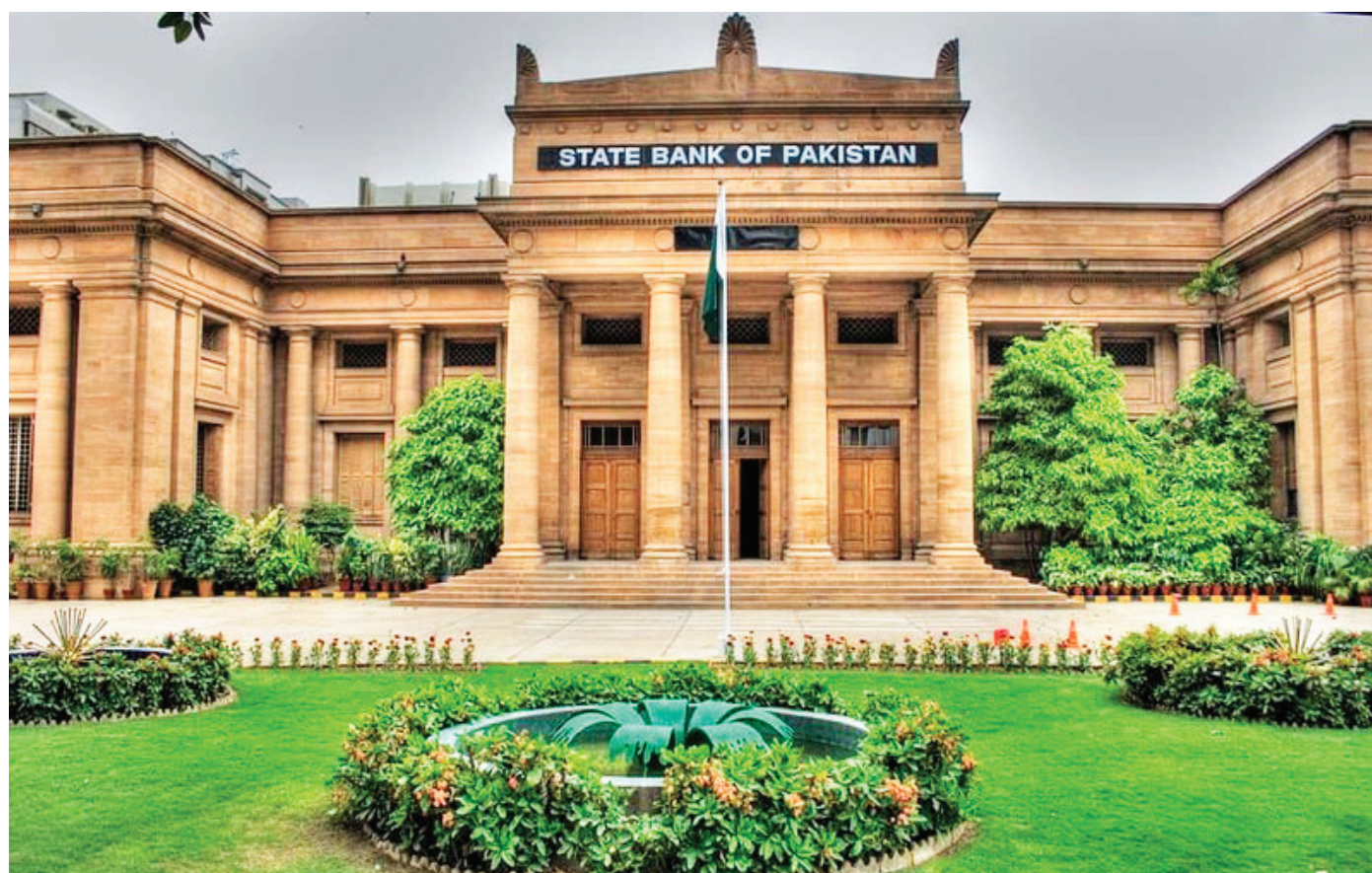
The Budget 2023 needs to manage the fiscal deficit which has a direct bearing on the current account. The budget must be finalized considering the overall financing envelope and the needed repair of the

expenditure side as current expenditure has swelled to PKR 7.5 trillion.

Burgeoning pensions and rising mark-up payments are part of Pakistan’s unfinished reforms agenda. Revenue reforms covering the personal income tax regime and doing away with concessions also need a serious effort. Budget 2023 must show a move towards a progressive and simple taxation system in the country. It may be prudent to pursue a levy on income and wealth of high net worth individuals and a reduction in the threshold of the highest taxation bracket.

Managing inflation beyond monetary tightening is a key challenge for the government to give relief to the people. In this regard, vigilant supply-side monitoring of key food items is important to bring down food inflation.

Last but not the least, the government would have to place qualified professionals and bureaucrats having in-depth knowledge about macroeconomic issues and dynamics to revive the economy on sustained basis. Otherwise this boom and bust cycles would continue to haunt the economy in the months and years to come.



Best foot forward?

The government failed to highlight the areas where it was doing well

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

All real world governments fail at some of the things they attempt; most do well in some area or the other. Come a reckoning, it is common sense to highlight the achievements and try to explain away the failures. In my opinion, one of the major failures of the coalition led by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has been its inability to take due credit for the things it got right.

Some of the things it did well but did not get enough credit for include its management of the Covid-19 crisis, in particular its policy of 'smart' lockdowns, the expansion of social protection programmes, and introduction of a health insurance scheme through its Sehat Card. Its attempt to curtail the capacity payment burden in the power sector through renegotiation with the independent power producers (IPPs) was also a move in the right direction even though the relief resulting from it was not huge and went mostly unnoticed by the masses.

Compared to neighbouring economies, Pakistan has managed the Covid-19 quite well. Having a dedicated NCOC may have been the difference between the relatively low casualty count and economic disruption in Pakistan compared for example to better resourced and culturally similar India. The NCOC was largely successful in maintaining adequate availability of testing kits, vaccines, oxygen cylinders, ventilators and personal protection equipment.

The smart lockdown policy in preference to comprehensive shutdowns was also an inspired choice. Instead of imposing a general curfew, the government locked down selected neighbourhoods based on the documented incidence of the disease. This policy helped protect livelihoods of millions of people, particularly urban poor. On a macro-level, it enabled the textile sector to expand at the cost of regional peers where strict lockdowns were in force and production was stalled.

The national social protection initiative during Covid-9, called the Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme, was the fourth largest in terms of the number of people covered and third in terms of percentage of population covered amongst those that covering more than 100 million people. However, this disbursement of emergency grants at such a large scale, upgrade of the national socio-economic registry, identification of potential beneficiaries through a transparent mechanism and launch of several other social safety nets failed to get decisive recognition and appreciation domestically as effective strategies to insulate low-income people from the impact of food and fuel inflation amid a pandemic.

The health insurance launched through Sehat Card in three provinces can be a signature initiative for any South Asian government. The PTI government failed even to use this initiative effectively in defence of its performance.

Renegotiation with independent power producers to reduce some of the capacity payment charges has helped slow down the accumulation of energy circular debt. It is a step in the right direction but the government has not been able to use it to build a narrative of better energy governance.



What can explain this narrative building failure?

First, fallback mechanisms are not considered important until someone needs them. Barring initiatives in the energy sector, most of the initiatives mentioned above are fallback mechanisms that were/ are taken to protect people from certain types of risks that arise out of uncertain events. For instance, the primary purpose of social protection and Covid-19 management initiatives was not to take people out of poverty (or improve their life expectancy) but to stop them from falling deeper into poverty by saving their livelihoods (or lives) amidst the pandemic. Similarly, the importance of health insurance can only be recognised when someone has to get hospitalised. The importance of such measures is not readily realised by the masses.

Another reason the PTI government did not get much political mileage from the initiatives is that these are not "brick and mortar" projects. Most people are more inclined to appreciate tangible outputs. It is easier for governments in Pakistan to defend their performance by quoting the number of hospitals built, than by quoting the number of lives saved due to better management of existing health facilities.

It can be argued that the health insurance initiative should have been started earlier. If regulated adequately to prevent misuse of insurance by health services providers, the initiative has the potential to be a signature intervention. However, it is too early for most people to recognise its potential benefit.

Building a positive narrative in support of its socio-economic initiatives has been a significant challenge for this government. This is partly because many in the government have preferred spending their time and energy criticising its predecessors rather than highlighting their own achievements. This tendency has its political cost and implications.

If the PTI government survives the current political turmoil, it will do well to highlight the things it managed to do right. It should also try to foster a political consensus around the solutions to major economic challenges facing Pakistan. The advice is also valid for the next government if the PTI does not survive the vote of no confidence.

Courtesy The New

The economy challenge



By Dr Khaqan Hassan Najeeb

We live in uncertain times. The last two years have been tumultuous for citizens globally. A pandemic for which there was no playbook, followed by a fragile economic recovery, recently overshadowed by geo-political turmoil and a resultant inflation shock, has left many families struggling to make ends meet. Higher fuel, food and shipping costs continue to increase prices and stretch household budgets.

In Pakistan's case, weak economic fundamentals, global price pass-through with devaluation enhancing the price effect, and expansionary fiscal stance, have all exacerbated prices. Inflation touched a high of 12.7 percent YoY in March 2022. Nine month average inflation is in double digits at 10.77 percent. Inflation is likely to remain elevated in 2022. Consequently, the State Bank of Pakistan raised the discount rate to 9.75 percent on March 8, 2022. This rise may negatively impact the healthy private-sector credit off-take seen in FY22 of about Rs874.3 billion as opposed to Rs403.6 billion last year, with consequences on slowing economic growth.

The country's economy's external economic indicators are more concerning. Current account deficit is now estimated to widen to an untenable level of 5-6 percent of GDP in FY22 – twice as high as the initial forecast of 2.6 percent and even surpassing the recent forecast of 4 percent. A widening current account deficit continues to erode Pakistan's largely borrowed foreign exchange reserves. State Bank reserves have declined to \$12.05 billion on March 25, 2022 from a high of \$20.1 billion in August 2021 – a hefty fall of 40 percent. Reserves now barely cover two months of Pakistan's import needs. Our economy may fast be approaching an uncomfortable balance-of-payment position.

Foreign direct investment remains stagnant at an unimpressive level of \$1.26 billion in 8MFY22. Foreign private portfolio investment has witnessed a net outflow of \$314.6 million during 8MFY2022. Foreign public portfolio investment had a net inflow of \$904.9 million in 8MFY22 aided by an inflow of \$1.0 billion of Pakistan International Sukuk bond. The Sukuk carries an interest rate of 7.95

percent – the highest return Pakistan has ever paid on an Islamic bond.

The Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) tax collection has been encouraging in FY22 after three years of low growth. The FBR has collected Rs4,382 billion from July-March 2022 against Rs3,394 billion in the same period last year – a growth of 29.1 percent. It is prudent to mention that the bulk of the FBR revenue growth is dependent on imports, which grew by 50 percent from \$32.1 to \$47.9 billion in 8MFY22.

With monetary tightening to slow the economy, a weakening rupee acting as a buffer to slow imports, the rise in revenues may not sustain the same growth momentum as seen in 9MFY22. Collection of Rs575 billion in March is about 5 percent shy of the Rs604 billion target. The FBR also missed its collection target in three out of the last four months. Non-tax revenue (NTR) is a substantial resource spinner for the budget, estimated at Rs2,080 billion for FY22. NTR collections at Rs783 billion for the first six months of FY22 are 16.7 percent lower than the same period last year – not an encouraging picture.

Budget deficit in the first seven months of FY22 has risen to a worrisome level of Rs1,862 billion (2.9 percent of GDP) from Rs1,309 billion (2.4 percent of GDP) in FY21 – a mammoth increase of 42 percent. This requires higher domestic and international borrowing and puts further pressure on rising inflation.

Given the above challenging economic picture and a fluid political climate, astute economic management and near-perfect calibration of monetary and fiscal policies in the near term is critical. Let us outline some practical steps.

First, it is wise for Pakistan to complete the on-going programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). External financing needs have risen to near \$32 billion for FY22 and \$35 billion for FY23. The continuous depletion of SBP reserves and the unsettling devaluation in the exchange rate is a ramification of the economic frailty that exists in the country. Restoring confidence requires successful closure of the seventh review with the IMF. A note of caution: if the talks with the IMF were to remain inconclusive, it could raise both local and foreign borrowing costs and hurt Pakistan's sovereign credit ratings. One can't stress enough our preparation in data accumulation, economic modelling and policy prescription that will get us across the bridge with the IMF on favourable terms.

Second, the IMF programme review

closure is time bound. Being in an IMF programme requires consultation on the contours of Budget 2023 with the IMF. Budget 2023 needs to be prepared considering available financing options, encompassing the needed repair of expenditure side as current expenditure has swelled to Rs7,523 billion in the past three years. The burgeoning pensions of the federal government to Rs480 billion and rising mark-up payments near Rs3,073 billion remain an unfinished reform agenda.

Third, we must, for the medium term, put up a framework which stabilises and then reduces gross and net debt as a share of the economy. Pakistan's accumulated debt and liabilities of Rs29.88 billion in FY18, have markedly risen to an uncomfortable level of Rs51.72 billion in less than four years. External debt has increased to \$130.6 billion as of December 31, 2021 from \$92 billion in 2018.

We must target a budget balance, on average, over the course of an economic cycle that is consistent with reducing the debt growth. This can be achieved by: i) managing expenditure growth; ii) supporting sustainable, progressive and simple tax burden by bringing the retail sector into the tax net and ensuring property taxes, agricultural income tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax form part of mainstream taxation; iii) using the government's financial resources to support agriculture

productivity; and iv) enhancing investments in soft infrastructure that build a productive economy.

Lastly, managing inflation, especially ensuring vigilant supply-side monitoring of key perishable and non-perishable food items in the coming months, is crucial. Initiatives should focus on reducing food inflation as it erodes the buying power of the vulnerable and urban middle-class. This is the best relief for citizens. Beyond interest-rate hikes, much more can be done. Our goal must be to manage the supply of cheaper fuels, improve performance of competitive markets, ensure that there is no undervaluation of the rupee, and limit the rate of monetary expansion to a low double-digit rate. In the medium term, correcting the fundamentals is a sound way to manage inflation. This is all hard work.

Policymakers have to be realistic about our growing challenges. Pakistan's structural reform agenda must be articulated in an economic reconstruction plan, and must remove the brakes on growth. The nation must believe that we are fundamentally altering the structure of Pakistan's economy even if by a small margin – through lowering barriers to entry, broadening ownership patterns and lowering the cost of living and doing business. The task at hand is indeed daunting.

The writer is former advisor, Ministry of Finance.



Covid and the Digital Divide

The pandemic has brought the inequality built into our digital infrastructure into sharp focus



By Mishaal Ashraf

“Haan internet affordable hou tou kyun nai ziada istemal karaygein? Zaroor karay gein.” [Yes, why wouldn’t we use the internet if it was more affordable? Of course, we will], says 36-year-old Mazhar from Bakote, Abbottabad.

He slips in this information as we discuss the kind of internet access he has and its increased usage over the last two years. Mazhar works at a canteen in a university in Islamabad while his wife lives in his ancestral town in Abbottabad.

He believes that technology plays a vital role in our lives and will inevitably be consumed by a significant majority if it is more accessible and affordable. He uses Facebook and WhatsApp regularly, but only at work, where he uses the university Wi-Fi, or at his small rented flat where he lives with his children in Islamabad. Once he is back home in Abbottabad, he loses the connection to the internet and this world.

Mazhar had to bring his children to Islamabad to live with him during the Covid-19 lockdown so they could continue to attend online classes, which they could not do in Bakote for want of internet access.

Perhaps one of the most significant trends of this century is the importance of establishing communication through the internet. The need for a stable internet connection was only acknowledged in Pakistan after an unprecedented pandemic that shifted the entire global infrastructure – when everything from schools to employment went online and anyone without a proper internet connection was practically handicapped.

The PTA claims the country is well equipped to cater to the needs of internet users, but the current situation depicts otherwise.

Economic barriers

PTA’s statement and Mazhar’s access to the internet in Bakote are contradictory. According to Mazhar, “There is no system for Wi-Fi back home. Mobile data is available but not 3G/4G. We only have access to 2G, which doesn’t work anyway.”

Abbas works alongside Mazhar and is an avid user of the internet. While his work does not require him to rely on the internet, he uses WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram for entertainment and essential communication.

Mazhar and Abbas’ experiences with the internet and the observation of how it became a necessity for everyone during the pandemic indicate that the use of the internet has become crucial for people belonging to almost all socioeconomic classes.

Despite being a commodity, the internet continues to be a luxury for the masses, leading to widening the already huge digital divide amongst different socioeconomic classes in the country. The result is an evident difference in the content that goes online based on who gets to create it and who gets to consume it.

Currently, in Pakistan, the lowest average monthly cost of mobile data is PKR 234.5 for an average of 3.5GB of data, which is barely enough for a household. When it comes to community broadband networks, they too cost generally around PKR 600-800 with extremely poor quality.



Internet Accessibility and Gender

However, while men seem to have avenues and resources to connect to the internet when they feel the need to, women, on the other hand, struggle with a lack of digital literacy on top of economic and infrastructural barriers.

Women's access to the internet in many communities is heavily dependent on permissions from the patriarchs or the heads of the family. The latter, in most cases, happen to be men. Arooj Aurangzeb, a political worker from Lahore, narrated her experience of interviewing a girl for her article for Digital Rights Monitor (DRM) regarding how women's access to the internet is more than just having a device.

She writes, "The call [with the girl] was short, in secrecy, interrupted by bad signals, and it ended when she was signaled by her younger sister on the lookout that her mother might be approaching. This is reflective of how a lot of women end up conducting conversations on their phones, with lookouts in place due to the complete lack of privacy."

Abbas' otherisation of his own community seems to be based on his apprehension of not knowing how to use digital platforms rather than controlling women's access. For him, if internet access is available for men in one household, it is also open to women.

Kulsoom, a 23-year-old girl from the Kohala Bala district of Abbottabad, believes that men have more open and easy access to the internet than women.

For Kulsoom, there is an evident contrast in how she accesses the internet compared to how men in her family do. According to

Kulsoom, even her son has more open access to the internet than she does as she has to constantly think about saving the data for her son or speaking to her husband.

But even here, the experiences and norms of some households differ from what research and majority experiences dictate. For instance, AD, a 34-year-old man from Kuri, a village in Islamabad, currently working as a support staff member in an office, says that while the affordability of the internet is an issue for him, there is no gender-based discrimination in his house when it comes to accessibility.

The only concern that AD has with his internet access is paying PKR 800 for an average quality connection that is also unreliable. He thinks that he has no other option because those that are better quality are more expensive and so beyond his means.

Meaningful Internet Connection

All of the people interviewed for this story said that their access to the internet was only through their smartphone, and they do not own any other device like a laptop or computer.

Mazhar says, "I had to get a laptop for my children, but the rates are so high that someone like me cannot even begin to fathom the inflation in our country. Technology has become a need for everyone in this country, but this country fails to provide adequate resources to make use of it."

In December 2021, reports of the government's proposal to increase tax on laptops and computers in the country started circulating, which if passed would have made these devices further out of reach for the masses. Eventually, the proposal was scratched from the Supplementary Finance Bill.

Still, another 17 percent tax on mobile phones was imposed in January 2022, making the primary device to access the internet for the working class more expensive and hence out of reach of many.

With the spread of Covid-19, many people from the working-class communities lost their jobs. It was the same time Pakistan was on the road to creating a digital economy, and the need for internet connections and digital devices rose. These communities were expected to have stable internet connections and working devices to access the internet to avail fundamental rights such as their right to education, communication, and work.

Telecom providers are persistently introducing cheap packages for marketing purposes, but they must ensure that the connections they offer do not compromise on reliability and strength. It falls upon both the service providers and the government to guarantee equal access to the internet, regardless of factors like geographical location and affordability levels.

A plethora of research supports the need to provide internet connections to enhance a nation's developmental curve. Communication is the tool needed to survive in the digitized world that we live in today, and regulators need to maintain checks that working-class citizens are no longer discriminated against, especially for basic needs, like the internet.

Christian Eschatology and Its Impact on World Affairs

A look at the largely Christian edifice of the secular western civilization

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Followers of Christianity form the largest faith-based group of world population. Hence, Christian eschatology, which revolves around the man-God personality of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, influences a large part of humanity. His various titles including the Messiah, the Anointed One, and the Savior all portray the meaning that influence this world's affairs and also the one which will come after this world.

Christian eschatology revolves around three issues:

1. The time of the second coming (return) of Jesus Christ
2. Israel and the Church
3. The Rapture question and the great tribulation

"Millennium" is the thousand-year period of peace and justice, termed by Christians as the Golden age. Beliefs in the prophecies of golden age are termed as "Millenarian" concepts.

"Rapture" is an eschatological theological position held by some Christians, particularly within branches of American evangelicalism, consisting of an end-time event when all Christian believers who are alive, along with resurrected believers, would rise "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

The time of the second coming of Jesus Christ

Most Christians agree that Jesus Christ will return to this world and one thousand years long golden age will prevail. Three major viewpoints regarding its timeline influence world politics, historically, presently and in future:

- a) Pre-Millennial: During the time of extreme Chaos (great tribulation period), Jesus Christ will return to the earth in future, intervene into human history in a dramatic



episode, setup the kingdom of heaven on earth and bring about the Millennium, the golden age after Jesus Christ's arrival.

- b) Post-Millennial: Christ from Heaven is actively participating on the earth through the agency of his Church, golden age will be achieved under his Spiritual inspiration and Christ will return after achievement of the golden age without any episodic intervention for implementation of final Judgement.
- c) Amillennial: Similar concept to that of Post-Millennial except that Christ will not personally intervene or participate in achieving golden age and at the end of millennium, will come to implement only the final Judgement.

Evangelical Protestantism is a worldwide inter-denominational movement within Protestant Christianity. The United States has the largest proportion of evangelicals in the world. American evangelicals are a quarter of that nation's population and its single largest religious group.

For the last century, pre-millennialism has been common belief and evangelical heads of states of USA and western world have affected the middle eastern politics in a major way. They do believe in the physical coming of the Christ during the end times.

Denominations such as oriental Orthodoxy, eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Lutheranism are generally Amillennial and interpret Revelation (20:1-6) as pertaining to the present time, a belief that Christ currently reigns in heaven with the departed saints. Amillennial view does not see the millennium mentioned in revelation as pertaining to a literal thousand years, but rather as symbolic, and see the kingdom of Christ already present in the church beginning with the Pentecost in the book of acts.

Post millennialism holds that Jesus Christ establishes his kingdom on earth through his preaching and redemptive work in the first century and that he equips his church with the gospel, empowers the church by the spirit, and charges the church with the great Commission (Matt 28:19) to disciple all nations.

Postmillennialism expects that eventually the vast majority of people living will be saved. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace and prosperity, will prevail in the affairs of men and nations. After an extensive era of such conditions, Jesus Christ will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously, to end history with the general resurrection and final judgement after which the eternal order follows.

Postmillennialism was dominant theological belief among American Protestants who promoted reform movements in the 1850s abolitionism. Their beliefs have become one of the keys tenets of a movement known as Christian Reconstruction.

This Christian right face of the United States wants restoration of certain biblical laws said to have continuing applicability. These include death penalty not only for murder, but also for propagators of all forms of idolatry, open homosexuals, adulterers, practitioners of witchcraft, and blasphemers.

According to the Amillennial belief, there will be no millennial reign of the righteous on earth. Adherents of this view interpret the thousand years symbolically to refer either to a temporary bliss of souls in heaven before the general resurrection, or to the infinite bliss to the righteous after the general resurrection.

It does not hold that Jesus Christ will physically reign on the earth for exactly 1000 years. They view this as a symbolic number. They hold that the Millennium has already begun and is identical with the current church age. According to them, Christ's reign during the millennium is spiritual in nature, and that at the end of the church age, Christ will return in final judgement and establish a permanent reign in the new heaven and the new earth.

Historically, since the time of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), Christians did not see earthly authorities opposing the world of God. On the contrary, Rome became an ally of the Church. Rise of papacy in Pope Gregory I (590-604) also laid the foundation for papacy to be the rightful ruler of Christendom.

This resistance free rise in the West led them to adopt Amillennial ideas and Catholicism embraced this view of end times and believed no intervention by the Christ was needed to achieve the Golden Age.

They also adapted the view that church has replaced the chosen people of Israel and their role in the end times. Protestant reformists also had similar views about Christian Europe. The only difference being that instead of church, reformers were the prophets heralding in the last days. They believed that the essential struggle

was Christ working through godly men on earth to destroy the devil and his agents, some of whom have infiltrated the Church.

Both Catholics and reformists embrace Postmillennial and Amillennial interpretations and reject pre-Millennialism as wicked, foolish and vanity of Jesus. Both saw church as the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth and believers were not to expect a future Golden Age. Hence, the role of people of Israel and their return to the Holy Land was not a precursor to the return of Jesus Christ. Post millennialists foresaw mass conversion of Jews prior to Christ's return.



In contrast to the Postmillennialist and Amillennialist authorities who believe that the world is moving towards the Golden Age, Premillennialist approach is that the world is getting worse, full of misery and bloodshed through wars.

The two world wars, Hitler and Stalin's horrors, the dark future destructiveness of nuclear weapons points to premillennial trials and tribulations and not peace and tranquil improvements expected by postmillennialists.

A key belief of some segments of pre millennialists is that the Church and Israel have two distinct roles in God's plan for end times. Christ would return to establish the final kingdom. But during tribulation, before the arrival of Christ, Israel would suffer temporal judgement by God and will prepare her for Messiah's return.

Hence, in the view of evangelicals and the

new breed of Christian Zionists, for the literal 1000 years reign of Christ on earth, they make a distinction between Israel and the Church. There is a role for Israel and the Jewish people, and that includes a return to the Holy Land. Palestinians and Arabs who oppose this divine scheme of things are agents of the anti-Christ.

During the past century, especially after the establishment of state of Israel (1948), there is a revival of premillennialism in several Protestant and Catholic denominations. In the US, dispensational premillennialism is popular among evangelicals and many fundamentalist churches.

Idealists believe prophecy in general and book of revelation in particular should not be interpreted literally. Non-literalists view Christianity's ultimate triumph on earth. These idealists are more comfortable with Postmillennial and Amillennial End Times beliefs. They want to avoid interpretation of drama and conflict mentioned in revelations.

This background of Christian End Times beliefs and their impact on worldviews have created a socio-political tussle between the followers Premillennialism and Postmillennialism in the Christian West in general and in United States of America in particular.

In the next part, attitudes of US political leadership towards this dichotomy and its impact on Middle East policies will come under review.

(To be continued)

Neoimperialism and International Institutions

The IMF, FATF, and the never-ending economic crises of Pakistan



By Areesha Manzoor

With the old masters bent on continuing their rule over the world in one guise or another, the ever evolving nature of international system due to globalization and institutionalization brings changes in old expansionist methods as well. Karl Marx identifies historical materialism as a driving factor behind all the societal or political development in the world. His lens of Marxism rightly explains contemporary world, where neoimperialism is in vogue globally.

History is evident of chronic aftermaths of colonialism in the form of exploitation of natural resources, domestic political unrest, the North-South division, a permanent intellectual colonization, and many more.

To quoting Mark Twain, "History does not repeat itself, but it often rhyme itself".

Wave of decolonization leads to another way of rhyming history in the form of imperialism. Globalization is attributed for creating a new style of interaction among states, whose fates are connected to each other due to complex economic interdependence. A shift from hard power (expansion-

ism) to soft power started dominating international politics since 20th century, but it has reached its zenith in the contemporary era.

Historically, economic motives of elite class and states of the world have been met by colonization. Now they are controlling other states indirectly. Neoimperialism is a way of influencing other states' political, social, economic, and even cultural lives by ruling their economy without physical annexation.

Seen in this light, neoimperialism is nothing but continuation of historical material exploitation in another way. Capitalist states look towards Third World states for cheap labour and raw materials but hold the monopoly of production, circulation, and finance (capital) in their own hands.

According to world system theory, core states exploit resources and manpower of peripheral states and rob them of their economic potentials. It has consequence in the North-South division of the world, augmenting inequalities between capitalists and Third World states.

This economic expansionism is presented in camouflage of liberal or free trade system that is intended for universal benefits of human. However, the reality is quite the opposite, as evident in worldwide inequality and injustice.

Elite States have tighten their grip of the whole world by establishing international institutions, which are not only being funded by great powers but also used for pursuing their national interests in general economic interests in particular.

International institutions have been created to prevent the world from another war of global extent, bringing in peace and promoting universal human rights. Yet, behind this facile image, lie underlying ambitions, hidden motives, and indirect but visible and wide-ranging political effects of these institutions.

United Nations is a universal institution which has six different bodies. Their original member states are mostly capitalist states which are responsible for major funding and also enjoy the right of Veto in any decision of UN. Other than six bodies,

UN also has some specialized agencies which perform specialized tasks regarding economy, culture, food, health, etc. Like the UN, these agencies are also supported and controlled by great powers.

The lack of hierarchal structure in the world creates room for major powers to subjugate weaker states. Establishing international institutions is one such tactic of ruling the world, according to Neo-Marxist ideology.

Great power politics rests upon a geoeconomics approach in the modern-day world. Institutions are used to drag and exploit weaker states in great power rivalry. The International Monetary Fund is a specialized agency of the UN tracing its roots back to the Breton Wood System of 1945.

The IMF gets its funding mostly from its founding members and aims at promoting monetary cooperation and trade, balancing between imports and exports of the states, and providing funding to economically struggling States. It provides four type of funds: Stand by agreement, supplementary financial stability, extended fund facilities, and buffer stock facility.

IMF has been providing these different kinds of funds to almost all Third World states for uplifting their stagnant economies. However it proved to be making them fall in the trap of continuous exploitation.

Pakistan being a Third World state, encircled by a number of crises has had a struggling economy since its inception. For a newly decolonized state, with immature and raw political system, no constitution,

lack of apt and masterful people to govern the state, eminent survival threat from neighbouring state, influx of refugees, handling of ethnic diversity and economic crises, were no less than a nightmare.

Pakistan started its journey to IMF just 11 years after its birth in 1958. IMF was one of the most relied upon option for Pakistan from initial years up to now. Economic crises of Pakistan and continuous dependence on IMF has significantly weakened Pakistan's sovereignty to the extent that currently, IMF is guiding overall national policy of Pakistan including both foreign and domestic policies.

The IMF together with FATF (Financial Action Task Force) is keeping strict observation of Pakistan's policies, ostensibly to help the country out of current economic condition. However, this is definitely posing a serious threat for sovereignty of the country.

Domestic policies of IMF regarding high energy and fuel prices, increasing indirect tax collection, cutting subsidies and even interfering in State Bank of Pakistan, shows how economic dependence has led to political interference in the country.

But IMF does not stop there. It also shows its concerns regarding China Pakistan Economic Corridor, being sceptical of China's strategic motives behind this incredible project. IMF being majorly funded by capitalist Western states tries to undermine Pakistan's economic relationship with the Chinese bloc.

Moreover, FATF and IMF also pressurize Pakistan to take measures against Taliban, once they were not in power. Thus, Pakistan's national policy is highly influenced by IMF and other international economic bodies.

There are serious consequences of grave concern for national economy and international standing of Pakistan. Firstly, devaluation of the Pakistani currency against the dollar is ever increasing. Secondly, inflation within the country has reached to highest level of history.

Thirdly, domestic unrest due to unemployment and energy crises is becoming a serious challenge. Lastly, Pakistan is losing its international stature due to economic dependence.

In a nutshell, capitalist states has shifted their colonial approach to neoimperialism. These states being "masters of mankind", raise slogan of universal liberty and freedom. In contrast, these states exploit peripheral states resources and manpower for their own growth and in return weaker states economies are torn to shreds.

Further, these core states use international institutions like IMF to drag the Third World states like Pakistan into a quagmire of loans and aid, which never lets them survive with dignity and sovereignty. In other words, international institutions are the tools in the hands of neoimperial powers.

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On Treason and Patriotism

Why does the ousted prime minister accuse everyone except his supporters of treason?



By Arsim Tariq

“During part of her childhood, Elizabeth was illegitimate. In 1534, Parliament ruled that it was treason to believe her illegitimate. In 1536, it was treason to believe her legitimate. Signals were changed again in 1543, and again in 1553. After that, you could believe anything.”

– Will Cuppy

Like identity, the idea of patriotism and treason is fluid, not static. It depends on the norms, values, and laws of the society. It is not inherently natural. In fact, it is naturalized in society through discursive processes by the ruling elite.

Similar to Will Cuppy’s example of Queen Elizabeth, in the 19th century, it was not treason to subscribe to the communist school of thought in the US. For instance, over 5000 people marched through Chicago in a political demonstration called the “communist picnic.”

But as the seeds of the Cold War started to grow, any person with any sort of affiliation with communism was considered a traitor. As soon as the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union collapsed, it was again normal to subscribe to communism or socialism. One such example is Senator Bernie Sanders who has continuously advocated for socialist politics in the US.

The idea of treason and patriotism is interlinked with David Campbell’s idea of danger and logic of interpretation. By the logic of interpretation, he means that the way a state interprets danger to its sovereignty shapes its identity, and whatever exists outside that definition of identity is unpatriotic.

In this interpretation of danger, a threat emerges from certain context-bound judgments made by decision-makers or policy analysts where a historical mode of representation, which according to

Roxanne Lynn Doty adopts the imagination of the Self and the Other, is employed to define danger, and therefore, treason.

Similarly, for most of its existence, Pakistan has interpreted India as a danger to its sovereignty. That India is trying to undo Pakistan and will attack any minute has constructed India as the Other, making India central to the discourse of treason within Pakistan.

For this reason, the India card, much like the religious card, has been frequently evoked in the public and media by the ruling elite for political and strategic purposes. It has become rather easy to dismiss any criticism and dissent as an Indian or foreign conspiracy.

This is not to suggest that India does not pose a threat to Pakistan. It very much does, especially under Narendra Modi’s far-right politics that is swiftly gaining

ground in India. However, things become problematic when the India card is used as a political tool for personal vested interests, to dismiss dissent from the peripheries against the ruling elite, or to silence the opposition.

This political tool is successful because whoever stands in the opposition to the ruling elite fears the allegations of unpatriotism. To take the example of the 'best' democracy in the world, the Democrats and public media did not criticize or question the Bush administration for carrying out an illegal invasion of Iraq.

Despite enough evidence against it, the Democrats in Congress refrained from a critical debate on the issue. Democrats have been united in their opposition to the Bush administration on the majority of topics. But, according to some critics, the Iraq War was unique, and Democrats did not resist the Bush administration because many believed bombing Iraq was the best course of action.

However, for those Democrats who opposed, speaking up made no sense because the administration would succeed and there would be no electoral reward from opposing. As Jane Kellor Cramer argued that there is compelling evidence that the majority of Democrats and a signif-

icant number of Republicans submitted to the executive branch, not on the facts of the case, but to avoid appearing unpatriotic to no end.

Therefore, the labels of traitor and unpatriotic depend on the principles and logic of the ruling elite. Whatever exists outside that logic and threatens the authority of the elite is treason against the state.

Similarly, ever since Pakistan's inception, practically every opposition leader, more than five former heads of state, human rights activists, journalists, poets, and even academics have faced allegations of treason including Mohtarama Fatima Jinnah when General Ayub Khan labeled her as Pakistan's enemy in his election campaign.

A 1964 pamphlet reads, "In reality, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his companions are working with Mohtarama Fatima Jinnah for Pakhtunistan ... Pakistan is surrounded by enemies."

Characterizing opponents as enemies of the state is among the central political principles of the ruling logic. Be it the US or India or anywhere else in the world, dissent against the ruling elite is considered treachery and unpatriotic.

In recent years, the socio-political environment in Pakistan for a critical debate has

deteriorated. Many academics, journalists, activists, and students faced sedition charges against them for speaking against the authoritarian policies of the state and for merely asking for their right to assembly.

It is worse for the people at the peripheries. Their dissent against the social, economic, and political marginalization is considered anti-state and they are often linked to a foreign conspiracy to quickly dismiss the discourse against the ruling elite.

The current debate on the 'letter' threatening regime change in Pakistan by the US has pushed the whole opposition under one umbrella: treason. Again, it is not to suggest that the US has had no role in the political life of Pakistan but to problematize the whole idea of treason and patriotism and how its misuse can have multiple effects on the political and social fabric of Pakistan.

The US might have reasons for regime change in Pakistan given Imran Khan's anti-American views and inclination toward Russia in the Ukraine-Russia war. The task is to investigate the letter on every platform possible both to avoid falling into another populist stunt by Imran Khan to save his government against the opposition and to punish anyone found involved in wrongdoing to destabilise Pakistan.



Man vs Machine vs Man-Machine

Our civilization is fast devolving into a dystopia, but we can still change that

Desk Report

We have long known humanity is hurtling towards a future where machines do almost all the work. The drivers of that change – including automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence – have long been with us.

However, the Covid-19 global pandemic has somewhat hastened us on our way to that future – in the process exposing a dynamic of inequality endemic to our newly digital world.

Thanks to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, it has become plain to see how the mere mortals among us stand to lose jobs going forward, while the tech billionaires who own the machines and algorithms see their fortunes soar into the stratosphere. Can we use this glimpse into the future afforded us by the vagaries of a pandemic to take the dystopian edge off the future that is almost upon us?

A Noma Magazine article quotes a recent study by MIT's Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo as reporting that each new robot employed in industrial production between 1993 and 2007 eliminated 3.3 jobs on average. The study says automation was responsible for 50-70 percent of the decline in wages of workers performing routine tasks.

This confirms the finding of a study last year by the McKinsey Global Institute. It found that “since the 1990s, productivity in the OECD countries has grown by 25 percent while wages grew by only 11 percent, a reflection of the core dynamic of digital capitalism. In the same period, capital income of the richest grew to the point where the top 10 percent own 89 percent of all equity in the U.S., a digital economy reaping those productivity gains.”

Stunning as this rise in the fortunes of the richest may seem, it saw an acceleration during the pandemic. “As Oxfam reported in a study released in January, the top 10 billionaires — including the founders of Amazon, Alphabet/Google and Microsoft — doubled their collective wealth during the last two years of the pandemic from USD 700 billion to USD 1.5 trillion.”

In the article, Noma Magazine editor-in-chief Nathan Gardels quotes US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's remarks from this January's (virtual) Davos conclave as noting that the gains from “pandemic-induced telework” will “ultimately raise U.S. productivity” by 2.7 percent.

Whatever the underlying causes of this trend towards ever greater inequality, we need to find ways to check and reverse it, and we need to do it fast.

According to Mr Gardels, any effective policy response to the endemic inequality of the digital economy would focus on “pre-distribution” — enhancing the skills and assets of the less well-off in the first place — instead of only redistributing the income of others with greater opportunity in the hopes of approximating a fair society.

But, she added, “technological advancement that boosts productivity growth may exacerbate, rather than mitigate, inequality.” It has mostly benefitted “upper-income” professionals, not to speak of huge profits flowing to the tech giants who own the platforms, while leaving the less educated and less skilled behind.

“Pre-distribution” in terms of skills means expanding access and affordability to public higher education for those in the workforce who lack college degrees (about 60 percent in the American case) as well as bolstering the digital-era skills of the non-college bound, says Mr Gardels.

He quotes Yellen further, “The Biden administration aims to boost labour productivity in ways that will help to address the disparities in wage growth. The focus is on enhancing the skills of workers — and particularly those with low incomes — to be able to take advantage of new technologies. To do this, we are proposing wide-ranging investments in human capital — from early childhood education to community college, apprenticeships and worker training.”

In terms of assets, says Mr Gardels, pre-distribution means fostering an ownership share for all in the wealth generated by those intelligent machines that are displacing gainful employment.

He adds: “In my 2019 book with Nicolas Berggruen, “Renovating Democracy: Governing in the Age of Globalization and Digital Capitalism,” we call this “universal basic capital.” The idea is not just to break up concentration of wealth at the top, but to build it up from the bottom.”

As James Manyika, who conducted the MGI study, argues, “It's crucial we have more people participating in the capital income pathway because, while labour income remains the most important for the majority of people, capital income is a bigger and bigger part of where the value is going.” Digital capitalism does not appear to ever be able to produce a fair share of the wealth across society through wages and salaries alone, if not supplemented by capital income.

In essence, the best way to fight inequality in the digital age is to spread the equity around, says Mr Gardels, who is also the co-founder of and a senior adviser to the Berggruen Institute, the publisher of the Magazine.

“There are many practical ways to do this, from employee stock ownership plans to universal participation in sovereign wealth funds that own shares in the digital economy and pay out the appreciating value in dividends to the average citizen or worker so they can accrue wealth in the same manner as those at the top.

“If the dynamic of growing inequality is endemic to the digital economy, it can only be addressed structurally in the very way capital is accumulated in the first place, instead of trying to close the burgeoning gap after the fact of wealth creation.”

Benaud-Qadir Trophy Off to a Cracking Start

The Pakistan-Australia series was a great learning experience for both sides



By Ali Abdullah

The Aussies touring Pakistan was almost everything the Pakistani cricket fans had on their wish list. A top-ranked international squad visiting Pakistan for a Test, ODI, and T20 series was great news. It was also a historic tour given that it was Australia's first to Pakistan after 24 long years.

Pakistan Cricket Board and Cricket Australia mutually decided to not just name the historic test series as Benaud-Qadir trophy but all upcoming bilateral test series between the two countries will be played under the same name. Richie Benaud and Abdul Qadir were both leg spin maestros.

The series itself consisted of three test matches, the first played in Rawalpindi, the second in Karachi, and the third in Lahore. Analyzing how the first test went would be easier since it was a draw. Many factors contributed to it.

First and foremost, Rawalpindi is considered to be Pakistan's fastest track. However, pitch curators of the PCB attempted to change the pitch's behavior, which led to a pitch that was extremely flat and offered nothing to the bowlers. No result seemed possible and that was the case at the very end as the first match of this historic series ended in a draw. Both sides raked up as many runs as they could but all in vain.

The 2nd test seemed promising as Australia piled up a massive total of 556 after which they declared and put the

Pakistani bowlers to test. The Karachi pitch was similar to the Pindi pitch unfortunately and offered not much assistance to the bowlers. However, to everyone's surprise, the Pakistani team was sent packing after scoring a paltry 148 runs and it seemed that all was lost.

Australia decided to bat again, increasing the margin of lead, after which they declared and set the target of 506 for the Pakistani batsmen to chase. 506 seemed a huge ask given Pakistan's first innings. However, cometh the hour, cometh the man. Abdullah Shafique and Babar Azam played a wonderful innings, defending and scoring with all their might. Sadly, both fell 4 runs short of a century and a double century respectively as the skipper departed for a mighty score of 196 while youngster Shafique was forced to go back scoring 96. Credit must be given to Muhammad Rizwan as well for finishing off in style and making sure Babar and Shafique's efforts do not go in vain. The match ended in yet another draw but this time it was a great effort.

The 3rd test at the popular Gaddafi stadium promised to be a thriller as both teams eyed glory to draw first blood and clinch the trophy. Australia was bowled out for 391 on this much better Lahore pitch which seemed to offer swing to the bowlers. Pakistan fell short of equaling Australia's lead by 100 odd runs, however, all was not lost. Pakistan bowled yet again and the Aussies played as much as they could, finally declaring at 227 and setting a target of 351.

On Day 4, it seemed as if Pakistan might chase the target, after all, having settled batsmen at 73 for no loss. But chaos ensued the next day as the Australian bowling attack sent the Pakistani team packing for 235. It was unexpected and a huge heartbreak for the Pakistani fans as Australia clinched the series.

The ODI series consisted of three matches to be played in Rawalpindi, which were all shifted to Lahore due to political tensions in Islamabad. Fans looked forward to Pakistan getting revenge for the Test series defeat.

The 1st match got off to a great start with Pakistan choosing to bowl first. Pakistan was very obviously missing Shaheen Shah Afridi in its bowling lineup. However, they bowled decently given the pitch conditions.

From the Australian side, Head scored a brilliant century and McDermott a much-needed 50. The target was set at 313. It proved too tall for the Pakistani batting lineup, which failed miserably.

Fakhar Zaman fell early. Imam and Babar

did their best to provide stability to their innings but as soon as Babar fell, the house of cards collapsed. Imam lost his wicket and soon it was game over for Pakistan. Australia ran over the tail-enders without breaking a sweat.

The 2nd match was pure redemption for Pakistan which now had Shaheen Shah Afridi in their bowling lineup. Shaheen is known for tearing into the top order. We all know how daunting it is to face a 6'6" lanky fella from Landi Kotal angling in the new ball. The target was set at 348. Pakistan got off to a brilliant start with Fakhar's massive shots. Imam and Babar scored centuries, leaving the job of concluding the innings to Khushdil and Iftikhar.

The 3rd and final ODI was of major importance as it was the series decider. Pakistan did not disappoint. Shaheen bowled a full toss that swung at the last minute and uprooted the off stump of Head who was amazed. Rauf bowled one right on the pads of Finch. Australia was at zero for the loss of 2. Sean Abbott provided the much-needed runs along with other Aussie middle-or-

der batsmen. Australia was bowled out for 210 thanks to the pace trio of Shaheen, Rauf, and Wasim Jr.

Fakhar fell cheaply but Babar and Imam ran the show and took Pakistan across the line, winning the series and much-needed points.

In the one-off T20 match, Pakistan was put to bat first. Babar played well along with Rizwan who then fell to Green. Zaman ended up losing his wicket to Green as well. The rest of the Pakistani batting lineup tumbled like dominoes and the target was a paltry 163. Australia got off to a great start with Finch playing a match-winning innings. Everything seemed lost until Wasim Jr. and especially Shaheen Shah bowled absolute gems at death but the score was simply not enough. The Kangaroos managed to clinch the win comfortably.

This concluded the historic series. Pakistan gained a lot in the end. Pakistani cricketers and selectors have a lot to learn from this series and improve upon.



‘Be Working On Some More Songs’

Faisal Kapadia on Strings, his solo flight, and a search for new horizons



By **Kaukab Jahan**

Strings need no introduction when it comes to Pakistani pop music. The generation who were in their teens and early 20s in the early 1990s must have in their memories that quartet of young college going boys. The deep and abstract lyrics and captivating voice of lead singer Faial Kapadia distinguished the band from others.

After an immense success, the band members split in order to pursue their studies. They reunited in 1999 with two major members Bilal Maqsood and Faisal Kapadia.

As the band again announced their closure last year, both the members opting for their solo careers, we all have witnessed a very different and fresh rendering from Faisal Kapadia in Coke Studio Season 14.

Phir Milenge featuring Kapadia with Young Stunners is the first number from the singer's solo career. Just after the release of the song Faisal could also be heard and seen singing with Hadiqa Kiani and Shehzad Roy in the official song for State Bank Of Pakistan ‘Tum Juray Ho Tou Barha Hai Pakistan’.

The Truth International (TTI) talked to this talented and veteran musician about his solo career, Strings days and the overall music scene of Pakistan.

TTI: What was the concept behind Phir Milenge?

FK: It is the first song of my solo career. So PM was a kind of new thing for me which ended up as a great experience. The idea that we conceptualise under the supervision of Xulfi that to have a collaboration between myself and Young Stunners was closely executed. The song is getting good feedback. It is the beginning of my new journey and I am pretty excited about it.

TTI: How was the experience of working with Young Stunners?

FK: It was great. In fact I was fortunate enough to work with them because their music is very current. I believe that music is all about learning like what is happening around you, what is new, and what is relevant. So working with the talent like ‘Young Stunners’ was really an interesting experience and something new which I had not done in my 30 years of career.

TTI: So as Faisal Kapadia, should we expect something very new from you?

FK: My thoughts are not limited. I am always open to experimenting with new ideas. It is true that now I am attracted to things I have never done in the last 30 years. So yes I want to work on concepts which are more challenging and get me out of my comfort zone.

TTI: Strings was disbanded twice (first in 1992 and then in 2021) but reunited once. Now is there any chance of its reunion again after the second break up?

FK: This is a question which we both can't answer I guess. When we disbanded Strings in 1992, we had no idea that we would reunite again, but eventually did in 1999. This time we have taken the decision to conclude the band cautiously as we both required going on our own journeys. Right now we can't say ‘Phir Milenge’. Laughs!

TTI: In 1992, Strings got a massive fame and fan following especially after ‘Ser Kiye Yeh Pahaar’. So how was it difficult to dissolve it especially in that young age, when these things attract one the most?

FK: Honestly, it was a very difficult decision. But luckily Bilal and I both had that courage to decide which thing could be done at what time. Like in 1992, when the band was at its peak, we decided to disband it. The reason was to complete our studies which were very important for both of us.

TTI: So, what was the reason to disband Strings in 2021?

FK: Now as we both reached our 50s last year, we are in a zone that feels as gifted as a band. So we thought it was a time to say goodbye to Strings and leave it for our fans at a level from where they could make the same connection which they always had with it. We didn't want to take it to the mode where we were just doing things to survive. At present, it is all about to start our own journey, a journey where it doesn't matter whether it carries more music, less music or something else. It is all about self-exploration now.

TTI: When Strings reunited in 2000, it was hailed as the force behind the revival of music in the new millennium, and it is still credited with taking Pakistani music to international platforms. Do you agree?

FK: Actually there were two revivals of pop music in Pakistan. First was in the 1990s where too many bands and musicians emerged on the scene. The major acts of that decade were Vital Signs, Junoon, Strings and Awaaz. Then in 2000, a new wave arrived that introduced Noori, Fusion, Aaroh, EP and the reunited Strings.

I feel, in the second decade of 21st century (2010 to 2020) not much original music was produced. But now in the current decade, we are again in a phase that includes talents like Hasan Rahim, Young Stunners, Abdullah Siddiqui and Shamooin Ismail. They all are here with new enthusiasm. So, I think this is the time when our music is being redefined and rewritten.

TTI: You worked on international level. Soundtracks in Bollywood films and inclusion of 'Najane Kyun' in the soundtrack of the Hollywood blockbuster Spider-Man 2. How was that feeling?

FK: What can be more satisfying and exhilarating than that when you represent your country on an international level? Whether it is to sing for Hollywood or represent Pakistan in the forums like UNICEF. It is true that our fans know us as Strings in our country but when you go outside where people don't know you too much they say, 'oh this is a band from Pakistan'. It is really a proud moment for you and I thank God we experienced that.

TTI: Why did it take so long to release 30 (2019) after Koi Aane Wala Hai (2008)?

FK: The political and overall situation in the region completely changed in Pakistan after 2008. A new government came in. There were also a lot of security concerns, which is why a ban was imposed on large gatherings and crowds. Because of all of this, we could not properly concentrate on our music.

That was the part of our career during which we were worried about what came happen next, especially for the future of our kids who were growing up at that time. So, we started working on singles like Ab Kuch Karna Pare Ga and Mien To Dekhon Ga.

That phase continued for 4 to 5 years and in 2014 we were picked

up as the producers of Coke Studio. In those years we remained disconnected as Strings and just did Coke Studio. After leaving CS, we started working on our new album 30. Yes, it took 10 years to release a new album but we were continuously doing music in that gap.

TTI: You did 4 seasons of Coke Studio. What was the experience regarding the innovation in music

FK: That was a phenomenal experience with so many amazing artists, whether it was Abida Parveen, Rahat Fateh Ali Khan Saheb, Ustad Rais Khan Saheb, or much younger talent. A dream project for us and thank God was appreciated by fans and people all around. We had a great time which we would always remember with joy and thrill.



TTI: What do you think makes Strings distinguished? Is it its signature tune or the abstract lyrics?

FK: I think both. Besides our signature tune, which comes naturally to any musician, our songs, most of them written by Anwer Maqsood are also an important component of our music. Both of them are essential at the same time as if you separate any one of the other, you lose the essence of the whole thing.

TTI: Many musicians are doing music for films. Do you have any plans for it?

FK: At this stage of my career, my approach is to not plan anything in advance. If producers consider my voice suitable for a particular song in a film and at the same time I also think I can do justice to this song then I would definitely do that. It is not like I must have a 'to do' list just for the sake of doing them. Yes, if I get something interesting, I would go for it but at my own pace, slowly and gradually.

TTI: So what is next for your fans?

FK: Hopefully after Ramzan, I will be working on some more songs. This new journey has just started, which I hope will continue for quite some time.

The Woman Who Brought Pakistan the First Grammy

Arooj Aftab's music fuses ancient Sufi traditions with folk, jazz, and minimalism of her present home New York

By Pavan Manzoor



The Grammy nominations for 2022 were announced on November 23, and one of the biggest surprises was a nomination for Best New Artist. Arooj Aftab, a Saudi Arabia/Pakistan-raised composer, producer, and vocalist, was nominated with accomplished musicians including Olivia Rodrigo, FINNEAS, the Kid LAROI, and Saweetie.

Arooj Aftab, a Pakistani singer, has won her first Grammy for her song *Mohabbat*, which was nominated for Best Global Performance. “I am beyond thrilled,” the artist told journalists backstage at the pre-gala ceremony, at which the vast majority of awards are handed out. “It feels great.”

“I’ve been very nervous all day. And we’re off to a good start.”

Aftab was born in Saudi Arabia to Pakistani parents and spent her teenage years in Lahore before moving to Boston to study music production and engineering at the famed Berklee School of Music. Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Ustad Zakir Hussain, and American jazz diva Billie Holiday, among others, inspired Aftab to learn how to play the guitar.

She also enrolled in an online music class. While living in Pakistan, Aftab gained fame for her YouTube covers of Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” and Pakistani

vocalist Amir Zaki’s “Mera Pyar.” Many Pakistani musicians followed her, realising that they didn’t need production labels if they could make music and post it online.

The Brooklyn-based vocalist has played at the Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art, as well as opening for Mitski at The Brooklyn Steel in 2018. The 37-year-old has been steadily gaining global attention for her work that fuses ancient Sufi traditions with folk, jazz, and minimalism in New York, where she has lived for the past 15 years.

A “neo Sufi” version of Hoshiyarpuri’s ghazal, ‘*Mohabbat karnewale kam na honge, Teri mehfil mein lekin hum na honge*,’ won the 37-year-old Pakistani singer the award for Best Global Music Performance, a category added by the Recording Academy for the first time this year.

The Academy posted on its official Instagram page that Aftab is the “first ever female Pakistani Grammy winner.”

Other nominations in the category included ‘Do yourself’ by Beninese singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo and Nigerian singer Burna Boy, ‘Pa Pa Pa’ by Nigerian musician Femi Kuti, ‘Essense’ by Nigerians Wizkid and Tems, and ‘Blewu’ by Kidjo and cello legend Yo-Yo Ma beat Aftab’s version of ‘*Mohabbat*,’ which is the lead track on her album ‘*Vulture Prince*’.

In her award speech, Aftab stated, “This category (Best Global Music Performance) should be called ‘yacht party.’” Aftab was also nominated in the Best New Artist category, which was won by Olivia Rodrigo, a 19-year-old who had a breakthrough in 2021 with songs like ‘Driver’s Licence,’ the first single from her debut studio album, ‘*Sour*.’

Aftab worked on film scoring and editing as she continued to make her own songs. In 2013, she composed the score for Cary McClelland’s film ‘*Without Shepherds*,’ which tells the story of six brave

Pakistanis in the aftermath of Benazir Bhutto’s killing.

Aftab also composed the score for director Karishma Dev Dube’s ‘*Bittu*’ (2020), which was nominated for the 93rd Academy Awards for Best Live Action Short Film. Aftab previously worked for MTV and Vice in New York, where she supervised the music and video departments. Aftab became attracted by Begum Akhtar’s thumris while working there. She was eventually introduced to Sufi poetry and music by the thumris.

In 2014, Aftab released her debut album, ‘*Bird under Water*,’ on her own independent label. She sang her interpretations of ‘*Man kunto maula*’ by Sufi polymath Amir Khusrau, ‘*Ka karu sajni*’ by Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, and Begum Akhtar’s thumri ‘*Na ja balam*’.

She went on to act as a playback singer, singing “*Insaaf*” in Meghna Gulzar’s “*Talvar*” (2015) and “*Ras ke bhare tore nain*” in the Pakistani film “*Dobara Phir Se*” (2016).

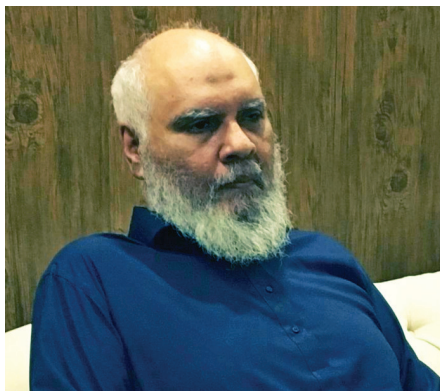
‘*Siren Islands*,’ her second album, included spiralling soundscapes mixed with her deep vocals. This was a lovely CD, in contrast to some of her previous work.

When Aftab’s brother Maher Aftab died, she was writing music for *Vulture Prince* in Brooklyn. Annie Ali Khan, a friend, model, and writer, died around the same time. “Thank you for helping me write the album that broke me and put me back together,” she said during her acceptance speech at the Grammys Premiere ceremony, which was held hours before the main event.

The poetry became elegiac, and one of Annie’s poems, ‘*Saanslo*,’ had been included, as well as Mirza Ghalib’s ‘*Diya hai dil agar usko*,’ the last song Aftab and her brother shared. Aftab’s voice is accompanied by ripples of harp, delicacy of violin, deeper colours from a flugelhorn, and a double bass on the seven-track album — six Urdu songs and one English song.

Imran Fazalled!

By M A Niazi



Back in 1982, during the Pakistan tour of England, which was the first time Imran Khan captained his country, might remember that England won the First Test, even though Imran had taken seven wickets in one innings, and nine in the match. He had scored 50s in both innings, but that loss should have told him that he couldn't win alone.

Any of the dwindling band who remember that series, almost 40 years ago, will remember that Pakistan lost 2-1, though that sole win was celebrated as historic, being the first by Pakistan in England since that dream win in 1954, at the Oval. That win had been because Fazal Mehmood took 12 wickets, because of which he was always known as the Oval Hero. A newspaper headlined the report as simply 'England Fazalled!'. An eerie coincidence that Imran was unseated by an opposition alliance led by Maulana Fazal Rehman?

That win, in the Lord's Test, was made possible by a double hundred by Mohsin Khan, which let Pakistan make 428 for 8, which let Imran enforce the follow-on. At that time it was normal, though now it seems to have fallen out of fashion. You don't want to be chasing even a small target on a wearing last-day pitch. Which is what Pakistan ended up doing, having to chase 75 with time running out. Well, it was done by the openers, who made the task appear easier than it was. Miandad had opened in place of Mudassar Nazar, who had covered himself with glory, not with the bat (he had scored 20 in the first innings), but the ball (he had taken 6-32 in the England second innings).

Well, Imran couldn't find either a Mohsin or a Mudassar this time. National Assem-

bly Speaker Asad Qaiser couldn't save Imran by his resignation. I was reminded of what Mufti Mahmood. Once said about Pakistan: "At least we weren't involved in the sin of making Pakistan." The Mufti was a true Deobandi, being a graduate of the Darul Uloom there. He had been part, along with other Deobandi ulema, of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, which backed the Congress and opposed the partition of India.

It is not all that well known, but the Mufti began his career in Isakhel, Mianwali district. One of the leading political figures there was Maulana Abdus Sattar Niazi, who was an MLA from there at Partition. It was later to be the constituency which sent Imran Khan to the National Assembly. It was for the Mufti's son, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, to lead the PDM, and thus spearhead the movement that ejected Imran.

But Asad Qaisar could say, as the Mufti did about Pakistan, that he was not part of the sin of ousting Imran. To use a hoarier proverb, he had his cake and ate it too. He not only played no part in the no-confidence motion, he delayed as long as possible. And he resigned just in time to avoid the the Supreme Court finding him guilty of contempt. That means your political career is on hold for five years. Well, it seems he still has hopes.

Does anyone in Punjab still have hopes? Ch Pervez Elahi hoped to succeed Usman Buzdar, but couldn't manage to persuade

enough MPAs to vote for him. Ch Pervez is an iron man, because he is taking the fight against the Sharifs into the second generation. He tried to unseat ian NawazSharif as Punjab CM back in 1986, but failed. Now he's to face Hamza Shahbaz in the race for CM. Hamza had been his son Moonis's classmate at the American School back in 1986.

One person who's probably not interested is Farah Khan, who came to prominence only recently, and is being accused of having taken money for every posting and transfer in Punjab, leaving Usman Buzdar powerless. So the famous foreign conspiracy was not meant just to get rid of Buzdar but to get rid of Farah Khan. Now what was her hold over Buzdar? Well, she was a friend of Mrs Imran. You can't say a word against her, because Imran wouldn't stand for it. Now the money Farah is said to have made may have gone to Mrs Imran. Is it too much to believe that she didn't proffer some to Imran? But then, how dare anyone believe that Imran was corrupt? He refused to have anything to do with corrupt people, didn't he?

And not just the corrupt, but traitors. We knew that the opposition was corrupt, but will the presence of an Indian diplomat be needed at a PDM meeting be needed to prove that there is a conspiracy against Imran? Let's see who is involved in the conspiracy: the Supreme Court, the Army, especially the intelligence agencies which failed to find any evidence, half the Parliament and the Sindh Agriculture Department. What did the Sindh Agriculture Department do? Well, why not?





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