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1st - 15th April 2022

No-Confidence Move
Reaching conclusion

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Prolonging war turned Ukraine into debris

IMF Programme
Pakistan still struggling to keep
programme on track



Miracle Awaited



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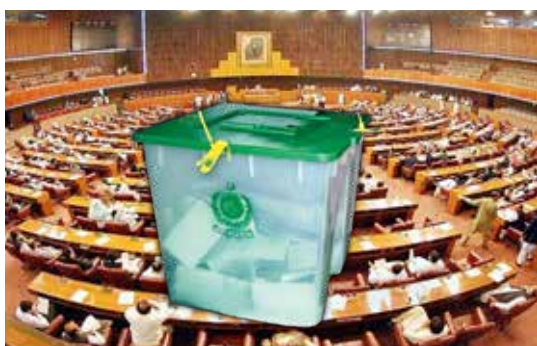


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Neutrality causes chaos?

By Hammad Ghaznavi



To put it mildly, the month of March was chaotic for Pakistani politics as till the last moment, with political alignments and realignments continuing, uncertainty reigned supreme. That's, more or less, how politics works when there is no apolitical manager supervising the process. It is easy to predict who will support whom under a hybrid system, with certain political parties always joining the side chosen for them by their string-pullers. With Balochistan Awami Party and PML-Q, two parties considered close to the powers-that-be, going in different directions last week, it seems the rules of game have changed.

Imran Khan, perhaps for the first time, appears to be managing his politics on his own. While on the one hand he is rigorously trying to restore the 'same page' by putting popular pressure on the Powerful, and on the other he is taking the guard again on the crease to start his innings afresh, without the help of the umpire.

In the last couple of weeks, he has been trying to build a new narrative for his future politics. The synopsis of the narrative goes like this: Imran Khan has offended the international establishment, the USA and EU, and these powers are conspiring to chuck him out of the office, supporting the no-confidence move and providing dollars for the cause to boot. His cardinal sins, according to Imran Khan, include him saying 'Absolutely Not' to the USA, visiting Russia, challenging EU's 'arrogant' letter and uniting the Ummah.

In a public rally, Mr Khan went a step ahead and waved a piece of paper to a sizable crowd, and said that this letter was a written proof of the threat he had received. He praised former PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for taking a similar honourable stance in national interest, and preferring the gallows over government.

This seems a populist stand, coined in a hurry, appealing to the masses' emotions, that does not stand the test of logic. There is no war going on in the region wherein Pakistan is supporting the wrong side, nor is Pakistan being recently accused of exporting terrorism; Imran Khan is not trying to form an organization of Islamic countries parallel to OIC, questioning the hegemony of KSA-USA; there is no Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project being vehemently pursued by Mr Khan; not a single meaningful agreement came out of IK's Russia visit; nothing of the sort.

On the contrary, there is a heap of evidence showing the IK government's vigorous efforts to win the west. For one, the CPEC was slowed down, halted in many cases, to please the USA. It was confirmed by the Chinese authorities. The details of the CPEC projects, in violation of the secrecy agreement, were shared with the west. Also, the IMF was given unprecedented influence over the State Bank of Pakistan. And so on. All these efforts were made by IK to woo the west to get the much needed financial support for a teetering economy. Hence, the new IK narrative sounds an effort to distract the voter from

the real issues, and the government's lackluster governance of over 3 and a half years. IK would be better off, many argue, if he builds a narrative based on something less incredible, like Ehsas programme and Health Card.

For Imran Khan, it is time to pause and ponder before he starts a new innings. For instance, the politics of Punjab must have taught him a lesson or two. He chose Usman Buzdar as his CM Punjab, a political nobody who had just joined PTI. He remained a nobody till his last day as CM, while Imran kept calling him the best CM in the history of the province – the Wasim Akram plus. Buzdar's appointment as CM in the first place is still a bigger news than his ouster. Punjab under Buzdar, many thought, was an unintelligent experiment, almost like running the biggest province of country without a chief minister. The crisis IK faced at the centre, and the fractures his party suffered, are directly related with the way Punjab was governed under Buzdar.

Meanwhile, the Punjab has been offered to Pervaz Elahi to seek the support of 4 PML-Q votes at the centre. In Punjab, PML-Q has 10 seats in a house of 371. It is power politics, with its own set of rules or absence thereof.

To conclude, it seems the political situation of the country will remain volatile till the next elections despite occasional intervals of deceptive calm. Shiekh Rashid has recently hinted at the possibility of an early general election. If all the stakeholders agree, not a bad idea!

No Confidence on Slow Burn

The motion has a good chance of success because it offers something to everyone



By Sarfraz Raja

It was 20 September 2020 when in an all-parties conference hosted by Pakistan People's party, ten opposition parties agreed on a 26-point agenda, with removal of Prime Minister Imran Khan from power as the top objective.

In fact, this was the point that brought all these parties of different thoughts together to form a coalition named Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). Initially, there were many differences of opinion but the overriding objective of the coalition was to remove Imran Khan from power.

Although it oscillated between its own hot and cold phases, the anti-government movement took off with a good power show at Gujranwala and maintained its tempo in many other cities. Major shows of power actually raised serious concerns in ruling party ranks.

March 2021 was perhaps the most tumultuous months of the tenure of Imran Khan (likely surpassed by March 2022). That month started with a big blow that jolted prime minister's office when Finance Minister Hafeez Sheikh, running for a Senate seat from Islamabad, suffered defeat at the hands of PDM candidate Yusuf Raza Gillani.

This was a moral no confidence over leader of house Imran Khan, who promptly went for a vote of confidence. But later PDM faced some hiccups big

blow was separation of PPP on issue of nomination of Yusuf Raza Gilani as opposition leader in senate without consultation of other opposition parties especially PMLN. Despite this rift, back channels remained active.

In the start of 2022, again heads of major opposition parties PMLN PPP and JUI agreed on bringing a no confidence motion against PM Imran Khan and on 8 March formally submitted a no-trust resolution.

A Gamble to play

The no confidence move was considered as a big gamble by opposition as its failure could have severe political consequences. The government was not expecting such a drastic move all of a sudden but opposition parties showed their ultimate confidence by submitting no trust resolution.

Days and weeks in the capital became like roller coaster and a suspense thriller where situation changed in every next scene. Government allies like PMLQ, MQM and BAP became important as government and opposition both start approaching them.

PM Imran Khan himself visited his allies for the first time since he took charge of the prime minister's office. Allies showed their tilt towards opposition and had frequent meetings not only with opposition but with each other.

Not only that but also dissident members of PTI increased worries and uncertainties among ruling ranks.

All that was not so simple but a result of hectic and intensive back door negotiations and there were something enough for everyone.

Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)

Nawaz Sharif's PML-N was the major stakeholder among all other political parties being second largest in center and Punjab and potential ruling party of future as well.

Initially Quaid of PMLN Nawaz Sharif and many of their top leaders did not agree to bringing in-house change in Islamabad or Lahore. They were of the view that Imran Khan government should be allowed to complete its terms so it does not become political martyrs and use it to their popularity gain in future.

But later PDM head Maulana Fazl ur Rehman and Asif Ali Zardari convinced PMLN leadership for an strong attempt of in house change. Being the largest party in center PMLN was offered premiership and obviously a major share in cabinet. The points on which they were convinced included the argument that being in government,



they could have unanimous election and institutional reforms for next elections to be fair and free.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

Already in power in Sindh with a comfortable majority, PPP believes it can enhance its representation in other parts of the country, where it has struggled for many years, with help of some seat adjustments.

Besides a major share in federal government, they also eye on president house as it was from beginning a part of plan to impeach President Arif Alvi after removing Prime Minister Imran Khan and his speaker and deputy speaker. Being second largest party in the coalition, they consider every right to ask for presidency.

serve their constituencies of Karachi and Hyderabad. As well, they would like to see a resolution of their issues and demands regarding local bodies where they are a major stakeholder.

Most of all, they expect to benefit in the upcoming elections to regain their strength and get their lost seats back with some seat adjustment with PPP in Karachi.

Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q)

Initially, it was thought the PMLQ would be a top beneficiary of this political crisis if they could secure the Chief Minister's office just 10 seats in Punjab assembly and 5 in center. However, in fact, the Chaudharys of Gujrat were focusing more on next tenure and for that they could get better incentive from PMLN who have strong footing in not only Punjab but a hefty vote bank in Gujrat too.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Dissidents

A dissident group in PTI emerged lead by Jahangir Khan Tareen in Punjab and center. Initially, they claimed to have support of six MNAs and more than two dozens of MPAs. Although PTI had some backdoor contact with these dissidents, insiders say that Jahangir Tareen group has some closer contacts with PMLN.

A former close aid of Imran Khan and a former secretary General of PTI, Jahangir Tareen is facing a lifelong disqualification by the apex court as of PMLN Quaid Nawaz Sharif on almost same grounds PMLN in some possible election reforms would go for amendment to abolish lifetime disqualification of Nawaz Sharif which would benefit JKT as well.

On the other hand, PTI would never go for any such amendment ever. So by joining hands with PMLN, Jahangir Tareen could get back his qualification of becoming an MNA.

A Joint Strategy

As there is a joint opposition, former government allies have also join hands for a joint stretchy. Major allies MQM, PMLQ and BAP have 17 seats together, which were actually decisive in turning PTI majority to a minority. So allies become allies with each other for a better bargain.

Delaying Tactics by Government

Opposition parties submitted their no confidence resolution and requisition for an assembly session on 8th March. As of constitutional requirement speaker has to call the session within 14 days to take up opposition agenda. But the session was not called within the required time which was before 22th March.

National Assembly met on 25 March but the session was adjourned after offering fateha for a deceased member without taking up the no confidence resolution. The government thus secured some additional time to try and win back its dissidents and allies while the opposition strongly criticized speaker for siding with the ruling party.



Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI)

Maulana Fazl ur Rehman has his eyes set on KPK and Baluchistan besides a share in federal government. In case of a successful no confidence in KPK province where opposition already has planned to go for in-house change as well with the help of dissident group of MPAs from ruling party. JUI would be candidate for CM ship and governorship of the province and a major share in Baluchistan with BNP.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)

MQM, a major PTI ally with seven National Assembly seats, could remain part of federal cabinet in the new set up, but it is keen on a share in the Sindh cabinet to

So by some seat adjustments they could gain some extra share in next set up. But giving them post of chief executive of the province with just 10 seats in provincial assembly against their 160 plus numbers was a difficult decision for PMLN.

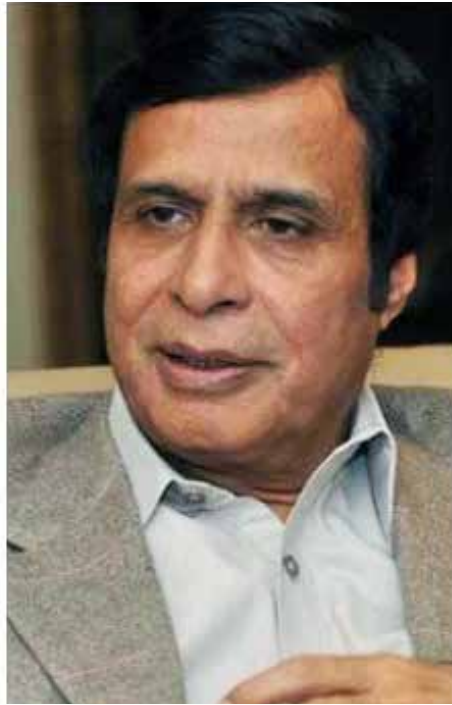
Balochistan Awami Party (BAP)

BAP, with five seats in the National Assembly, is allied with the PTI government in Baluchistan. But a clear divide emerged in BAP after removal of Jam Kamal from chief minister's office and a split determined in PTI after Yar Rind's statements against party. This led to BAP and PTI dissidents cosying up to the opposition PDM, weakening the ruling coalition.



The Chaudhrys Coup may not be a Coup

Can Chief Minister Pervez Elahi save Prime Minister Imran Khan is the question?



By Qasim Malik

The Chaudhrys of Gujrat played a masterstroke in the most crucial hours of country's politics as they emerged as last hope of Imran Khan to save his position in the office of the prime minister – soon after no-confidence motion against him was tabled in the National Assembly.

The prime minister came on record to accept Punjab Assembly Speaker and PML-Q Punjab president Chaudhry Parvez Elahi as Punjab chief minister replacing Usman Buzdar, whom he used to call his Wasim Akram-plus.

The PML-Q leaders Chaudhry Shujat Hussain, Chaudhry Parvez Elahi and Chaudhry Moonis Elahi had gone into deep consultations with all the stakeholders including government, opposition parties and ruling PTI's coalition partners in the country, when all major opposition parties had joined hands to oust the prime minister, who was getting tough against their leaders.

The prime minister, in the meantime, continued accusing his opponents as corrupt and even called names to bash them in his public speeches across the country. The PML-Q, in these crucial times, kept its

cool and continued advising the premier to stay cool and even asked him to avoid calling names as it was prohibited in Islam.

With the strength of five MNAs and 10 MPAs, the Chaudhrys continued asserting for their due share in the government pie since they continued supporting the PTI government in the centre and Punjab through thick and thin. They even complained that at times the PML-Q legislators met opposition-like treatment at the hands of ruling coalition partners.

The Chaudhrys assumed added importance when they started receiving almost every important player of the country's politics at their Lahore residence. The guests ranged from the prime minister to the government delegations, all opposition parties' heads and the ruling PTI's allied parties across the country.

The Chaudhrys had one simple demand from the government delegations and even the opposition leaders that Punjab Assembly Speaker Chaudhry Parvez Elahi be offered Punjab's chief ministership. Every stakeholder showed reluctance in the beginning but the Chaudhrys did not panic and believed that they would be able to strike a deal.

PPP's co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari had, however, continued pushing his partner PML-N president Shehbaz Sharif to accept Mr Elahi's demand and secure his support for PDM candidate for the position of prime minister.

The delay in accepting PML-Q's demand proved critical as Mr Elahi received the lucrative offer from the prime minister, who in return sought that he (Mr Elahi) should spearhead the campaign to convince his all coalition partners and disgruntled PTI parliamentarians.

While PTI leaders termed prime minister's move as his 'trump card', the political observers believe he took too long to make this move, leaving his new confidant little time to muster the required support.

The task of Mr Elahi, therefore, is to canvass the party's estranged leaders, disgruntled elements and the coalition partners annoyed over uncalled for treatment meted out to them during the past over three-and-a-half-year tenure of the incumbent government.

The CM-nominee put himself to work immediately and went to meet the MQM-P



leaders at the Parliament Lodges to placate them with fulfilling of their longstanding demands besides a lucrative offer of Ports and Shipping ministry.

Political observers believe that Mr Elahi could have helped smooth sailing of PM Khan through the no-confidence motion if he was taken into confidence sometimes earlier. The PTI camp believes that Chaudhry Parvez Elahi had the stature and skills to soothe more than required disgruntled MNAs to bring back in the fold of the ruling coalition.

Since one cannot step into the same river twice, the political situation for the prime minister has gone little tricky that the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) led by Khalid Magsi had announced parting ways with the PTI.

In a similar development, while Jamhoori Watan Party's Shahzain Bugti announced resignation from the federal cabinet and decided to support the opposition in the no-confidence motion.

Mr Elahi, it may be mentioned, had even in the absence of any commitment with him suggested the government ministers to reconcile allied parties BAP and MQM-P by meeting their demands in letter and spirit besides lucrative offers.

Mr Elahi now needs to put his own house in order as his party's secretary-general Tariq Bashir Cheema has announced a parting of ways with the party line of voting to support PM Khan in the National Assembly.

Though uncertainty is still prevailing in the centre over the success or failure of the no-confidence motion, Mr Elahi has ample time to strengthen his party's inroads in Punjab by not only pushing PML-N leader Sharif family against the wall but also weaken the PTI's hold and win a bigger piece of the pie in the next general elections. The fast track political activities will begin as soon as Parvez Elahi wins province's chief executive's election in Punjab Assembly.

Mr Elahi could have gone to shake hands with the PML-N leadership, if it had immediately offered him Punjab's chief minister-ship but the dispute in the Sharif family did not allow Shahbaz Sharif to go ahead and take the bold decision. The Sharif family could not muster up this courage even after persistent persuasion by PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari.

In Punjab, the opposition led by PML-N was exceedingly confident to dislodge the PTI government through its no-confidence motion that was submitted earlier on 28 March, the next morning after the prime

minister's 'historic' marathon address at the Parade Ground in Islamabad. The opposition was claiming to have the support of Jahangir Tareen group having 17 MPAs votes besides many a legislators approaching from the PML-N, who were 'pushed to join' PTI ahead of the 2018 general elections.

While the PML-N leadership was boasting having much more votes than the 186 magic number needed in Punjab Assembly to remove the chief minister, it came as a shock that the prime minister took resignation of CM Usman Buzdar and nominated Mr Elahi as PTI's candidate for the Punjab chief minister's slot.

The new situation has thrown a tough challenge to the PML-N in Punjab to deal with because Mr Elahi has strong relations with the legislators belonging to all parties and even those independents to vote for him for his chief minister election as he had demonstrated his popularity in his Punjab Assembly Speaker election back in 2018.

In Punjab Assembly, PTI has 183 MPAs on its side and PML-Q carries 10 votes. The opposition PML-N has 161 votes and the PPP has seven. The Rah-e-Haq Party has one vote and there are four independents as one independent Jugnu Mohsin has already joined the PML-N.





End of Line for Imran Khan?

The endgame of this political saga will be played neither in the courts of law nor in the streets but in the parliament



By Ahmad Waleed

From all appearances, the coalition government led by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is on its last legs as the final chapter of its political saga plays out in the federal capital. The government has many surprises to spring going by its rhetoric. Practically, however, it has failed to impress, with opposition lawmakers insisting its days are numbered.

All eyes are on the Supreme Court where the presidential reference is being heard by a five-member bench to decide if the dissidents can be disqualified for life. Many questions still need answers. But, the Constitution, experts believe, has laid down the procedure of no-confidence motion and the punishment for the dissidents and the Constitution cannot be violated.

"The law is very clear. Any dissident member of a party can vote on the no-confidence motion and the speaker will have to count it," Justice (r) Shaiq Usmani told a foreign news outlet. "The speaker has no authority to cancel or invalidate any vote in the National Assembly."

Can the presidential reference on the definition of floor crossing being heard by the Supreme Court, the 'huge' rallies to muster public support, and verbal threats to dissidents save the PTI government? Political experts say "after losing the support of its own lawmakers only a miracle can save the sinking boat of Imran Khan".

The no-confidence motion submitted by the opposition posed a clear danger to the just-shy-of-four-year rule of Prime Minister Imran Khan. The opposition's crushing move has made Imran Khan to go on a country-wide mass contact campaign.

His major focus so far has been on power shows to give a message to the dissidents or the power-that-be that he still commands street power. He is out to play all his cards including that of religion while keeping his trump card for the D-Day which is fast approaching despite the delaying tactics of the government. The inevitable is becoming inevitable. The Prime Minister is running out of options.

Holding forth in his public rallies on the human duty to stand with the righteous as "Allah has not allowed us to stay neutral", the Prime Minister has repeatedly said only "animals" are neutral, taking a swipe at the country's armed forces without naming them.

Most of the PTI leaders including the Prime Minister himself resorted to abusive language against the defectors of his own party instead of wooing them back with promises to resolve their grievances against the party and the Prime Minister.

Imran Khan has tried to put the blame on the foreign powers like the United States of America for dislodging his government for saying "absolutely not" to their demands. In his speech on 27 March, Khan claimed to have a letter as proof of foreign funding to topple his government.

The war of narratives is raging on the political landscape of the country. The opposition and the government both are holding marathon meetings with the allies



of the government – Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan Muslim League (Q) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). Both sides have held massive rallies to show public support and now the Parliament will be the next battlefield.

After reaching an agreement on certain basic issues, the both sides have been trying to get down to the nitty-gritty of key positions to be awarded to the PML-Q. The PML-N leaders were yet to announce that the PML-Q demand for slot of Punjab Chief Minister has been met while PPP claims to have reached an agreement with BAP and MQM for the interim setup.

However, the day the opposition submitted a no-confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar in the Punjab Assembly, the PTI gave one of the biggest surprises to the opposition by awarding Chief Minister's slot to Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and asking Punjab CM Usman Buzdar to submit his resignation. The opposition, nevertheless, has decided to bring their own candidate against Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi. Rana Sanaullah of PML-N told media that the opposition had agreed to give the same slot to Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi. "Now that Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi

has chosen to be the PTI candidate, we are not going to support him rather we will bring our own candidate against him," Rana Sanaullah said.

On the other hand, the PTI's own defectors have sprung up to add fuel to the no-confidence motion when they surfaced from Sindh House with piles of complaints against government policies that they say have endangered their political future.

It has been clear for the last two years the lawmakers on the government benches are not comfortable with the way the affairs of the state are being run. They have serious reservations on the Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar who, according to them, have failed to meet the expectations of the party members except Prime Minister Imran Khan, a staunch supporter of Usman Buzdar.

The Prime Minister has on more than a dozen occasions extended his all-out support to his Wasim Akram Plus (Usman Buzdar) ignoring calls from the party seniors that the biggest province of the country is slipping away from the party hands. Analysts believe Usman Buzdar is one of the major factors behind the annoy-

ance of the party's own lawmakers which led to the current situation.

"Despite polite reminders to the PM, our suggestions fell on deaf ears," one of the PTI's dissident leaders said.

Those who have openly announced to vote against the Prime Minister say there are many others who are afraid of revealing their names, but they have the similar grievances.

"Due to lack of proper consultation process in governance, rising inflation and unprecedented price-hike, failure in accountability, poor decision-making along with a host of other pressing issues we cannot face the voters of our respective constituencies," another remarked.

The PTI has done whatever they could to counter the opposition move on the public sphere by holding big public rallies. Now, the government has to prove their strength in the Parliament in the coming week.

It, however, seems the PTI leaders are resigned to their fate as they have knocked all relevant doors in the hope of getting help from the quarters that matter. But, there is no buyer this time around.





A Return to Dirty Politics

The opposition may outflank Imran Khan for now, but can it deliver on its fancy promises of relief for the masses?



By Naveed Miraj

The recent acts of our political leaders devoid of any democratic norms, decency and tolerance, clearly indicate that they have not learnt anything from their follies of the past. It will not be wrong to say that because of their conduct, democracy in our country is once again at crossroads. The price of these shenanigans will be paid by the masses in the form of economic instability.

Although moving a no confidence motion against the sitting Prime Minister or the provincial Chief Minister is in accordance with the Constitution, the methods adopted by the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) remind us the 90s.

The only difference is that at that time the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) used to resort to these dishonorable tactics of horse trading or buying and selling the loyalties of elected representatives to dislodge each other but today these two parties have come together to threaten the central and Punjab government of PTI.

Both the PPP and the PML (N) had made promises in the Charter of Democracy to respect the mandate of the public and bury this dirty politics of horse trading once and for all. For this purpose, they also inserted the defection clause in the Constitution to penalize the MPs who sell their votes.

Nonetheless, today they are luring the elected representatives of the ruling party either through money or the party ticket to oust PM Imran Khan. The pretexts they are offering such as that of inflation, economic woes and so on cannot be accepted under any circumstances as they too have no solution of the problems facing the country.

According to well-placed sources, both the PPP and the PML (N) have collectively secured the support of eighteen MNAs of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Notorious for Faustian bargaining and wheeling dealing, PPP Co Chairman Asif Ali Zardari has secured resignations in writing from these MNAs so that these could be submitted to the Speaker in case the verdict of Supreme Court on the

Presidential Reference, seeking interpretation and scope of Article 63-A of the constitution, goes against the turncoats.

On their part, Khan's coalition partners are trying to make the most of the current political situation. The Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) wants the seat of Punjab Chief Minister for Pervez Elahi whilst MQM-Pakistan and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) have their own demands.

But they all have agreed to collectively throw their weight either the government or the opposition. This is regardless of the fact that the PML-Q contested the last general elections after seat adjustments with the PTI in certain constituencies.

Political pundits are of view the PTI could have easily won from those seats if it had not entered into electoral alliance with the PML-Q. Then most importantly, the PML-Q has secured maximum funds from Punjab government for development in constituencies where its MPs were elected.



But as political analysts say, politics is the game of chess and everybody is trying to extract maximum benefit from the current situation.

In Punjab also, the situation has become uncertain following the no confidence motion against Chief Minister Usman Buzdar. According to political analysts, the role of Jahangir Tareen and Aleem Khan Groups will assume great importance in the current scenario.

According to some sources, both the PML-N and the PPP are trying to buy the loyalties of PTI members in Punjab Assembly to oust Buzdar and install their man on one of the most sought after seats.

It is really now the game of numbers and both the ruling and the opposition parties are engaged in hectic maneuvering to outsmart each other. If the opposition

parties win this game through horse trading, this will have far reaching and serious consequences for the future of the country.

This will haunt both the PML-N and the PPP and the resultant political instability will not be in the interest of the country, one political analysts said, warning this would only further erode the trust of people in elected representatives.

There is a common perception that if the opposition succeeds in ousting the Prime Minister by this way, it will ultimately benefit Imran Khan, something very much clear from the recent public rallies including that of Islamabad organized by the PTI.

For the time being, the Prime Minister has not disclosed the names behind the international conspiracy against him but if he is

ousted, then in the days ahead, he will continue to reveal the name of every character. This will appeal to the masses and Imran Khan will ride a wave of popularity.

The situation will become more favorable for him if the government of all these parties fails to deliver on the promises of providing relief to the masses in the form of reduction in the prices of petroleum products and other commodities.

Considering there is hardly a way to reduce petroleum and electricity prices when the prices of crude oil at the international market are still at record levels and given the global scenario, especially Russia-Ukraine conflict, the opposition coalition's task of providing relief to the masses will remain impossible in the near future.





Vote of No Confidence in Pakistan

A look at the concept and history of the constitutional process unleashed to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan



By Wajih Safarish Khan

Unlike in the Greek city-states where the idea originated, present-day democracies are republican in nature with people electing their representatives to run the affairs of the state. In a parliamentary democracy like ours, people elect their representatives to the parliament, who subsequently elect the head of government whether known as Prime Minister or any other name. The Prime Minister forms his cabinet to run the affairs of the state.

The Prime Minister and his cabinet are answerable to the parliament for their work. They remain in office until they have the support of the majority of the members of parliament and cease to hold office as soon as they lose their majority in the parliament. The vote of confidence and no confidence are the tools devised to gauge whether a government has majority in the parliament or not.

In almost all parliamentary democracies – including the UK, India, and others – the Prime Minister has a balancing power over the parliament. Whereas the parliament has power to withdraw its confidence from the prime minister and oust his government, the prime minister has power to dissolve the parliament.

Once the parliament passes a vote of no confidence against him, the Prime Minister has the option either to leave the office and let some other member to prove majority in the house to form government or to dissolve the parliament to let the ultimate sovereign, the people to decide. Our constitution of 1973 does not give the prime minister the latter option.

Though the prime minister can at any time ask the president to dissolve the National Assembly and call fresh elections and the president is bound by his advice, no such power is available to a prime minister against whom a notice of vote of confidence has been moved or against whom such a vote has been passed.

Thus unlike his counterparts across the world our Prime Minister has no counter-weighting power against the parliament.

Under Article 95 of the Constitution, twenty percent members of National Assembly at any time, except when National Assembly is considering budget, can move a vote of no confidence motion against the prime minister.

Any such motion can be put to vote within

three to seven days after being moved. If the motion passes by a majority of the total membership of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister ceases to hold office and his cabinet stands dissolved.

In the original constitution as was passed in 1973, the movers of the motion for vote of no confidence had to give name of the succeeding Prime Minister in the motion and no such motion was allowed until six months after the failure of such a motion. However, both these conditions were dropped by General Zia ul Haq while restoring the constitution in 1985.

Although the Parliament through 18th Amendment of the Constitution adopted in 2010, removed most of the changes made in the constitution by general Zia ul Haq and General Musharraf during their lead military rules, these changes were not touched.

Thus in case of passage of a vote of no confidence against a Prime Minister, the Prime Minister and his cabinet cease to hold office and a new process is under taken to get a new Prime Minister elected from the house.



In case no person is able to secure the support of the majority of the National Assembly in such a process, article 58 of the constitution allows the President to dissolve the National Assembly in his discretion and call fresh elections.

Imran Khan is the 26th person to hold office of Prime Minister in Pakistan and none of his predecessors completed the five years term of the office. Only one prime minister has been ousted through a vote of no confidence before now although two others have faced it during their tenures.

The first Pakistani prime minister to face a vote of no confidence was Ibarhim Ismael Chundrigar, who headed a weak and fractured coalition divided over many issues. The differences got very serious on the issue of joint or separate electorates and a vote of no confidence was moved against him, which was passed, and he was removed on his 55th day in office.

Thirty-two years later, Benazir Bhutto became the second Pakistani prime minister to face a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly. A brief background of the forces arrayed against one another in the vote is pertinent.

Pakistan People's Party and its leadership faced all sorts of persecution since the ouster of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in July 1977. Mr Bhutto was hanged, his party outlawed, his wife and daughter Benazir Bhutto put behind bars and later sent in exile,

thousands of their supporters hanged or jailed or subjected to the medieval punishment of lashing for supporting the party.

Zia ul Haq ordered party-less polls under stringent conditions in 1985 which were boycotted by all democratic forces in the country. The objective was to share power with the elected representatives of the people and not transfer power to take the military back to barracks. However even such sharing of power did not work and Zia ul Haq ousted his handpicked prime minister in May 1988 and dissolved the assembly.

In a stark violation of the Constitution, which he had heavily amended at will, he did not call fresh elections until he, along with 28 other members of his junta, died in a plane crash in August 1988.

The successors of General Zia were forced to hold elections that too on party basis in which PPP emerged as largest party in the National Assembly but short of clear majority and needed support from other parties to form government. However her problem continued with powerful establishment led by an empowered President who had likeminded governments in Punjab and Balochistan.

Against this background, a vote of no confidence was moved against Benazir Bhutto in October 1989. Before the submission of notice of no confidence, the main coalition partners in her government-MQM, switched sides and joined the opposition.

After ten days of highly charged atmosphere in which all fair and foul means were used by both sides, a vote was undertaken in the National Assembly in which opposition had to muster support of 119 members. However, it could muster only 107 and the motion was defeated. It is said that 35 MNAs failed to turn up for voting despite promises.

The third Prime Minister to face a vote of no confidence was Shaukat Aziz in 2006 while he was serving under military regime of General Musharraf. The vote was less to oust him from power than a way by the opposition to protest killing of Baluch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti in controversial circumstances. The motion, which never had a chance of success, was defeated by 201 votes to 136

Imran Khan is the fourth prime minister to face a vote of no confidence in history of Pakistan. As far as numbers in the assembly are concerned he is closer to Benazir Bhutto in 1989 than Shaukat Aziz in 2006 or I I Chundrigar in 1957.

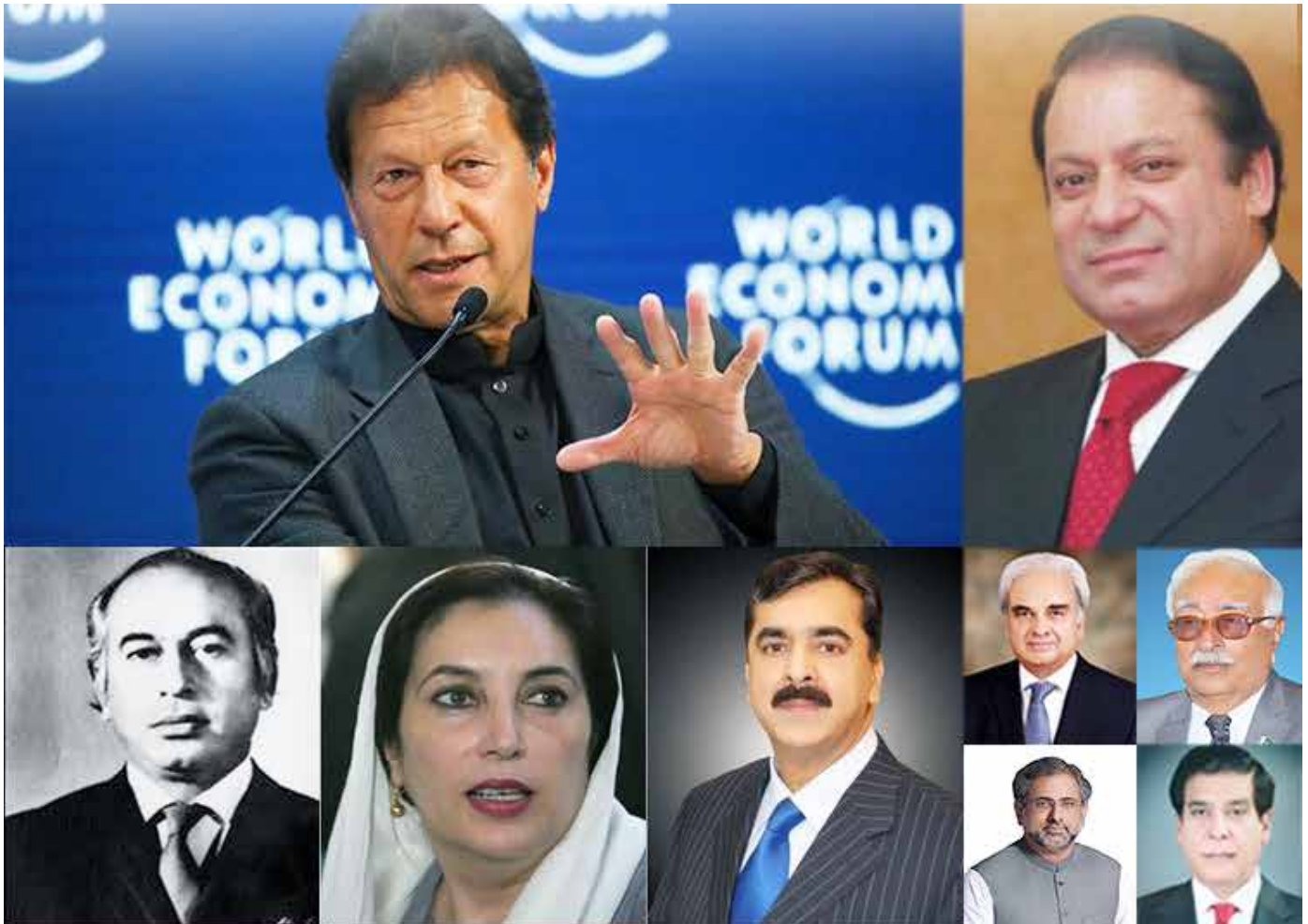
Whether he will defeat the motion like Bhutto remains to be seen. However, one thing is clear: Unlike I I Chundrigar, even if ousted he is not going into oblivion and would try to win his way back to power. Although he falls way short of I I Chundrigar in experience, his party, his support base, and his charisma more than makes up for his lack.





The Blind Pursuit

Is politics about people and their welfare, or is it just an endless string of power grabs?



By **Qurban Baloch**

Political instability has paralyzed the country from the beginning of its creation. Throughout history, efforts made to break free from the shackles have failed miserably, sending the country deeper into financial uncertainty. And yet, those in our country's power corridors fail to learn from history and continue their pursuit of power, no matter the condition of the country.

We have never been in a position to claim that the country has overcome instability, be it during a civilian or military government. This has led to the country being put in the reverse gear, and us regressing instead of progressing. We have failed to compete with countries that gained independence besides us in the same era, but also from a country that liberated itself from us (Bangladesh).

The country is yet again in the clutches of severe political and economic instability. A lot has been written on the past of countries that have faced a similar fate, when it comes to the political and economic situation. Our current focus must be on the critical crises that we face along with the probability of them having a hazardous impact on our future.

Imran Khan's rule was riddled with a controversial beginning when he started ruling in August 2018, post a questionable election. From the first day of his tenure, major opposition parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), Jamiat Ulema e Islam - Fazl (JUI-F) along with other parties have claimed the elections were rigged.

This is evident by how in his inaugural address at the National Assembly, Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had termed Imran Khan, 'The selected prime minister'.

After coming to power, PM Khan had claimed that he would not indulge in a political war with the opposition, rather would tackle the economic situation of the country that had been inherited in an already-adverse condition.

For the same purpose, not only did Imran Khan announce an austerity drive in the every field but also talked about converting the PM House into a university and the governor houses into public guest houses. The sale of buffaloes and old cars of the PM House made a public mockery of the



government since it spent more money on the advertisement campaigns than it did for these initiatives themselves.

Imran Khan's decision of not using the PM House as a means of limiting expense too proved to be a failure. After the few initial days of living at his personal residence in Bani Gala, Khan started using the PM House for office work and interactions with dignitaries as an inevitable consequence of his security department's advice.

The narrative of the austerity drive and saving money by limiting the expenses of numerous departments started losing popularity by each passing day. This was due to the confused policies and unnecessary announcement of holding the bureaucracy accountable, the latter stopped working in fear of getting arrested by the NAB.

The Khan government tried its best to handle the economy by taking financial help from brotherly Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to shoulder the economy. However, this step failed completely and at last, Khan had to go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Prior to becoming the prime minister, Khan would proudly boast of how he would rather opt for suicide rather than approaching the IMF.

Despite the failing economic situation, irrational claims of the economy's improvement and a faulty stance on the rising inflation as well as the depreciation in value

of the rupee weakened the government further. As this piece is being written, the US Dollar has reached PKR 182 in interbank market. It was trading at PKR 110 at the onset of Khan's tenure.

A long jump in the new year, 2022:

Former president of Pakistan and President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari made the smart move of calling on Shahbaz Sharif, the president of the PML-N, at the latter's residence in Model Town, Lahore for a meeting, with other PML-N leaders including Maryam Nawaz in attendance.

With Zardari's smart move, the ice that had formed in the year prior due to a falling out of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with other partners in the coalition Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM). The opposition alliance consists of several some opposition political parties including PML-N, JUI-F, Balochistan Nation Party-Mengal (BNP-M), Mehmood Achakzai's Pakhtoonkha Awami Mili Party, and Jamiat Ulema e Islam-Noorani who agreed on an agenda to oust PM Khan.

After serious consultations on 8 March 2022, the joint opposition (PDM, PPP and ANP) moved the motion of no confidence against PM Khan with the requisition in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

During the past three and a half years, this was the first time that the opposition moved against PM Khan in a joint effort. Otherwise, the divided opposition had been

defeated by PM Khan and the government's allies in the election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman Senate as well as the no-confidence against Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani.

The only exception to this rule was the opposition having defeated the PTI and its allies in the Senate elections by the former Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gillani.

Pakistan is not only facing internal disturbances but external issues as well. The no confidence move against PM Khan has brought a spike in the political temperature once again, pushing the country towards severe political and economic instability.

The issue of the no confidence motion submitted by the joint opposition has finally reached the floor of National Assembly. However, in a cunning move on Friday, Speaker Asad Qaisar adjourned the issue to the next week, buying the PM precious time to try and avert his ouster.

On Sunday, PM Khan addressed a big gathering in the capital city, showing all his cards to counter the move of the joint opposition. In any case, the contest is still too close to call.

If Khan survives the no confidence, he will start hunting the opposition. In case he does not, the opposition will remain hostage to PM Khan's past allies who will use blackmailing as tool of gather more power.

Whichever way it goes, the country will drift into a deeper crisis. This cycle of suffering for the people will continue.



OIC Foreign Ministers Back Pakistan on Kashmir

The 48th Session of OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers in Islamabad mooted "Partnering for Unity, Justice and Development"



By Zarghon Shah

The 48th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Islamabad on 22-23 March, was no doubt a great success for Pakistan, despite being a weary discourse on some important and long-standing issues facing the Muslim Ummah.

Being host, Pakistan picked the theme "Partnering for Unity, Justice and Development" for this CFM, and tabled around 20 resolutions out of total 140 – touching upon issues ranging from Kashmir, launch of unloaded Indian supersonic missile, UN reforms, Muslim minorities, Afghanistan, Islamophobia, counterterrorism, illicit financial flows, combating corruption, and COVID-19 response and Pakistan's 75th anniversary celebrations.

Major outcomes of the CFM from Pakistan's perspective include an action plan by the members of the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, acknowledging Pakistan's pivotal role in South Asia peace and convening a ministerial conference for promotion of peace and prevention of conflicts within the Muslim world.

Above all, around 45 foreign ministers/deputy FMs, 800 delegates, observers and guests recognized Pakistan's key position and role within

the OIC. Inaugural speeches on day one of the session not only praised Pakistan for hosting the historical event but also congratulated the entire Pakistani nation on its 75th anniversary.

In their addresses, the foreign minister of Niger, the outgoing president of the CFM; foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, the chair of the summit; secretary general OIC; representatives of the OIC regional groups; president Islamic Development Bank; and the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as a special guest hailed Pakistan for organizing and hosting the event.

Speech by the Chinese foreign minister, though supported the OIC stance on Palestine and Kashmir, but largely focused on investing in the OIC member states. He termed the theme of the OIC CFM a reflection of the majority world community.

"China is ready for partnership with Muslim world," he said and added that China has provided 1.3 billion doses of Coronavirus vaccines to the Muslim world and would extend three million more. Referring to terrorism, the Chinese foreign minister dispelled the impression of linking the menace with any religion or sect.

The address by Prime Minister Imran Khan was generally good and focused but he unnecessarily dragged references to his days while living in Europe, the cricket saga, the caliphs, the Mamluks, and Muslim imperialism.

Imran Khan also kept churning his 'riasat-e-Madina' rhetoric besides telling the foreign guests how a Pakistani ruler invented the terminology of 'enlightened moderation', the rise of sex crime in Pakistan, and children using mobile phone for pornography.

The Prime Minister held forth about how we have failed Palestine and Kashmir, and how the world community paid lip service to the Kashmiris' right to self-determination but never too any steps to ensure it in practice.

He said Muslim leaders failed to counter Islamophobia, and noted how Muslims lives were in danger in the West since 9/11. He argued the world was headed in the wrong direction and said the 1.5 billion Muslims of the world should avoid joining any block.

The PM took care to raise the situation of Afghanistan, saying the country was on the threshold of a colossal humanitarian crisis, and argued that left unaddressed, the Afghan situation could result in an eruption of global

terrorism. He stressed that Afghans could not be dictated.

Khan also voiced his desire for China and the OIC foreign ministers to jointly mediate between Russia and Ukraine. Expressing his deep concerns on the Ukraine situation, Imran Khan candidly advised OIC members to stay away from the “new cold war and block politics”.

The outcomes of the two-day conference were in the shape of Islamabad Declaration, a strong resolution on Kashmir, an action plan by the Contact Group on Kashmir, a resolution on Palestine, operationalization of the trust fund on Afghanistan, appointment of OIC Special Envoy on Islamophobia, and a resolution on threats to peace and security in South Asia.

Regarding Kashmir, the Islamabad Declaration renewed its “unwavering” solidarity with Kashmiris, and supported their right to self-determination in line with UN and OIC resolutions. It vehemently rejected India’s unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 and condemned the violation of Kashmiris’ human rights in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The declaration also expressed its grave concern over the violation of the Pakistan’s airspace arising from the launch of supersonic missile on 9 March by India. The member states called upon India to conduct a joint probe with Pakistan.

The action plan by the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir contains measures and activities by the OIC member states, the Contact Group itself, the OIC secretary general and the OIC Secretariat, the OIC special envoy on J&K and the OIC subsidiary organs, to advance the Kashmir cause.

As per the plan, the group will regularly meet in Jeddah, New York, and Geneva. Members will also periodically brief the UN secretary general on the evolving human rights situation in occupied Kashmir. They would, in their bilateral engagements with India, raise the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in order to advance a peaceful resolution according to the UNSC resolutions.



What Has He Done to Deserve the Wrath of Foreign Powers?

Parsing Prime Minister Imran Khan's pretensions to an independent foreign policy



By Umer Farooq

Faced with the possibility of ouster from power after no confidence motion was tabled against him, Prime Minister Imran Khan started projecting himself as a leader who was being punished for his so-called independent stance on foreign policy issues. His close confidants launched a campaign in the media that his independent foreign policy was in fact the cause behind opposition's "desperate" move to remove him from office.

However, neither the prime minister nor any of his close associates has bothered to describe the contours of the independent foreign policy he claims to be pursuing as chief executive of the country. Could it be that he is planning to start a project of running an independent foreign policy in the future? If yes, what are the details of such a plan?

Truth be told, Prime Minister Imran Khan has hardly created any niche for himself in the world of diplomacy up until now. He has dedicated the lions' share of his time over his four-year sojourn in power to dealing with petty party politics. What, then, is the basis for his claim to being a foreign policy prime minister?

Two events on foreign policy front in recent days could be alluded to as his contribution to what his followers are dubbing as independent foreign policy. First, his meeting in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin and second, his government playing host to the 48th OIC Foreign Ministers' Conference. But none of these represents any change in the foreign policy of the country.

Pakistani diplomats have been describing Prime Minister Khan's meeting with President Putin as the fruit of years if not decades of hard work of silent exertions by the Pakistani foreign office. They also say that meeting with Putin does not represent any change in the foreign policy of Pakistan.

If there is no change in the foreign policy and if the said meeting is the culmination of years of hard work then the foreign policy of Imran Khan's government is a continuity of the previous government's foreign policy.

The OIC on its part is the most timid of multilateral forums – particularly towards the sole superpower of the world – that exist

in the world politics today. Being part of this forum does not allow you to be aggressive or jingoistic as PTI government cronies are pretending to be on foreign policy front in their assertions for domestic audiences.

On the contrary, being part of this forum indicates that Pakistan continues to adhere to the status quo in international politics and jingoism of Imran Khan's cronies is reserved for domestic audiences.

Pakistan's political elite lost all control of foreign policy decision making apparatus in the post-Musharraf period. In the years between the death of third military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash and military coup of October 1999, Pakistani political elite conceded almost all ground to the military establishment as far as foreign policy making processes were concerned.

There were few major foreign policy initiatives in this period for which civilian rulers could be credited, such as the Lahore peace process initiated by Nawaz Sharif. However, it was scuttled by military leaders even before it got the opportunity to take off.

In the post Musharraf period the three successive governments made no serious attempts to introduce any change in the foreign policy or to undertake any initiative on foreign policy front.

This was for two reasons: Firstly, the successive governments including PPP, PML-N, and PTI were too preoccupied with deteriorating law and order and economic conditions in the country. Secondly, foreign policy making processes were completely in the grip of bureaucratic (both civil and military) institutions like GHQ, intelligence services and the Foreign Office.

In other words it means that the civilian leaders, firstly did not find time to devote to foreign policy making processes and secondly they knew that even if they had devoted some time to the processes, it would go to waste.

Now out of the blue the PTI government is claiming that it was because of independent foreign policy that they are being punished through a no confidence motion in the national assembly. One of his cronies has said that this no confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan has clear links with foreign powers, but even he had not specific allegations.

This leads us to the conclusion that Prime Minister Khan and his cronies are using this foreign conspiracy card to drum up popular support. The strategy seems to be two-pronged: drum up enough public support to beat back the no-trust motion through (a show of) brute force, preventing his ouster; or if that fails, use it to fuel a mass protest movement against his ouster.

That leaves us with the question as to what exactly is independent foreign policy in the context of a country's political system? Is it desirable in the first place? Is it something to which Pakistan's political leaders should aspire? What exactly do Pakistani politicians have in mind when they talk about independent foreign policy? What actually independent foreign policy is? Has Pakistan ever had an independent foreign policy and will it ever have one in future?

Past political discourse in Pakistani media and political circles suggests that the country's political elite equates indepen-

dent foreign policy with freedom to pursue an unabashedly jingoistic posture towards India and to provide material and perhaps military assistance to Muslim freedom causes around the world including Kashmiris and Palestinians.

When the Americans toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, our right wing parties started blaming the Musharraf government that it has lost the freedom to pursue an independent foreign policy.

After the death of Prime Minister Bhutto in what has since been called judicial murder, Pakistani political discourse started fabricating stories that Bhutto was punished for his independent foreign policy. It was recalled how US top diplomat Henry Kissinger had allegedly threatened Prime Minister Bhutto with consequences if his government did not halt its nuclear program.

In this discourse, Zia died in a plane crash after (read because) he differed with Americans on Afghanistan and refused to sign the Geneva Accord. Thus, Zia was also running an independent foreign policy or at least he started to run it independently in the last days of his tenure.

Seen in this light, it is plain that Imran Khan's strategy is to hoist himself to the mythical big league of Pakistani leaders: He 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, goes the story template.

In an unmistakable sign of a well-thought-out propaganda plan, Khan and his takers refuse to engage with the question what exactly he or his government have done on foreign policy front to attract the wrath of foreign powers.

Much is being made of his "absolutely not" in response to American requests to provide air bases to the American military after they left Afghanistan, but the claim does not bear scrutiny.

The Pakistani government asked the Americans to vacate military bases in November 2011, when PPP – one of the most pro-American governments in the post-Musharraf period – at the helm in Islamabad.

This actually accentuates civilian governments hardly matter when it comes to the security aspect of foreign policy. Everybody knows who pulls the strings when we say no to Americans.

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 then started hobnobbing with Arab sheikhdoms and other bigger Muslim countries like Iran, Indonesia, and Turkey under American tutelage. Our foreign policy remained under the guidance and control of extra-regional powers, which used to ensure our security vis-à-vis much larger military powers.

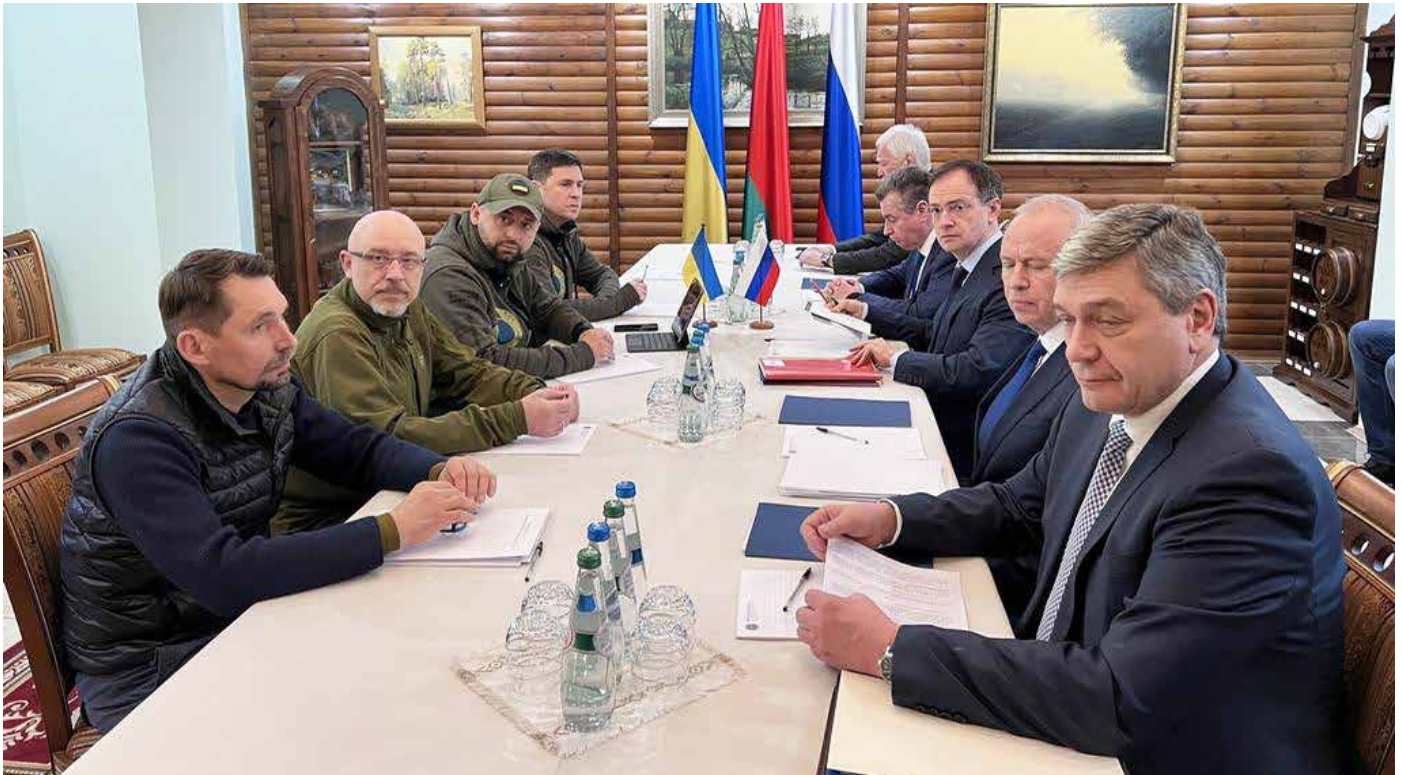
Not only did these extra-regional powers guarantee our security, they also kept us afloat economically. The Pakistani elite failed to create a self-sustaining economic base for the society and state.

To talk about independent foreign policy in such a situation is laughable. Foreign policy is a reflection of internal economic, political, social and cultural strength of a society. Jingoistic statements, laughable assertions about freedom and self-projection as a nationalist do not qualify as an independent foreign policy.

You need to have a strong economic base, political and social cohesion in the society to run a foreign policy free or independent of constraints imposed by foreign powers. Pakistani political elites' behavior in foreign capitals when they go there for lobbying is shameful and embarrassing to say the least, and Imran Khan or his coterie are no exception.

Can Talks Beat Bombs to Peace in Ukraine?

How realistic is it to expect a resolution of the Ukraine conflict through talks?



By Hamzah Riffat Hussain

While the war rages on with its terrible consequences for the people of Ukraine and the rest of the world, talks between Russian and Ukraine have made little progress. The administration of Volodymyr Zelensky and the Kremlin continue to be at odds over semantics. This has led to a humanitarian catastrophe in Mariupol, bombardment in Kharkiv, and a refugee crisis for neighboring countries to deal with.

After several rounds of talks, there has been no breakthrough. While international observers vouch for negotiations to be the only way out of this seemingly intractable quagmire, it is important to gain a holistic understanding of what the key differences are before concluding as to whether it is realistic to hope for an early end to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

On the 22 March 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said everything would be on the table in negotiations with Vladimir Putin's administration. Any leeway from Moscow would also be subsequently subject to a referendum in Kiev.

Talks between the two sides are not a new phenomenon. They held multiple rounds of talks on the question of Crimea before Russia annexed it in 2014. Discussions were also held on the status of the Donbas region, parts of which are now controlled by pro-Russian separatist groups and recognized as independent republics of Donetsk and Luhansk by Russia.

The status of Ukraine's NATO membership has also been under discussion but all the aforementioned subjects have not been addressed resulting in a lingering stalemate with relentless bombardment.

On Ukraine joining NATO, Moscow has requested for assurances which Kiev has agreed to. Russia has also sought to justify its invasion by claiming that the Russian speaking Ukrainian citizens are being defended and liberated from genocide. This has been categorized as a non-starter by Zelensky.

The negotiating teams headed by Russian presidential adviser Vladimir Medinsky and Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii

Reznikov have witnessed lingering sticking points such as questions of territory where Russia taking control of large portions of Ukrainian territory during the war already adding to the contentious discourse surrounding the Donbass region and Crimea.

The truth is that Russia has with it at least another 170,000 square kilometers of additional Ukrainian territory the size of Tunisia. In light of this, Ukraine has denounced any Russian claim to what it considers an occupied territory with Podolyak saying that the Ukrainian stance is unchanged and the only way out of this impasse is an agreement on a ceasefire, withdrawal of Russian troops, and strong security guarantees for Ukraine.

All these variables complicate the Ukrainian issue and raises questions over whether hostilities would cease. The question of neutrality has also been raised in relevant quarters across Russia which has made it a central part of negotiations.

As per international law, neutrality entails

that a sovereign state is obliged to not interfere in military conflicts of third states. Russia has claimed that Ukraine must remain neutral and not partake in NATO force buildups along the border with Russia, a request rejected outright by the Biden administration.

Interestingly, Ukraine already acknowledged that it would remain neutral and not join NATO but the stance of the United States has resulted in an impasse continuing with lingering trust deficits between the two sides preventing de-escalation to materialize.

Vladimir Putin has conditioned de-escalation with 'de-Nazification' of Ukraine which he considers to be a massive impediment towards peace as neo-Nazi groups carry out attacks against Russian speaking communities in Ukraine.

There is evidence that the Azov Brigade which is part of the National Guard of Ukraine has carried out war crimes against the Russian speaking population yet the rationale for launching an all-out attack against the Ukrainian population over this is bizarre.

From 2014 onwards, volunteers fighting back against Russian rebels have extreme far right, anti-Semitic and white suprema-

cist views, yet Zelensky claims that Russia has been promoting racist ideologies through 'Pan-Russian' objectives as part of the military operation.

In any case, it seems unless the Azov Brigade which is part of the National Guard is curbed or defanged, Russia's justification for continuing the war will continue.

Opening up a humanitarian corridor from Mariupol has now become a national security issue for Kiev and a humanitarian imperative for the international community for which talks have to resume with the Kremlin. Russian forces and Russian backed separatists control about half of the city which is home to four hundred thousand people.

The difficult circumstances have compelled Ukraine to look forward to the talks with the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, who had earlier raised alarm about an impending global economic crisis due to the crisis, also encouraging dialogue.

The United States is expected to announce new sanctions by 24 March 2022 with President Joe Biden visiting Brussels to attend an emergency NATO summit, a G7 meeting and a session of the European Council.

The Ukrainian President has expressed confidence in the upcoming talks with Russia despite the controversial nature of the discourse between the two sides. However, his persistent calls for Western governments to impose tougher sanctions on Russia concomitantly could actually act as a potential spoiler.

This bi-pronged strategy is well understood by the Kremlin which has already accused Kiev of adopting a duplicitous approach towards reconciliation and de-escalation.

Viewed objectively, Moscow is employing a war of attrition which can only subside if Ukraine approaches upcoming talks without Western interference and a firm guarantee of non-alignment. Russia has already claimed that it wishes to destroy Ukraine's military, which it accuses of adopting an offensive posture.

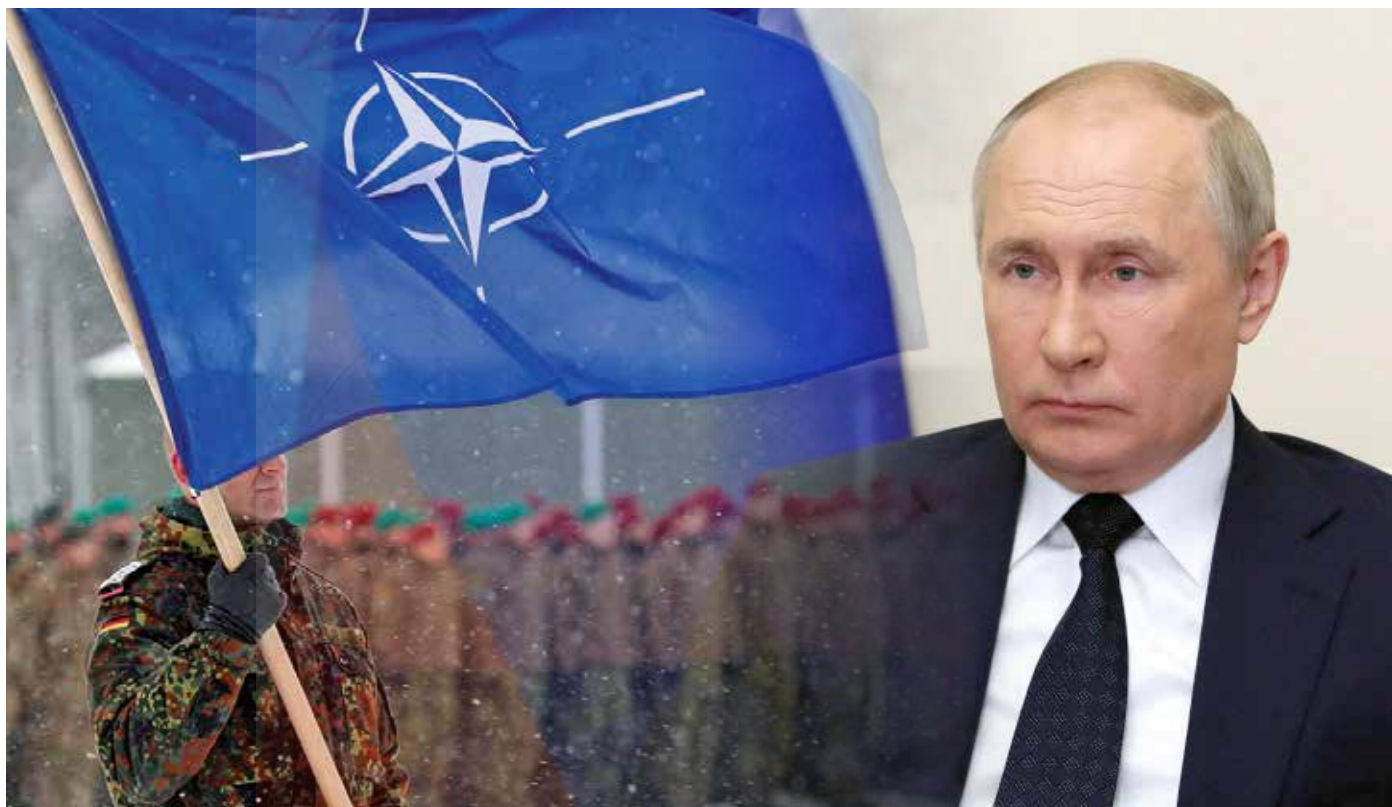
Recent history saw Russia decimating opposing military forces in Chechnya and Syria, where urban centers saw wholesale destruction and massive civilian casualties. The world and in particular Europe cannot afford a repeat of that history.

However, the near-deadlock in talks means a resolution of the conflict could be distant.



How Vladimir Putin United NATO

The invasion of Ukraine has pushed European powers into a tighter embrace together and with their transatlantic partner



By Shahmir Niazi

NATO was a house divided when President Donald J. Trump, in an unprecedented turn of events, reprimanded its member states in 2017 for not contributing enough financial resources to the military alliance. He even contemplated a US withdrawal from NATO, labeling it a drain on the country's economy. This marked a significant cooling of US relations with its European allies.

Michèle A. Flournoy, who served as the undersecretary of defense under President Barack Obama said, "withdrawing from the alliance would destroy 70-plus years of painstaking work across multiple administrations, Republican and Democratic, to create perhaps the most powerful and advantageous alliance in history, and it would be the wildest success that Vladimir Putin could dream of."

A divided bloc

In the years following the end of the Cold War, NATO has struggled to maintain its

relevance in the face of the emerging challenges of the 21st century. French President Emmanuel Macron said that the alliance was in a state of "brain death."

The threat perceived by the US and Eastern European countries from China and Russia was much lower than Western Europe. This kept the alliance from bolstering its defenses and investing in building the military capacities of the member states.

Economic interests guided European action, or the lack of it, as they sought to capitalize from the access to Russian oil and Chinese markets. The bloc was polarized. Countries on the eastern flank, Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States perceived existential threat from Russia's "expansionist designs" while on the other side, Western Europe remained focused on economic growth.

Earlier, the US, owing to its massive military and economic clout, was able to forge a consensus within the bloc by incen-

tivizing member states' actions. Over the years, with globalization and industrialization, and the rise of major powers outside of the West, Europe was forced to reduce its reliance on the US and explore new opportunities for fostering trade links.

The US on its part remained entangled in multiple conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, meanwhile China focused on investment, relocation of industry, and developing trade corridors.

The Putin Factor

Five years later, NATO is more united than ever before. US Vice President Kamala Harris was on point when she told reporters in Warsaw, "The NATO alliance is stronger and Russia is weaker because of what Putin has done. That is very clear to us."

Weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, the US was struggling to muster up a collective response from its

European allies, in particular Germany, to force Putin to reconsider his plans for an assault on Ukraine. The potential fallout from the sanctions on Russia led Europe to follow a more measured approach to the crisis. This despite repeated warnings from the US intelligence agencies of an imminent invasion by Russia.

Perhaps, the experience is still fresh in the European allies' memory; when misleading US intelligence assessments failed to predict the swift capture of Kabul by the Afghan Taliban, within weeks of the US forces' withdrawal, caused this skepticism. But Putin's actions have restored their faith in the US intelligence reports once again.

A major point of contention between the US and Germany weeks before the war had been the selling of arms to Ukraine. Berlin resisted the move saying the assessment was based on its war experience, where the outcome of the move was bitter.

Similarly, Germany resisted the US suggestion of detaching Russia from SWIFT, which is an international payments system.

However, just a day into the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a major reversal of his country's longstanding policy, decided to send 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger missiles to Ukrainians. Moreover, Germany has given consent to the European Commission's move barring seven Russian banks from SWIFT.

In the last three months, an unprecedented 7 meetings of NATO have taken place; Two summits, two foreign ministers' meetings, two defense ministers' meetings. Countries that initially preferred staying out of the alliance are now reconsidering their membership. Recent polls held in Finland showed that a majority of 53 percent prefer joining the alliance. Support is also rising in Sweden.

The underlying principle holding the alliance intact is collective defense, as enshrined in Article 5. Smaller states were wary of this commitment that an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies. They doubted that the US would risk a large-scale war if a member state was attacked. Article 5 was earlier invoked only twice; in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and during the Syrian crisis.

How forcefully the US has responded to the Ukraine invasion, a country that is not even a NATO member state, has done wonders for smaller member states' trust in the US's ability to defend them in the face of an offensive.

Similarly, Turkey which in the past had a troublesome relationship with some of its NATO allies has fully cooperated with the alliance at a time of need. It has fulfilled all its obligations, delivered weapons to Ukraine, and closed major sea lanes in Bosphorus and Dardanelles to Russian war ships.

Planning ahead

At the extraordinary summit of NATO heads of State and Government held on 24 March, allied leaders expressed their resolve to reset the bloc's longer-term deterrence and defense posture across all domains, (land, sea, air, cyber, and space).

Presently, there are over 40,000 NATO troops deployed on the eastern flank, four additional battlegroups stationed in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, and the NATO Response Force placed on high alert.

The bloc has also outlined plans for increasing defense expenditures under the Defense Investment Pledge and Article 3 of the Washington Treaty. Earlier, Germany in a major shift from its post-war pacifism created a special defense fund worth USD 110 billion that will take the country's defense spending from 1.5 percent of GDP to 2 percent.

The portion of GDP to be spent on military spending is listed out in the NATO rules although Germany has previously been reluctant to meet it.

Although it is difficult to predict the future of NATO beyond the current conflict, recent developments demonstrate the alliance's strong propensity to grow ever stronger in the face of danger. However, the situation may be entirely different once the war clouds subside.



Russia-Ukraine War: On Western Media's Representational Politics



By Arsim Tariq & Aimen Bukhari

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine can potentially overshadow other major conflicts of the latter half of the last century, including Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The crisis that is unfolding in Europe has given rise to a multitude of perspectives if we look at it from different schools of thought that are competing to explain. The baffling question then is, how a deadly war returned to Europe after so long? While answering this question, Western media is revealing a predominant Eurocentric bias.

Sure, any invasion by a state into another 'sovereign' state based on political, economic, or strategic interests is not justifiable. But representational politics by the Western media against Russia shows a hypocritical Eurocentric bias that favors the persistence of hegemonic ideas disseminated by the West.

Western Media manipulates news to produce and reproduce the hegemonic

principles of the state. It has a treasured spot in the political and cultural life of the region, especially in the US. Gitlin has identified people rely on media for their realities, symbols, and heroes. As all modes of communication are available to the media, it is an ideal platform for misreporting reality and submitting to the interests of the ruling class; simply put, they have a hold on the means of communication.

Likewise, the critical thought and ideas against Western hypocrisy and such double standards have been pushed to the margins by the hegemonic Western viewpoints and approaches to International Relations. All this is because the knowledge and power centers, by and large, reside in the West.

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine, many scholars, researchers, and critical journalists have pointed out that the Western double standards of characterizing invasions and conflict as what only occurs in poor countries, not the West.

For instance, according to a CBS correspondent, Kyiv is a "relatively civilized" city; a British ITV reporter stated, Ukraine is not a "developing third world nation;" and according to an Al Jazeera anchor, refugees are "prosperous, middle-class people," not "people trying to get away from areas in North Africa." Kelly Cobiella, a news correspondent for NBC News, was more straightforward in discriminating between the so-called 'civilized' and uncivilized' worlds: "Just to put it bluntly, [the Ukrainian refugees] are not refugees from Syria; these are refugees from neighboring Ukraine. These are Christians, they are white, they are remarkably similar [to Westerners]."

In a BBC interview, Ukraine's Deputy Chief Prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze lamented that "It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed." The problem is not that he could voice such a racist stance by creating a binary division,

but the fact that he was left unchallenged during the whole interview. ITV News correspondent uttered similar words that summed up the Western media's perception about human lives abroad: "The unthinkable has happened...this is not a developing, third-world nation; this is Europe!" By that logic, the "unthinkable" things only happen in the third world, not the West.

However, this hypocrisy has not gone unchallenged without criticism from dissidents and thinkers on the Left. For example, the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association stated in a statement that such inaccurate framing portrays conflict outside of Europe and North America as "normal and expected," humiliating people who suffer the consequences.

The assertion that Europe is too civilized for war is not only racially prejudiced but also inconsiderate, given that the West is responsible for many wars in the world since the end of World War II, especially in the Middle East. A state cannot claim to be the champion of human lives and global peace while being responsible for destroying countless lives in other parts of the world.

The demonization of Russia, a country that remains critical to US national security, in the Western media has been afoot for several years. If the ongoing representation of Russia, Ukraine, and President Vladimir Putin is any sign, this practice of media (mis) representation of conflicts is pervasive and has become a norm. Be it the Israel-Palestine conflict, the 9/11 and the US invasion in Afghanistan, the Iraqi invasion, the disputed 2009 elections in Iran, the Western-facilitated destabilization of Libya in 2011, or the crisis in Syria from 2011, the hegemony of Western media as it legitimizes false or misleading pretexts for America's imperial wars, and eventually normalizes Western-centric discourse, evidently serves the strategic interests of the Western elite.

Media is, therefore, the most crucial marketplace for ideas. So, the notion of objectivity attached to it gives it the legitimacy to perpetuate ideologies and perceptions that are deliberately or unconsciously in line with the interests of the ruling class, i.e., the state.

The ideas that the politically uninformed people are being socialized into, regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, are those that benefit the military-industrial complex and political elite to maintain the support for the

US foreign policy on Russia. As Stephen Cohen argued that "the media have followed a different leader-centric narrative, also consistent with US policy, that devalues multifaceted analysis for a relentless demonization of Putin," since the 2000s.

Therefore, this type of representation by the Western media legitimizes the political rationale of the West against its adversaries, which in turn, leads to the normalization of Western-centric discourse across the globe because, as mentioned earlier, the centers for knowledge production reside in the West.

In this context, the media, being a hegemonic actor, controls what event is newsworthy and how it should get represented. As Gramsci argues that the hegemony of the ruling class is perpetuated and sustained using middle-class intellectuals like media that undertake the task of disseminating the ideas of the ruling elite to preserve their dominance and political interests. By Gramsci's logic, the West is collectively aligned, however, once again, to demonize Russia using its hegemonic media. While doing so, it has exposed bigoted and discriminatory binaries that persist in the consciousness of the West.



One Step Forward and Two Steps Back

While they seem to be making some headway on reconciliation, Taliban renege on girls' education



By Haq Nawaz Khan

The top leadership of Afghan Taliban has once again denied reopening of the schools for the girls above the grade 6 across the country shocked everyone. Everyone was anxiously waiting to witness the historic moment of opening of all schools on 23 March, but it could not happen. No immediate reason was given as to what led to the last moment decision that was widely criticized by the international community, rights groups and also women rights activists.

Afghan girls have been waiting for the last 7 months to hear this good news, but the education ministry announced that the schools for girls above grade 6 would not be reopened till further order as per the directives of the supreme leader of Taliban Sheikh Haibatullah Akhonzada.

The officials of the ministry of Afghanistan education argued that there was no major issue to delay the reopening of the schools for the girls, but the leadership was not satisfied with the arrangements.

"We assure our Afghan sisters that they will be allowed to resume their studies soon. The decision to reopen the schools for girls above grade 6 is beyond the mandate of the education ministry," Aziz Ahmad Rayan, a spokesman for the education ministry, told reporters after the ceremony of beginning of the new academic year.

Mr Rayan stated: "The ministry of education will try to convince the leadership to reopen the schools as soon as possible. Our policy focus is to spread education across the country. We are working on a number of projects to facilitate people in the remote areas, which were deprived of education in the past."

Access to girls' education was one of the conditions of the international community for the recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The Taliban had suspended girls' education above grade 6, arguing to make proper arrangements for segregating both the genders in schools, colleges and universities.

The leaders of Afghan Taliban have been defending the decision as to make the educational institutions align with the principles of Islam and values. However, the education ministry could not finalize the proper arrangements for the Afghan girls to return to schools and colleges.

Some of the Afghan girls cried when they were told to wait till further orders from the Taliban leadership. Some of the girl's students told Afghan media they were shocked to know that they were denied school.

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai deplored the decision. "Islamic Emirate should not help the agenda of those who want a needy and subordinate Afghanistan. All the girls' schools should be reopened."

The US special envoy for Afghan women Rina Amiri reacted to the decision thus: "The reported failure to open schools for girls above grade 6 across the country not only weakens confidence in the Taliban commitments but further dashes the hopes

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The Five Dimensions of Magnificence

A bucket list of world-class tourist sites dotted right across Pakistan

In 2010, Pakistan was termed “tourism’s next big thing” by the Lonely Planet. Ten years later, the Condé Nast Traveller magazine ranked Pakistan the “best holiday destination”. And in 2019, Forbes included the country in its list of “coolest places to visit”.

Pakistan is without doubt one of the most beautiful countries in the world. It has sky-high mountains, lush green valleys, mighty rivers, splendid lakes, and wildlife that is worth experiencing. The country is home to five of the world’s fourteen 8,000 meters high peaks, including K2 – the world’s second-highest summit.

Lying at the heart of Asia, Pakistan has long remained a tourist attraction for its diverse topography, climate, and people. From the mighty Himalayan, Karakoram and Hindukush ranges in Gilgit Baltistan to the rich cultural heritage in Sindh; from the world’s oldest religious and cultural monuments in Punjab to the golden deserts of Nushki in Balochistan to the hilly havens of Galiyat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – Pakistan is the “best-kept secret of Asia”.

Nowhere will you find people so hospitable, food so delicious, adventures so diverse and views so awe-inspiring. The country offers all kinds of activities for adventure-lovers and thrill-seekers, including desert safari, camel riding, ice-skating, trekking, boating, trout fishing, paragliding, etc.

Here is a quick rundown of the notable tourist destinations in the five provinces of the country.

Gilgit-Baltistan

Recently, Pakistan’s national flag carrier, PIA, started operating exclusive air-safari flights to Skardu. The plane flies over some of the world’s highest mountain peaks including K-2, Nanga Parbat, Broad Peak, and the Gasherbrum peaks. Travelers can also enjoy mesmerising views of the Deosai plain and the famous Lake Saiful-Maluk.

The stunning Hunza Valley with its unique history and exceptional scenery offers tourists a chance to experience centuries-old culture including the 8th century Baltit Fort and 11th-century Altit Fort.

The people of Hunza are warm and tender-hearted and are widely known for their hospitality. They will make your visit worthwhile with their rich cuisine and folk dances.

The valley’s iconic peak, Rakaposhi, serves as a major attraction for mountaineers and wildlife lovers. It’s the only mountain in the world that drops directly, uninterrupted, for almost 6000m from the summit to the base. Rakaposhi is home to several endangered species including snow leopard, brown bear, and Marco Polo sheep.

Situated near Skardu, the second-highest plateau of the world, the 13,500 feet high Deosai Plains is famous for its rich flora and fauna. The flat but undulating plains surrounded by mountains are surreal to say the least. While you are there, don’t forget to visit the beautiful Sheosar Lake that has a beautiful backdrop of Nanga Parbat.

Balochistan

Pakistan’s largest province in terms of area, Balochistan offers numerous avenues of tourism with its wildlife parks, deserts, coastal landmarks, and mountain ranges.

The 653-km-long Makran Coastal Highway traces the contours of Pakistan’s Arabian Sea coast. Adding to the beauty of this state-of-the-art pavement is a highly prized architectural gem: a gigantic, rock-cut, architectural complex Sphinx of Balochistan.

The golden deserts of Nushki and Kharan are worth feasting your eyes on. Hingol National Park in Makran is an attractive destination for wildlife lovers. It is home to about 257 plant and 289 animal species, including 35 mammals, aquatic animals, amphibians, reptiles, and migratory birds, including hundreds of rare species.

The gorgeous beaches of the province including Kund Malir and Buji Koh are a great attraction for the tourists since they are all-natural and very well preserved.

The Astola Island, 39 km southeast of Pasni, with its natural caves and coves and crystal-clear turquoise water, is breathtaking. Several endangered species such as the green turtle and hawksbill turtle nest on the beach.



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The northwest province of Pakistan is popular for its rugged mountains, valleys, hills, and farms. KP attracts most of the country's mountain tourism to its scenic valleys of Naran, Kaghan, Shogranm and Kumrat.

Every year, tourists seeking refuge from the scorching summer throng the famous Galyat region, which includes Nathiagali, Donga Gali, Changla Gali, and Ayubia.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also hosts the Shandur Polo Festival in Chitral – on Shandur Pass, which is the highest polo ground in the world. The annual festival at the “rooftop of the world” features a multitude of activities including folk music and folk dance.

When speaking of tourism, one cannot overlook the magnificent Swat Valley with its alpine meadows, pine forests, and glacier-fed lakes. The snow-laden peaks of Mankhial and Flaksair have earned the valley the well-deserved label of “the Switzerland of the East.” Mingora, the principal town in Swat, is also the hometown of Pakistan's only Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai.



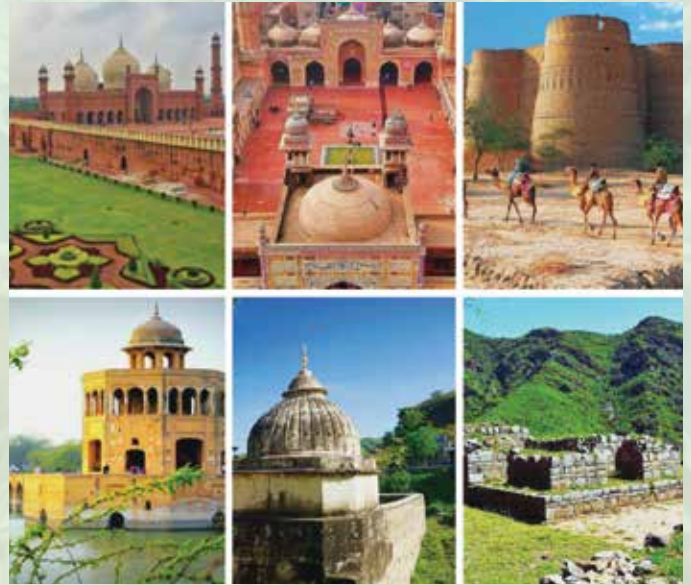
Punjab

The Punjab province is home to some of the oldest civilisations of the world including the Indus Valley Civilization in Harappa and Gandhara Civilization in Taxila. The province is known for its historical monuments.

The Mughal era architectures including Lahore Fort, Badshahi Mosque, Shalimar Gardens, and Wazir Khan Mosque attract visitors from across the world.

With the inauguration of the Kartarpur corridor, the historic gurdwara in Narowal, which is the birthplace of Sikhism's founder Guru Nanak has become accessible to religious devotees from India. The Katasraj temple in the city of Chakwal is also a major religious destination for Hindu devotees.

The city of Nawabs, Bahawalpur, hosts the annual Cholistan Desert Jeep rally, perhaps the biggest motorsports event of the country that attracts 100 racers from across the country to compete on a 500-km long track.



Sindh

The southern Sindh province is home to the famous archeological destination, Mohenjo-Daro near Larkana – classified as the UNESCO World Heritage Site – besides numerous ancient Buddhist sites, forts, and other monuments.

The province also forms the basin of the Indus River and has several lakes, including Keenjhar Lake, Manchar Lake and Bakri Waro Lake.

Pakistan's largest city, Karachi houses two of the largest ports of the country, Port Qasim and Port of Karachi. The sprawling metropolis offers a tremendous opportunity to explore the local cuisine, collect souvenirs, and reminisce after a long tour of interior parts of the province.

While you're still there, don't forget to visit the stunning French beach, Manora Island, and the famous Port Grand complex.



of families for a better future for their daughters.”

The sudden decision to continue the ban on girls' education by the senior leadership of the Afghan Taliban has weakened the case of the Taliban to seek world recognition. Global human rights groups have been criticizing the Taliban for denying due share to women in the administration and leading role.

The Taliban also banned women employees to remain at home till further order when it took control of Kabul in August last year. Women activists were tortured, harassed and jailed for holding public protest rallies in Afghanistan.

People in Afghanistan have complained that they did not celebrate the solar year due to the economic woes. Afghan Taliban also did not announce to officially celebrate Jashn-e-Nawroz.

Afghanistan has been facing a number of challenges where the humanitarian crisis is the most alarming. In a recent UN report, 95 percent of Afghans are unable to buy food for their families. Afghan traders have been asking the international community to allow Afghan banks to transfer funds as they are facing problems in international trade.

In a recent message on the eve of the new year, former Afghan President Dr Ashraf Ghani suggested 7 points to the Taliban leadership to cope with the ongoing challenges. “The war has ended, but more efforts are needed for having lasting peace in Afghanistan. We need tolerance and respect for each other. If you and I become we, only then we could move forward. Otherwise, there will be no end to the violence.”

In a major development, the interim Taliban government has decided to reach out to the political leaders and personalities in exile, across the divide to facilitate them to return to their country. A high level Commission for contacting the Afghan leaders and noted figures has been set up by the Taliban government in a recent cabinet meeting.

The commission is headed by Mawlawi Shahab Delwar, acting petroleum minister, and its members are acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, acting Information minister Mullah Khairullah Khaikhwa, acting army chief Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat, acting minister for the preaching Virtues and forbidding Vice Sheikh Muhammad Khalid Hanafi and Anas Haqqani.

The decision of the current Afghan govern-

ment to facilitate the return of the political leaders was welcomed inside and outside the country. It is not clear what role the commission could play to convince the Afghan leaders in exile, and what role the Taliban could offer to them if they agree to return.

The future political scenario is unclear whether the Taliban could adjust the political leaders from other parties in the government or not. The Taliban leadership is sticking to its stated position that it has been representing the people of Afghanistan.

However, the world is pushing the Taliban led Kabul administration to initiate an intra-Afghan dialogue to agree on the future political discourse. The Afghan political process ended nowhere when the foreign troops withdrew from Afghanistan last year. The western backed government of Ashraf Ghani collapsed before the troops' withdrawal were completed.

For recognition and legitimacy of its rule, the Taliban leadership is reviewing some of its policies and political reconciliation is one of them. If the interim Taliban government wants to attract foreign investment and economic development, it has to give space to the political leaders and accommodate some of the opponents.



How Did We Get Here?

Will there ever be a reckoning for the awful plight the women of Afghanistan are in today?



By Zainab Umer

Even before the fall of Kabul, right after Joe Biden's mid-April promise to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan, fears gripped the hearts of Afghan women as the return of the Taliban loomed ever larger.

Back then, nobody had an inkling the Taliban would stage their spectacular comeback through brute force instead of a rapprochement with the then Afghan government under the aegis of Western powers.

In any case, there were widespread concerns that the Taliban would reintroduce the system of gender segregation they first instituted when the group ruled the country in the late 1990s. The code banned women and girls from virtually all areas of public life, in addition to denying them the right to vote and access to education.

It sounded like betrayal when, speaking to reporters ahead of the 4 July weekend, Biden said "The Afghans are gonna have to do it themselves."

Melina, a high school graduate in Herat's Obe district, said in an interview that she barely managed to complete her own education before the Taliban captured her distant mountainous area.

As the Taliban tightened their hold of her area, warnings piled up. "One day, we found burial shrouds that the Taliban had sent to our school, saying "any girl continuing school will wear these," said Melina.

In early May, insurgents targeted a school attended mostly by Shia Hazara girls, a minority forced to leave schools in Kabul. Media reports spoke of "Blood stained backpacks and charred notebooks ... strewn among their dead bodies".

Kabul blamed the Taliban, who denied responsibility and condemned the attacks, pointing the finger at the Islamic State.

It is no secret that violence against women has been a consistent element in the lives of Afghan women. Studies suggest that 87 percent of Afghan women experience abuse in their lifetime.

Taliban's basic interpretation of Islam draws heavily on conservative Pashtun customs. They are bent on imposing their obscurantist code on the Afghan state and society like a straitjacket in their pursuit for an ideal and just Islamic society.

Their pursuit has unleashed a wave of repressive politics that has restricted the country's female population to their homes. On 23 March 2022, the de facto rulers of Afghanistan "reversed a decision to allow Afghan girls to return to high schools, saying a ruling is still to be made on the uniforms they must wear", according to BBC.

"Schools were set to open nationwide after months of restrictions since the Taliban seized power in August. But the education ministry abruptly announced girls' secondary schools would stay shut, causing confusion."

"Some girls were in tears as parents and students reacted with anger and disappointment to the last-minute move. Many had

earlier talked of how happy and excited they were to be back in the classroom.”

In 2001, during the original Taliban rule, Laura Bush spoke out on Taliban oppression of women and children inside Afghanistan on the weekly radio address normally delivered by President Bush.

“Life under the Taliban is so hard and repressive, even small displays of joy are outlawed”, she said. “Long before the current war began, the Taliban and its terrorist allies were making the lives of children and women in Afghanistan miserable.”

While Laura Bush highlighted a detailed image of the horrors of Taliban rule and linked the war on terror with liberation of women from a very misogynist regime, she omitted the critical history that lead up to this.

To quote Kim Berry of Berry of Humboldt State University: “The very fact that there is an extensive history of American support for the Taliban and its precursors was ignored by Laura. During the Soviet-Afghan war during 1979-1989, the United States and its allies funneled about USD 10 billion to the fundamentalist mujahideen.”

Berry believes this created the “material ideological conditions for the eventual domination of the islamists in Afghan politics”

In an article published in Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, she argues that “without proper critical analysis we run a risk of using Afghan women as symbols and pawns in a geopolitical war, thereby muting their diverse needs and interests and foreclosing the possibility of contributing to the realization of their self-defined priorities and aspirations.”

After the Soviets withdrew their forces from Afghanistan in 1989, Afghanistan descended into anarchy as mujahedeen warlords battled it out among themselves. This was why the people of Afghanistan to openly welcomed the Taliban, who promised peace and order. The Taliban forces were made up with elements of the mujahedeen mainly in the context of law and order.

In the meantime Americans were preoccupied with the prospects of a natural gas pipeline to be built by Unocal, a

Texas-based oil company, and a Taliban crackdown on opium – matters that somehow eclipsed women’s issues.

However, at least in oratory, things changed significantly after the 9/11 attacks. For instance, Laura Bush addressed the general public saying the fight against terrorism was also a fight for the rights of women.

Representative Carolyn Maloney wore a burqa to Congress, while the State Department issued a report detailing Taliban misogyny. The mainstream media did its part by publishing an article titled “Lifting the veil” that discussed the terrors unleashed by the Taliban on Afghan women.



However, the war that so bravely spoke about protecting the rights of women in Afghanistan miserably failed. The Northern Alliance, allied with US-led invasion forces, had former mujahedeen members every bit as militantly patriarchal as the Taliban.

Anti-Taliban allies like General Rashid Dostum were charged by human rights groups with “mass killings, torture, abduction, and rape.” In the meanwhile several bombs and airstrikes had injured and killed civilians which included women and children.

Berry says the talk about protecting the rights of women had put a halo of feminism on the head of this war.

Ironically, both the Taliban and the Americans used women as a symbol for their respective causes. For the Taliban, control over women symbolized the amalgamation of Pashtun traditions and a radical interpretation of Islam, that seemed to them as an ideal Islamic society. For the Americans, Afghan women were used as a way to make their bomb campaigns and their “war on terror” permissible.

In the years following 9/11, more women entered the workforce and more girls went to school. But – as senior political analyst Marwan Bishara wrote in 2021 – “Afghans continued to suffer from widespread poverty, illiteracy, and patriarchy compounded by violence, repression and war, hurting women first and foremost.”

“Afghanistan became a ‘forgotten war’ and the cause of its women disremembered until recently when the Trump administration basically handed Afghanistan back to the Taliban and the Biden administration withdrew US forces rather humiliatingly from the country.”

Despite all the sentimentality of first lady Laura Bush and others and all the good intentions of successive United States administrations, Afghan women remained powerless through all these years. Today they are more powerless than ever before. Will there ever be a reckoning for how we got here?

A 3-Billion-Dollar Question

How the subsidies announced by PM Khan last month threaten to derail Pakistan's IMF bailout



By Mehtab Haider

By all accounts, balancing the budget for the next fiscal year promises to be a herculean task for whoever is at the helm of affairs by June. Even more urgent and challenging, however, is the balancing of the books for the current fiscal to the satisfaction of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the wake of the subsidies announced recently by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Pak-IMF parleys as part of the seventh review of the Fund's EFF (Extended Fund Facility) program for Pakistan are on a slow burn because of the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Khan. Will the government that emerges from the chaos eventually be able to keep the program alive is a 3-billion-dollar question?

Balancing the budget for the fiscal year 2022-23 would be daunting because Islamabad would have external financing requirements of USD 34 to USD 35 billion in the next fiscal year. The government will have to face a catch-22 situation whereby it will have to present a budget to show its alignment with the IMF to keep the Fund program afloat and on the other hand, it will have to take measures to save inflation-hit

masses from further price hike.

Now there is need to ascertain basic facts that resulted into creating major stumbling block in the way for finalizing pending 7th review under the USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Pakistan so far secured USD 3 billion funding out of the USD 6 billion EFF program the IMF and three reviews were pending including 7th, 8th, and 9th reviews and the IMF program would be completed by September 2022.

There is another possibility in case of changing political environment and if the no confidence motion succeeds, the IMF may club seventh and eighth reviews together which it would be concluded in June 2022, around the time the budget for the next fiscal year is presented.

The major stalemate surfaced on the account of changing macroeconomic and fiscal framework that made impossible for the IMF for striking staff level agreement with the IMF.

The macroeconomic figures changed mainly because the government approved rebasing of national accounts after which the size of the economy

increased in the last fiscal year from PKR 48 trillion to PKR 55.5 trillion. Now for the current fiscal year, the size of the economy is expected to touch PKR 63.8 trillion. The whole Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) needs major revisions.

Secondly, the PTI led government unveiled Prime Minister's Relief Package by slashing petrol and diesel prices by PKR 10 per liter and freezing the prices at the existing levels till 30 June 2022. It also reduced electricity prices by PKR 5 per unit.

The government also announced Kamyab Pakistan Program (KPP) offering subsidized loans; and a Tax Amnesty Scheme for industrial sector.

Now the IMF raised serious objections on these measures. The Fund staff say the government's financing projections are much lower than the actual financing required to fund these programs. They also argue these programs will lead to financial indiscipline.

The IMF estimates that the PM's Relief Package for reducing petrol, diesel and electricity prices and provisions of loans under the much-hyped Kamyab Pakistan Program (KPP) will cost the

national exchequer around PKR 425 billion, double the officially projected PKR 220 billion amount.

It is also argued that since the government has underestimated the financing requirements, if it calculates accurately then the budget deficit and primary deficit might worsen further in the current fiscal year.

The IMF made these calculations based on existing prices of POL products in the international market. The petrol and diesel prices stood at USD 120 per barrel in international market, which according to the Fund staff, requires at least PKR 55 billion per month subsidy and in totality will require PKR 220 billion in the four-month period (March-June) of the current fiscal year to finance the financial requirements. The consumption of diesel stood at 625,000 tons and MS Petrol 700,000 tons on monthly basis.

The government had estimated much lower estimates because the price in international market at time of devising this package stood at USD 85 per barrel while they had estimated that it could go up to USD 95 per barrel maximum. The rupee stood at PKR 178 against US dollar at that time which had now crossed PKR 182 against US dollar.

The electricity tariff reduction of PKR 5 per unit for the four-month period will have a financial impact of PKR 136 billion. The

IMF has also assessed that Kamyab Pakistan Program (KPP) will cost subsidy of PKR 69 billion in the four-month period. In all, the financing requirement for the remaining period of the current fiscal year will go up to PKR 425 billion.

The IMF also points out that the tax amnesty for industrial sector is in breach of standing structural benchmarks agreed by Islamabad at the conclusion of the sixth review of the IMF program.

The foreign currency reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) have started to deplete, nosediving by USD 869 million in the one-week period ending 18 March 2022. This poses a serious risk for eruption of a balance of payment crisis at a time of political turmoil in the context of no confidence motion against the prime minister.

According to the Ministry of Finance, "Negotiations under the 7th review are continuing as planned and the two sides remain engaged on a regular basis at a technical level through virtual meetings and data sharing".

The ministry further said that the focus of negotiations under the seventh review had been on the agreed targets between the two sides, as well as the recently announced relief and industrial promotion packages. There is a consensus that all the end-December agreed targets have been

achieved, while progress on other actions mentioned in the Memorandum on Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) for the sixth review has also been found to be satisfactory.

Independent economists believe the success of Pakistan's ongoing talks with the IMF would be immensely important. According to the IMF's assessment, Pakistan's external financing needs for FY22 stand at USD 30 to USD 32 billion.

The recent freezing of prices of petroleum products in the country adds a new dimension in ongoing parleys with the IMF as over-all amount of subsidy or the Price Differential Claims (PDC) needed due to oil price freeze has increased from prior estimates, as oil trades over USD 121 and rupee depreciates to PKR 182 to a dollar.

In addition, electricity subsidy of PKR 5 and Kamyab Pakistan and Ehsaas Program interventions and scholarships for four months add further financing needs. If full payments from the exchequer are not made, there is a risk of a new circular debt building.

This means firm commitment on dividends from SOEs, a cut in PSDP, provinces pitching in, and FBR making PKR 6.1 trillion in FY22 are all necessary conditions for the successful conclusion of the Fund program.



Tool Little Too Late - and Too Controversial

PM Khan's relief package has riled up the IMF without easing the burden of the common citizen



By Javed Mahmood

Trade deficit has increased alarmingly, to USD 29.87 billion in eight months of the ongoing financial year in comparison with USD 17.31 billion deficit in the same period in the last financial year. Thus, more than USD 12 billion growth in the trade deficit has expanded the current account deficit in the first eight months of 2021-22 and also deteriorating value of rupee against dollar.

From 1 March 2022, Prime Minister Imran Khan has reduced petrol and diesel prices by 10 rupees a liter along with 5 rupees a unit decrease in the tariff of electricity with the promise that these prices will be capped until the new budget, starting July 2022.

PM Khan reduced domestic oil prices at a time when the crude oil international prices have breached USD 100/barrel and further hit USD 126 a barrel record high mark soon after Russian invasion of Ukraine. Later on, the crude oil prices plunged to below USD 100 per barrel.

Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the following relief measures:

- PKR 10 and PKR 5 decrease in petrol and electricity prices, respectively
- No increase in petrol and electricity prices until the next budget

- Tax exemption for companies and freelancers in IT sector
- Foreign exchange exemption
- Exemption from capital gain tax for IT startups
- Skills-based internships for graduates
- Ehsaas stipend increased to PKR 14,000 from PKR 12,000

The PTI government has upheld its promise of maintaining domestic oil prices to 1st March 2022 level. Nonetheless, NEPRA has approved about six rupees per unit hike in the electricity tariff just a week after the Premier said that there will be no hike in the cost of electricity when he reduced the tariff by five rupees a unit.

Thus, in April the consumers would see the impact of a massive hike in the power tariff in the name of fuel cost adjustment (FCA for the month of Feb). Data gathered by The Truth International (TTI) reveals that the government is extorting billions of rupees every months from the power consumers through its fuel adjustment cost.

For some reason, the government finds this it acceptable to strap people with this additional cost to overcome the problem of circular debt. Instead of recovering stuck up over two trillions rupees energy debt from the stakehold-

ers and minimizing the theft of electricity, the government is choosing the easiest path of recover billions of rupees additional revenue from the power consumers to partially off-set the impact of circular debt.

PM Khan's decision of reducing the oil prices has given an immediate relief to the motorists nationwide who are saving 10 rupees on each liter since 1 March, but frankly speaking, the general public did not get any benefit of this decision that was expected from the reduction in the fares of public transport.

Almost all the public transport companies and online ride hailing services are charging the same amount of fare that they were charging before reduction in the domestic oil prices. Nor did the PTI government take any interest to influence the public transport companies whether online or offline to pass on to travelers the benefit of cut in oil prices.

Another important issue that surfaced soon after the announcement of this relief programme was the objection of the IMF which has questioned the subsidy programme during the recent seventh review of economy of Pakistan.

The PTI government has anticipated total cost of the subsidy equal to USD 1.5 billion.

How the government would manage it and from where amount would be generated? The IMF officials have raised these questions from the government's team during recent discussion for the seventh review of the economy.

So far, a deadlock is prevailing between the government and the IMF over the subsidy programme and completion of the seventh review which ended a few days ago. As the Prime Minister is facing a no-confidence move from the opposition, none of the PTI government's officials and elected representatives are showing worry about the IMF's objection to subsidy programme and all eyes are on the outcome of the no-trust move.

Deadlock between IMF and government over relief package

A deadlock is persisting between the IMF and the government over the relief package and seventh review of the economic performance of Pakistan. The officials of IMF have estimated more than 400 billion rupees expenditures under the relief programme and Kamyab Pakistan Programme against the government's estimate of about 220 billion rupees subsidy. This deadlock is expected to end once the mystery surrounding the no-confidence move ends probably by the first week of April.

Yawning deficits and declining forex reserves

The State Bank of Pakistan has reported a huge decline of USD 870 million in its

foreign exchange reserves till 18 March 2022, on account of debt repayment and a widening trade imbalance though the current account deficit has squeezed to just half a billion dollars in February 2022 from USD 2.5 billion in January 2022.

The central bank's reserves have fallen below USD 15 billion by mid-March because of the two main causes quoted above. The trade deficit has widened alarmingly, mounting to USD 29.87 billion in eight months of the ongoing financial year in comparison with USD 17.31 billion deficit in the same period in last financial year.

Thus, more than USD 12 billion growth in the trade deficit has pushed up the current account deficit in the first eight months of 2021-22.

Another worrisome aspect is that rupee continues to slide despite a big dent in the current account deficit in the month of February this year. The dollar-rupee exchange rate has seen further deterioration with record increase in value of the green-back, which crossed 181.70 rupees in the inter-bank operations in the third week of March, amid deepening political uncertainty.

Experts say the wait-and-see approach of the government in the wake of a no-confidence move against Prime Minister Imran Khan in the National Assembly has encouraged some market players to manipulate value of dollar and other major currencies to mint as much money as they wish.

Current account deficit has exceeded USD 12.32 billion mark in the first eight months of ongoing fiscal year (July-February 2022).

A good development was that the CAD has shown a big dent and it dropped to USD 575 million in Feb-2022, in comparison with USD 2.56 billion in Jan-2022.

This indicated that the government's measures taken to contain unwanted current account deficit have started yielding the desired results from Feb-2022. From July 2021 to Feb 2022, Pakistan has suffered a total of USD 12.324 billion current account deficit against a surplus of USD 807 million in the corresponding period of previous financial year.

Trade deficit has increased alarmingly, to USD 29.87 billion in eight months of the ongoing financial year in comparison with USD 17.31 billion trade deficit in the same period in last financial year. Thus, more than USD 12 billion growth in the trade deficit has expanded the current account deficit in the first eight months of 2021-22, according to the latest data of the State Bank of Pakistan.

Experts attribute this spike to high international prices of crude oil, gas, edible oil, and other commodities.

Earlier, the current account deficit of Pakistan had widened to beyond USD 11 billion in first seven months of the ongoing fiscal year. During July 2021 to January 2022, the current account deficit of Pakistan expanded to USD 11.58 billion in comparison with USD 1.05 billion surplus current account balance in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal year.



Iron Brothers are Haggling Over Trade Concessions and Market Access

Pakistani business community is unhappy with how the trade balance is tilted in favour of China



By Azeem Waqas

Pakistan is considering to renegotiate the Free Trade Agreement with China – one of its major trading partners, amid the rising imbalance of bilateral trade.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to China, Pakistan asked to enhance the scope of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and an increase in the quota of rice and sugar for Pakistani exporters. It has also asked China to abolish the 4 percent duty it charges on imports of Pakistani cement.

Chinese side has agreed to give a quota of 2 million ton of rice to Pakistani exporters but there is no word on the abolition of 4 percent duty on cement imports from Pakistan, the Truth International (TTI) has learned.

Pakistan wants more concessions exclusive to its products, like rice, to have more market access and to increase its share in bilateral trade, sources at the Ministry of Commerce said.

Source said that the 2nd phase of the FTA with China has not yielded the expected results for Pakistan so far as the trade balance is in favor of China. Under the FTA, 38 items exportable to China have not produced the desired benefit to the Pakistan.

Prime Minister Special Assistant on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) affairs, Khalid Mansoor, said, “The Prime Minister presented a pitch book to Chinese President, Xi Jinping and Prime Minister, Li Kiqiang.”

“Top leadership of 19 Chinese companies met with the Prime Minister during his recent visit to China. These companies expressed intentions to invest in various sectors including relocation of their labour-intensive industries in Special Economic Zones of Pakistan. Follow up meetings are being held with all of these companies to ensure expeditious development and execution of their respective projects”.

He said that the proposed projects include a wide range, from Metal & Paper recycling, Information Technology including Semiconductor design and testing facility, Infrastructure projects including Housing units, Energy, Industrial and Agriculture projects.

Pakistan imports 27.54 percent of its goods from China. According to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Pakistan has made payment of USD 11.28 billion to China from July to February 2021. From July to June 2021- Out of USD 56.37 billion imports Pakistan Imported USD 15.52 billion worth of goods from China.

In 2021 Pakistan's total Exports to China was only USD 2.043 billion, during the last eight months Pakistan's exports to China are USD 1.84 billion.

Trade volume between Pakistan and China is roughly USD 20 billion which is highly in favour of China. A study conducted by the Pakistan Business Council (PBC) showed

that although 7,550 products were covered under China Pakistan FTA for Pakistan's export to China list, Pakistani exports were only concentrated in 350 product lines making it 4.6 percent of the total concessional products.

By comparison, imports from China to Pakistan were recorded in 3,800 products out of 6,803 products, on which Pakistan offered concessions. Hence China utilized 55.87 percent out of the total products.

"The Pakistani side is constantly working with our Chinese counterparts to improve the bilateral balance of trade", says Khalid Mansoor.

He adds: "During the recent visit of PM to China, CPEC Authority, after comprehensive research, has compiled a Pitch Book containing general comparative and competitive advantages of Pakistan and labour-intensive industrial sectors where Pakistan has competitive advantage". The sectors identified for preferential Chinese investment are: Textiles; Footwear; Automotive; Furniture; Pharmaceuticals; Information Technology; and Agriculture.

It is learned that Pakistan has started drafting a renegotiation exercise concerning these export items to China. Pakistan and China are expected to renegotiate the current phase of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) benefits as the trade results for 38 export items to China have not been very encouraging.

During 2021 Pakistan imported Electrical, electronic equipment worth USD 4.93 Billion, Pharmaceutical products USD 1.85 billion, mineral fuels, oils and distillation products USD 1.49 billion, organic chemicals USD 1.13 billion, Iron and steel USD 1.06 billion.

Pakistani business community has expressed concerns over Chinese suppliers, who are getting heavy tax exemptions. Chief Executive of the Amreli Steel Mills, Abbas Akbar Ali has said that Federal government has issued two SROs 9916 and 9917, under which materials of anything and everything is being imported free of duty from China.

"We have suggested to amend these SROs to exclude cement, steel, building materials and cables manufactured in Pakistan", he

said. The proposed amendment will provide an opportunity of expansion and protection from Chinese suppliers, after this amendment Chinese exporters will be bound to pay due taxes in Pakistan.

One of the industrialists alleged that Chinese industrialists are supplying machinery more than 20 years old. He was of the opinion that the government should not allow more than 5 to 7 years old machinery to be imported by Chinese companies.

Pakistan's domestic industries raised concern over the ineffectiveness of the first phase in protecting the local industry from competitive Chinese imports.



Former Chairman Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industries has said that Free trade agreement is damaging Pakistani industries. Due to Chinese imports toys, footwear, bicycles, automobiles, and other industries are closed. Pakistan should take care of its industries and formulate its long term policy.

Pakistan approved sweeping tax concessions for Chinese operators at the deep-sea Gwadar port and businesses that will operate in the Gwadar Free Zone for up to 40 years.

The government also approved a complete income tax holiday for 23 years to businesses that will be established in the Gwadar Free Zone

Khalid Mansoor said that CPFTA-2 should significantly improve Pakistani exporters' access to the Chinese import market and thus help address the country's ballooning trade deficit.

Phase I of the China Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) was widely criticized

for failing to provide preferential access for Pakistani exports to the large Chinese markets. The second phase of the China Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) spanning 2019-2024 was finalized after comprehensive negotiations between the two countries in early 2019 and entered its implementation phase from 1 January 2020.

Pakistan is now focused on major Chinese imports from all over the world in which we have export competitiveness.

Khalid Mansoor emphasizes that the CPFTA-2 caters not only to the protection for our domestic industry through tariffs on domestically produced products but also

provides an additional safety valve through inclusion of more robust safeguard measures and the inclusion of the balance of payments clause

He says Pakistan needs to improve export competitiveness through, transfer of technology and rapid industrialization under CPEC; design and implement a long-term strategy to upgrade productivity of firms that fosters competition and innovation and maximizes export potential; long-term uniform and competitive energy tariffs for export oriented industry; consolidate market intelligence services by supporting new exporters and evaluating the impact of current interventions to increase their effectiveness; gradually reduce effective rates of protection through a long-term tariff rationalization strategy to encourage exports; reallocate export financing away from working capital and into capacity expansion through the Long-Term Financing Facility.

Economy and the political uncertainty

Whoever prevails in the parliament will have to live with a global commodity price-hike and a possible global recession



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Economic activity declines when there is uncertainty. A climate of uncertainty negatively affects consumers, businesses, investors, financial markets and most importantly, economic policymakers. They are compelled to make short-term policies in a shortened horizon that are suboptimal.

Like most developing countries, Pakistan faces great uncertainty. One may argue that these uncertainties, mainly originating from chronic political instability, have hampered Pakistan's economic growth the most. Political compulsions under these circumstances have led to short-term macroeconomic policies and a more frequent change of policies than is desirable.

A cursory look at the past two decades of economic policymaking in Pakistan, for example, will reveal that most economic policies that the parties in opposition have opposed were policies they themselves had tried to implement when in power.

Let me give you a few examples of how the political economy of economic policymaking negatively affects our economic performance. The energy circular debt (ECD), which over the years, has accumulated to Rs 2.6 trillion (equal to two years' defense budget) takes its origin from providing

energy (oil, gas, and electricity) to consumers, due to political compulsions, at rates lower than the cost of imports, electricity generation and distribution.

In the run-up to the 2008 general elections, when international oil prices doubled (from \$55 to \$110) from January 2007 to March 2008, the Shaukat Aziz government increased domestic prices by only 9 percent. The impact of oil prices too was not passed on to the consumers.

International oil prices kept on increasing for the next few years. By 2011, Pakistan had reached a stage where the power sector required Rs 3 billion a day to buy fuel, whereas collection from consumers amounted to less than Rs 1 billion a day. The low collection was due to low tariffs as well as power theft. The result was that the private businesses stopped generating power for want of liquidity, and Pakistan witnessed an unprecedented load-shedding from 2008 to 2013.

The PML-N government (2013-2018) fulfilled its energy manifesto by ending load-shedding through Chinese investment in the power sector under the CPEC. When global oil prices dipped to a record low of \$20-30 a barrel, the government had an opportunity to reduce the ECD by keeping

the electricity tariff higher than the cost of production. It chose not to do so. There was instead an increase in the ECD, thanks to the "capacity payment charges" the government had to pay the independent power producers for not buying enough electricity from them.

The PTI government took the unpopular measure to curtail the ECD by demanding that consumers (barring life-line consumers) pay the cost of energy generation. However, it did not find implementing the decision easy in an unstable political environment. The prime minister has, on several occasions rejected OGRA's/NEPRA's recommendations for an increase in petrol/ electricity prices (resulting in an increase in the ECD).

Global energy prices are rising amid the Russia-Ukraine crisis. However, the domestic prices have been frozen until June 30. The popular relief to the masses will come at the cost of ECD accumulation.

Like ECD, the deterioration in public sector enterprises (PSE) may also be attributed to chronic political instability. Political appointments have been a factor in massive losses. Successive governments have failed to privatise these because of political opposition to layoffs and allega-

tions by the opposition of lack of transparency on the privatisation process.

The IMF is waiting for the result of the no-confidence motion against the prime minister to determine the next steps in its seventh review mission. The result will determine with whom the IMF engages on critical structural benchmarks.

The Supreme Court thwarted attempts by the Shaukat Aziz government to privatise Pakistan Steel Mills. The PPP government's efforts to privatise met resistance from the PML-N and the JI. The PML-N government's efforts to privatise failed due to opposition from the PPP, the JI and the PTI. The PTI government has faced criticism of its privatisation plans from the PML-N, the PPP and the JI. Resultantly, loss-making PSEs remain a perennial problem. The World Bank estimates that total liabilities of loss-making PSEs in Pakistan range between 12 and 18 percent of the GDP.

Levying a value-added tax and documenting all sectors of economy is another issue that got politicised. The PPP government tried to introduce it as a reformed general sales tax (RGST) but had to abolish the idea due to staunch opposition from the traders and the PML-N.

The PML-N government too tried to introduce the RGST but failed. The current government, acting through a mini-budget, introduced a uniform rate of GST by withdrawing most of the sales tax exemptions. However, it has faced tough resistance from the opposition parties who have promised to revoke some of the measures taken in the mini-budget whenever they come to power.

The State Bank of Pakistan Act amendment was also opposed. The PPP and PML-N governments had earlier amended the Act twice each as part of the IMF terms. The PPP and the PML-N have opposed the amendments brought in by the current government and vowed to reverse those.

The support price of wheat, maintaining artificially high exchange rates, manipulating the State Bank's policy rate, delay in entering an IMF programme and board energy subsidies are all examples of actions taken by governments under political pressure.

Pakistan has again been hit with heightened political uncertainty that has an economic impact both on the macro and micro levels. The IMF is waiting for the result of the no-confidence motion against the prime minister to determine the next steps of its seventh review mission. The result will determine with whom the IMF engages on critical structural benchmarks and quantitative targets under the current Extended Fund Facility programme.

Pakistan has asked China to roll over its debts and deposit an additional \$10 billion in the State Bank of Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves. China, too, is waiting for the outcome of the no-confidence vote before responding to Pakistan.

The government is occupied with handling the current political crisis. It has postponed a scheduled cabinet meeting for the fourth time in a row. Major decisions are being taken via 'circulation' that lacks the advantages of threadbare discussions at in-person meetings.

It can be argued that it is due to the ongoing political instability that the government has not been able to focus on strategies to counter commodity prices super-cycle and the brewing energy crisis as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The opposition too is under pressure in its choice of positions on economic matters. Promise to bring down the food, fuel and dollars prices are clearly unrealistic. Whoever prevails in the parliament next week will have to live with a global commodity price-hike and a possible global recession.

Politicising economic issues has not served the country. There is a need for all political parties, both on the treasury benches and the opposition benches, and the powers-that-be to come to an agreement concerning the formulation of a medium-term macroeconomic policy framework.

All concerned should offer pragmatic solutions to the economic challenges facing our country instead of issuing utopian wish lists. Once such a medium-term macroeconomic policy framework is agreed upon, the opposition should allow the government to implement it without opposing it. When its opponents come into power, the ruling party of today should be ready to support them in implementing the agenda.

An early end to political instability in Pakistan is unlikely. However, sincere efforts by all who matter can reduce the adverse effects of political instability on economic growth. The time to act is now.

Courtesy The News.



A Pandemic Slayer's Last War Plan

In his new book out this May, Bill Gates outlines how we can make COVID-19 the last pandemic



TTI Report

When Bill Gates and Paul Allen set the goal of “a computer on every desk and in every home”, “a lot of people thought we were out of our minds to imagine it was possible”. Some people today may have similar thoughts about his new goal, of banishing epidemics forever.

His new book, *How to Prevent the Next Pandemic*, is out 3 May 2022. How is that for an answer to all those conspiracy theories linking him with Covid-19?

One conspiracy theory says Gates is “planning to use a future COVID-19 vaccine to implant microchips in billions of people in order to monitor their movements”. There was no evidence to support the claim but it went viral nevertheless and won acceptance with certain audiences inside the United States as well as globally.

Ironically, global health has been a key theme for philanthropic spending by Bill Gates (through various instruments) along with climate change and education.

In June 2020, USA Today fact checked – and found true – a claim Gates has spent “30 years” of his life and “USD 50 billion” of his net worth “supporting humanitarian causes.”

Matthew Brown Wrote: “Bill Gates, who has been one of the wealthiest men in the world for decades, made his fortune as the co-founder of Microsoft. The company, which was a key player in the personal computer revolution in the 1990s,

eventually became a corporate behemoth, and Gates became a household name as a tech titan and business magnate.”

He goes on to relate how in 2010, Bill and Melinda Gates (alongside billionaire investor Warren Buffett) founded the “Giving Pledge,” a movement encouraging many billionaires to donate most of their wealth to charity either during their lifetimes or after their deaths.

The voluntary group now includes more than 200 families and individuals from more than 20 countries.

Brown says Bill and Melinda Gates have given USD 45.5 billion to charitable causes, including the eponymously named Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, since 1994, CNBC reported, citing the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

In 2019, the couple donated USD 589 million to charity, making them the seventh most philanthropic people that year. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the Gates family has pledged billions of dollars in donations and funding for efforts to fight the virus.

In February, Bill Gates announced, on his blog Gates Notes, his new book on pandemic prevention was due this May.

“I believe that COVID-19 can be the last pandemic”, says Gates in his blog post. “I know that might be hard to believe while we’re still trying to get COVID under control.

“The last two years have caused unbelievable amounts of hardship around the world, and it’s not easy to feel optimistic when you’ve endured the misery that so many people have experienced.

“But whenever I see the suffering that COVID has created—every time I read about the latest death toll or hear about someone who lost their job or drive by a school that is closed—I can’t help but think: We don’t have to do this again.”

The Microsoft founder says this is something he has been thinking about for a long time, and Covid-19 has only made it clearer that the world needs to prioritize eliminating pandemics as a threat to humanity.

Gates has been following COVID since the early days of the outbreak, working with experts inside and out of the Gates Foundation championing a more equitable response and fighting infectious diseases for decades.

“I’ve learned a lot in the process—both about this pandemic and how we stop the next one—and I want to share what I’ve heard with people”, he says. “So, I started writing a book about how we can make sure that no one suffers through a pandemic ever again.”

He goes on to say, “In the book, I lay out the specific steps we can take to not only stop future pandemics but, in the process, provide better health care for everyone around the world.

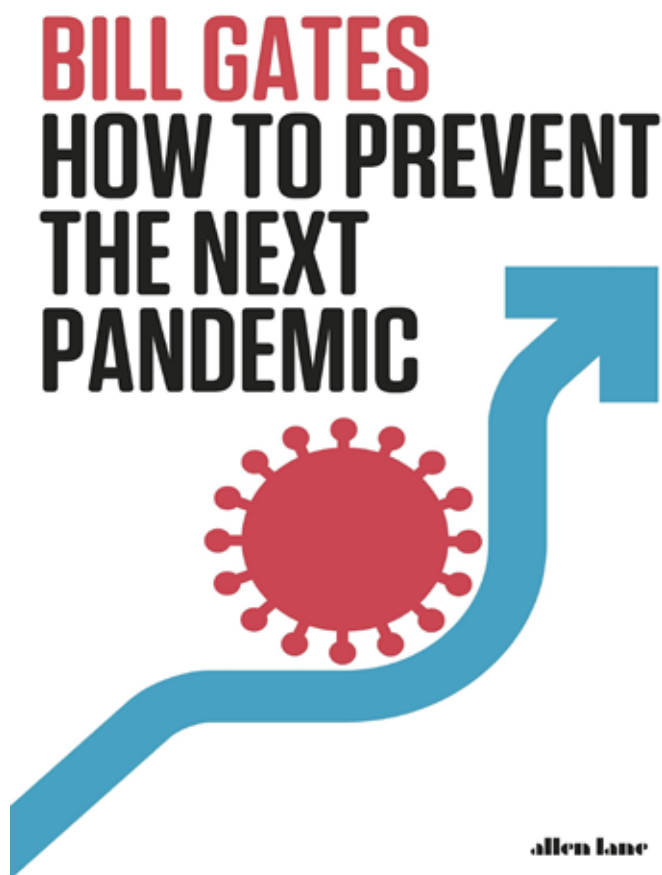
“I outline the lessons we can learn from this pandemic, the innovations we need to save lives, and the new tools we need to stop pathogens early and equitably.

“I also tell you about my regular conversations with public health leaders like Anthony Fauci and Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, my view of the vaccines that are stemming the tide, and what it’s been like to become the subject of conspiracy theories.

“The goal of no more pandemics ever is ambitious, but the progress we’ve made over the last two years—including the huge leaps forward we’ve made with vaccines and the knowledge we’ve gained about respiratory illnesses—has already set us on a path to success.

“The world now understands how seriously we should take pandemics, and momentum is on our side. No one needs to be convinced that an infectious disease could kill millions of people or shut down the global economy. If we make the right choices and investments, we can make COVID-19 the last pandemic.”

Due 3 May 2022, his book called How to Prevent the Next Pandemic is being published by Knopf in the US and Penguin Random House internationally.



Islamabad's Shiny New BRT is Ready for Commissioning

The new metro bus line will ply between the new Islamabad Airport and the city



By Asadullah

The wait is finally over, as the much-awaited metro bus service from Srinagar Highway Metro Bus Station to the new Islamabad International Airport is going to start in April, with buses expected to reach the Karachi port anytime in the current month.

The service was scheduled to start on 23 March – the Pakistan Day but the deadline was missed due to delays caused by procedural impediments thrown up by the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Thirty buses will ply the route according to the plan made by Capital Development Authority (CDA). Six of these will run nonstop between the Airport and Srinagar Highway Metro Station at Peshawar Mor, while the others will stop at every station on the way.

According to CDA chairman Amir Ahmed Ali, the non-stop Metro service will be like Heathrow Airport Underground Link that linked the airport with Central London where most of the city's hotels are.

Heathrow Express is a non-franchised, unsubsidised private company which runs up to 150 services a day between Paddington and Heathrow Airport. Launched in 1998, the non-stop service takes 15 minutes from Paddington to Terminals 2 & 3; and six minutes more to Terminal 5. It is a high-speed service link offering the fastest journey time between Heathrow Airport and central London.

The CDA chairman said that initially, it was planned that 06 busses would ply the route non-stop. However, during a reconciliation meeting, a brief stop has

been proposed for those intending to catch the airport bound bus from Rawalpindi.

The busses will provide affordable and hassle-free journey to and from the airport. Unlike Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi-Islamabad metro bus services that are provided over PKR 8 billion in subsidy every year, the airport metro will not be subsidised.

According to an estimate, one side fare of a non-stop bus from Peshawar Mor to Airport will be PKR 200. While this may seem somewhat expensive compared to those other metro bus services, it will still be a bargain compared with the PKR 3,000 to PKR 1,500 charged by taxicabs or the ride hailing services.

The 23 March launch was missed after the dispatch of buses from China was

delayed due to the observance of standard operating procedures (SOPs) adopted by the Chinese government for the Covid-19.

The Chinese supplier of buses was under obligation to get the buses inspected from foreign experts before shipping them. The team experts arrived in China's capital Beijing on schedule and quarantined for 14 days.

However, the team had to quarantine again when they visited the factory situated in another city, as per Chinese SOPs for Covid-19. Thus the delivery of the buses was delayed for another 14 days. Finally, the third-party pre-shipment inspection was completed in China earlier in March.

The CDA, after a competitive process had placed the order for procuring 30 buses to an Chinese bus manufacturing company called Higer Bus Company, which had submitted a bid of PKR 728 million for the 30 buses.

M/s Foton and Auto Park had submitted a bid of PKR 33 million against one bus while Master Motors Corporation offered PKR 29.8 million per bus. However, Higer Company submitted a bid of PKR 24.2

million against each bus.

The CDA took over the metro bus project in March last year from the National Highways Authority (NHA) on the direction of the federal government and started the process to procure the buses.

Construction of the bus track (25.6 kilometres) worth PKR 16 billion began in January 2017. The project was executed by NHA and it was supposed to be completed in August 2018. However, its civil work was completed last year.

What is more, a new issue arose after completion of civil work when NHA stated that its responsibility was only to construct corridors and do civil work and it had nothing to do with the operation of buses. Similarly, Punjab Mass Transit Authority, which is already running Rawalpindi-Islamabad Metro bus service also refused to run the service.

Then CDA was asked to do it, but it also refused after stating that being a development authority, it had nothing to do with operation of bus services. However, the federal government intervened and directed

the CDA to take over this project from NHA and take steps for starting operation of the bus service.

In March last year, NHA after construction of the corridor and stations handed over the project to the CDA.

CDA's PC-1 worth PKR 1.9 billion was approved for procuring 30 buses and set up a ticketing and command and control system was approved in 2020. However, the civic agency struggled to secure the release of funds from the federal government for the procurement of buses.

The corridors and stations of the metro track have already been constructed and now command and control, ticketing, station management, cleanliness and security systems have also been completed out of CDA's expense.

The next challenge was to find a bus operator for operation, management and maintenance of the service, for which the CDA initiated the process earlier in March 2022. The stage is now set for this big-ticket project to start bearing dividends in terms of public service and convenience.



The Road to Hell

Why we must judge people based on their actions and the consequences of those actions, and not based on their intentions

By Rana Azam

There is a famous saying, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”, meaning humans with good intentions sometimes indulge in wrongful activities or that their actions have unintended consequences. The difference between the aims and objectives of human activity proves that the course of history is not entirely in the power of man, nor is it external.

We think that we should stop here and explain the basic concepts (rationalities) related to our subject so that the scope for ambiguity is minimized. You know the level of development that human society has reached today.

The natural and social sciences have their own disciplines and sub-disciplines with separate rationales. It is not possible to get hold of the subject without knowing them. This is very important for the social science discipline.

The laws of natural science have been adopted to some extent by backward societies like ours. The main reason for this is that medical sciences are not class-based, even though there have been occasional instances in the Church where Galileo was charged and Giordano Bruno was burned alive.

These historical examples prove that class interests are influenced by the scientific view or the results of the arts for the philosophical justification and purpose of the information derived from the physical sciences. We also want to give examples from our Muslim tradition of how the Muslim elite inflicted indescribable atrocities on Al-Kandi and Ibn Rushd.

If anyone evaded persecution, it was Ghazali, because his philosophy perpetuated the rule of the ruling elite. But he avoided saying that as then his admirers would have the opportunity to say that he was not a scientist in the field of natural sciences. However, this is not entirely true. Therefore, it has been proved that it is not a matter of any one religion but class interests.



Let's start with where we left off. Dissemination of social rationality by interpretation, for example: What is man? How does he think? How to organize ideas? What is knowledge? Is wrong knowledge also knowledge? What is the difference between reality and truth? Why does human activity succeed or fail?

Let us clarify at the outset that there may be an overlap in the interpretations of these questions.

We will not go too far to Darwin for “what is man”. let it be said that man has not come down from anywhere but is the product of this planet. That is, man is a child of nature. As man progressed towards his perfection, the journey of thinking and understanding, as well as narration, continued.

The journey is not short but is spanned over thousands and even millions of years. This is not a thing of the past, but the process of understanding this thought was and is being interpreted in the spirit in the world society even today.

The soul and the body are considered to be two separate categories. For

example, we use statements like, the soul is released, has gone, has come. All perceptions about life and death are attached to this. However, a segment of society, based on medical knowledge, considers (mind) consciousness, conscience, wisdom, expression, etc., as products of the functioning of the human brain.

Let us expand on this to better understand the idea. Humans, animals, and all other species are born with two instincts (animal intellect), one is hunger and the other is reproduction. All other things continue to be additional and derivative which later arise under circumstances and events.

Time has made a very fundamental difference between animals and other species, and humans in contrast to these species. Animals have sexual intercourse only once in the cycle of their birth system. This act of animal is only instinctive while sexual desire is a very beautiful thing for human beings provided that it is lawful.

Knowledge is due to three things: Object, topic, subject. The third word is written by the language of Marx and Engels that language is “the immediate

reality of thought and a process of consciousness that exists for other human beings and for that reason it exists for me personally," since the object is not compelled by the subject for its existence, while the subject is the most advanced form of the object itself.

Object means any material object in nature, even nature itself, which falls into the category of verifiable or empirical.

The senses feed information to the mind. Critical thinking is only an attribute of the human mind, while the other attribute is to organize thoughts to dispel confusion. As the material world progresses, knowledge also progresses. This is a law.

But sometimes exceptions occur in history when knowledge goes on to guide the growth of the productive forces. This exception arises when the qualitative (social change) is at its peak. We must always be ready to accept exceptions in the process of social life.

Now let us see whether the correct knowledge is knowledge or whether the erroneous knowledge should be considered as knowledge. Scholars of knowledge believe that false knowledge is also knowledge. Even if the thoughts of Plato or Freud or Hegel have been overtaken, they cannot be denied the privilege of being leaders of philosophy owing to their practical services even if much of their knowledge has turned out to be flawed.

Reality and truth are two different categories. Reality is the manifestation of the object. There can be more than one reality of any object, that is, many manifestations. It depends on the viewer from which direction he looks.

Another definition of reality is that it is the antithesis of non-existence. Reality is subjective by itself because it is the mental layer of the object. Everything that makes a person happy in his life and activity, nature, society, everything exists in the inner world of man's thoughts and feelings and emotions.

To know more, a question can be asked here whether there is any contradiction between appearance and reality. The answer is that there is no contradiction, they are both components of the same

being. Despite this, there is a contradiction in appearance and reality.

It turns out that there are different layers of reality that are discoverable. It exists in a world beyond our minds. The basic essence of reality is the relationship which is the cause of unity in the innumerable manifestations of nature.

Lenin says, "The human mind gradually reaches from the manifestation to the reality with maximum depth, from one level (Order) to another level in such an endless series."

This guides human beings to the path of truth. Truth is not something that descends from the heights. Truth is an organized product of man's struggle with nature.

When we say that the universe is matter, we mean that truth has a secret relationship in the formation of the relationships or causes that determine all phenomena. It is a complex thing that survives and develops.

Because the seed is related to the universe and matter, we know to some extent what the truth is. There is no room for more now. The second question is how to reach the truth and what are its criteria. We have just copied the formula for access to truth in the form of a statement by Lenin.

There is nothing wrong with repeating after Lenin: "The human mind has to reach the reality from the highest manifestation to the highest level, from one level (order) to another level, and thus with an infinite series."

This endless series gives human beings access to the truth. Truth is formed in the human mind in the special complexity of the smallest reflection of reality and not merely as a single mass. But this approach becomes organized in a provided society through the scientific literature, debates, means of communication, facilities of laboratories, and experimental techniques.

The truth of life is decided by the process of life. Truth is only one in its time and reality while facts can be more than one. And it should be clear that truth does not belong to any one human being.

You know that when Marx and Engels first met in Paris in 1842, there was a consensus in all ideological spheres and this consensus became the basis of everlasting friendship.

Similarly, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace had reached the same conclusion (truth) at the same time.

Now, we come to the part where we talk about the main theme of this essay. What is human activity, and its purpose? And how can we assess the results of this activity?

This process is because life itself is dynamic. Everything in its stability is dynamic. Society is a system that exists externally and evolves. But this characteristic does not separate society from nature as an external object, because in both cases the operation of material systems and the laws of their transformation are studied.

Society is an external thing that is fundamentally different from nature because it also includes internal. That is why social sciences not only study a system of social relations, and the study of human beings not only as an element of a particular system and an organ of the social body but also as an individual who is capable of activity and creative endeavour and who has his spiritual world, his likes, dislikes.

Social sciences do not discuss man's inner world as merely the inner world, but rather study it as the first human activity from outside. But there is also a more general, philosophical concept of the principle of activity. Man is not only a conscious mind but also an active being. This is the process by which the social man changes the world and also changes himself.

The relationship between the external conditions and the laws of activity and the social-historical process, cannot be ignored when discussing the principles of activity.

These are the objective (external) and subjective (internal) laws that change any external object for man. It changes, and the goals, desires, and knowledge take objective and material form in human activity and its consequences. If these rules are unable to maintain the required balance for the success of any activity, then it does not matter how good our goals, aspirations, or intentions may be.

The Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution of 1905, despite all the good intentions and aspirations, were unable to prevent failure. The saying quoted at the beginning of this article rings particularly true of matters like these.

IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: It's Now or Never to Take Up Climate Action for A Livable Future

By Adeena Tahir

"The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss the brief, rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future."

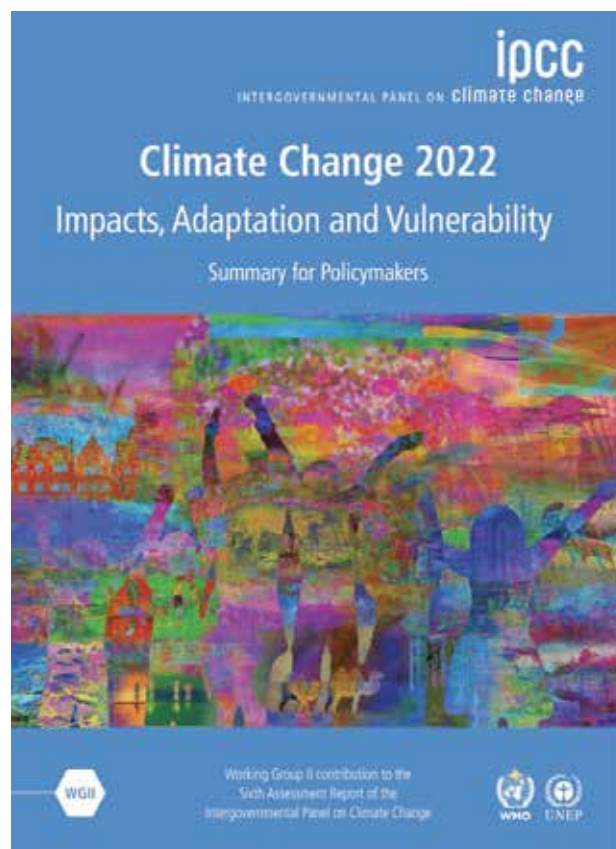
These are the profound words issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), at the launch of the Sixth Assessment Report titled Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. The report was developed by the Working Group of IPCC, which includes 270 authors from 67 countries, 43 percent of which are developing and 57 percent are developed economies. It is a moment of pride that one of the Drafting Contributing Authors was Ali Jamshed, belonging to Germany/Pakistan, giving Pakistan an important representation on this key initiative. The driving ambition for IPCC's working group is that growing scientific knowledge gives humans a better understanding of challenges, which in turn helps in advancing the ambition to overcome the global climate crisis.

Planet Earth, inherited from our ancestors and loaned to our children, is facing the perils of climate change, which is a global phenomenon of facing long-term changes in Earth's natural environment. The most notable of these trends include rising global temperatures, glacial melting rates, sea levels, and a rise in the frequency of disruptions in Earth's climate and weather systems. These changes are leading to a multitude of impacts, such as prolonged summers/winters, increased intensity of heat, ocean acidification, and greater incidences of climate-induced natural disasters like droughts, floods, coastal hurricanes, heatwaves, and many more.

Since the industrial revolution began in the 17th century, anthropic activities scaled up exponentially, resulting in large-scale emissions of greenhouse gases while also leading to a variety of unsustainable environmental and human interactions that leaves the natural ecosystem damaged and depleted. Since human societies, wildlife, ecosystems, and the climate are closely dependent upon each other, these manmade disruptions in the ecosystem and climate have left both humans and biodiversity at stake.

When it comes to flora and fauna, their species across land and water bodies (both freshwater, coastal, and oceanic) are suffering from changes in their habitats. Today, Planet Earth has all-time high extinction rates for wildlife, with an estimated 37,000 animal and plant species at the brink of extinction, making up 28 percent of all studied species.

For humans, climate change means that life as we know, will cease to exist, since changes will be felt in almost all human systems, be it societal, energy and infrastructure, economic, political, or behavioral systems.



The Sixth Assessment Report highlights some of the most prominently observed impacts from climate change. The effect of climate change on marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems and ecosystem services is significantly increasing with implications on water and food security, human settlements and infrastructure, health and wellbeing, economic productivity, and societal culture. Most notably, there has been a rise in the prevalence of inequality, social injustice, and poverty that can be correlated to the breakdown of ecosystem services available to humans and the disproportionate extraction and distribution of natural resources.

One way of understanding this domino effect is how in rural areas, climate change-induced incidences of floods and/or draughts has led to the loss of agricultural productivity, and this reduced farming activity leads to loss of livelihoods, incomes, culture, recreation, and food security, compelling the rural demographic to move to urban areas for a better quality living.

Since 2008, more than 20 million people are internally displaced annually by weather-related extreme events each year. Cities too are no longer safe, with the report observing that recent times have seen the most rapid rise in urban vulnerability and exposure to climate risks, especially pronounced in low and middle-income communities. The risks have economic consequences, where damage to property, infrastructure, supply chains requires large-scale funding to mitigate risks, repair damaged structures, and develop new ones. Thus, climate change has caused policymakers and public sector officials to incorporate the cost of mitigation and adaptation into budgeting practices.

When it comes to farming, food, and forestry, it is perhaps one of the most critical areas of impact from climate change, where the changes are being felt across the whole supply chain, from limiting the production and quality of crops to causing malnutrition, poverty, food insecurity, inflation, and disruptions in supply-demand.

Climate change is making our food unsafe for consumption, with higher temperatures and greater humidity supporting the outbreaks of toxigenic fungi on many food crops, and with algal blooms, vectors, and pathogens causing water-borne diseases in marine and freshwater ecosystems.

The report observed that the level of variations in Earth's ecosystems and climate are becoming more and more extreme, surpassing the resilience capacity of many environmental systems. This means that as the intensity and frequency of unprecedented events like floods and cyclones increase, the ability of ecological and human systems to cope with these events is reducing. This means that people and ecosystems are now more vulnerable to risks from climate change because they cannot survive, adapt, and thrive through such unprecedented changes.

Looking at the concept of vulnerability further, one realizes that not all people are equally exposed to risks and the population that is socially disadvantaged, economically deprived, and culturally mistreated such as women, children, people with disabilities, poor or low-income countries, indigenous peoples, etc., are impacted more by climate change since they do not have the resources to keep themselves safe or to respond better with a changing climate.

It thus also affects their physical and mental health, where people are feeling threatened, mistreated, ignored, and physically at risk. Vulnerability thus poses intersectional risks, causing social, economic, political, and cultural tensions, where some feel more marginalized than others.

The observed mortality from climate-induced disasters such as floods, droughts, and storms is 15 times higher for countries ranked as highly vulnerable compared to less vulnerable countries in the last decade.

Looking ahead, the risks from climate change are only getting grimmer, where the report projects that ecosystems and biodiversity loss, pollution, habitat fragmentation, food insecurity, poverty, and social injustice will only get exacerbated. The risks to ecosystems get accelerated with every one-tenth of a degree increase in global warming, meaning that we can only expect the frequency and severity of extreme weather events to increase with implications of an irreplaceable loss to humans and nature.

The risks for societies include added pressure on food production, uncontrolled urbanization, lack of social security, damages to infrastructure, and loss of lives and livelihoods. Out of all these, knowing that human life holds inequivalent value above all else, the estimate that 9 million climate-induced deaths can occur annually by the end of the 21st century leaves a mammoth existential crisis.

By 2030, the current population of 122 million living in extreme poverty can rise to 700 million, who will also be highly vulnerable to climate risks.

Towards adaptation, which is the process of making adjustments to survive and thrive through the projected and current climate change impacts, the Sixth Assessment Report makes a series of observations on current adaptation efforts. Although humans and natural systems are increasing their adaptive response to climate change impacts, gaps persist in planning and implementation. Adaptation looks different for every sector, for example in agriculture, this means earlier planting, soil management, water conservation, land restoration, and changing the genetic makeup of plants and livestock to be more resilient in new environmental conditions. The



report also recommends that adaptation planning should be systematic and follow a step-wise approach, to plan for near-term, long-term, low-regret actions scenarios separately.

Adaptation across all sectors requires climate financing, private sector, and citizen engagement, mobilization of resources, proactive political leadership, and accelerated R&D. The gap between climate financing and adaptation is so high that for example, Africa alone is receiving billions of dollars less than the adaptation expenditure against short-term impacts of climate change. Thus financial mobilization remains a key determinant for climate adaptation and one of the biggest limiting factors.

Another deficiency in climate change response is maladaptation, where inappropriate planning and response to current and foreseeable climate risks has further deteriorated the challenge. This includes unsustainable expansion of cities, unplanned infrastructure development, deforestation, costly irrigation techniques in dry areas, etc. Maladaptation poses a serious gap in our understanding of the complexity of issues and costs us time and money without achieving targets such as attaining SDGs and developing greener economies.



Ecosystem-based adaptation and conservation of biodiversity will be a key accelerator in climate adaptation efforts, because ecosystems that remain intact have higher carrying capacity against risks, provide a greater number of ecosystem services, and help in building overall resilience. Protecting the ecosystem is a blended effort that requires societal awareness and community-driven initiatives, proactive political leadership, proper planning, monitoring and evaluation for continued improvements, and localized adjustments that are key for success.

Another approach is finding synergy between adaptation efforts across various ecosystems and social domains, where some adaptation options carry mutual benefits for multiple stakeholders. By viewing the challenge holistically, adaptation solutions should be assessed through a geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political, and scientific lens. In cities and urban settlements, this intersectionality of benefits of holistic adaptation methodologies can be used as a crucial delivery instrument for climate action. Cities need well-researched and evidence-based approaches, that segment and prioritize areas for adaptation, build linkages, alleviate vulnerable populations, and make communities empowered and standing at the forefront of integrated adaptation approaches. Thus, the focus is aligning the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with country-wise National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions.

In coastal areas, adaptation requires providing inland space to coastal communities, building disaster response mechanisms, and protecting mangrove forests and seabed sediments. For coastal cities, a blended approach merging nature-based, socio-cultural, political, and urban planning and infrastructure solutions will ensure urban mobility, provision of secure accommodation, and protection against climate events. In agriculture and fisheries, water conservation, irrigation efficiency, agroforestry, agricultural diversification, and land protection will be important adaptation techniques. For water and food security in general, multisectoral approaches that address the human and economic dimensions of the environmental problem will be much more effective.

For managing environment and human interactions, sustainability should be the guiding principle and adaptation would include reallocation and distribution of resources, especially to climate-vulnerable populations, and would need a mix of social, political, economic, environmental, and governance interventions. This holistic approach would be critical in balancing eco vs. human needs, for example when starting an afforestation program, the rights of forests and rights of indigenous peoples should be viewed as equally important to meet. To ensure that the interactions are being managed sustainably, principles of equality, social justice, equity, gender rights, and community consent are paramount and provide the basis of participatory policymaking, planning, and implementation of any intervention geared for people, planet, and profits.

Another benefit of multisectoral adaptation efforts is that one action can improve the situation across various paradigms of human society. Taking climate adaptations in the health sector as one example, health and wellness interventions include improving the quality of drinking water and air, provision of proper sanitation, overcoming malnutrition and food shortages, providing safer shelters from adverse weather conditions, and creating higher quality livelihoods. These would not only contribute to protecting human health but would lead to overall economic prosperity, social cohesion and satisfaction, environmental protection, and sustainable cities.

Other adaptation options that build a strong nexus with UN sustainable development goals include sustainable forest management, disaster risk management, livelihood diversification, water use efficiency and management, energy reliability and reliant power systems, improved cropland management, and so on.

Thus, as we are advancing in the UN's Decade of Action, there has never been an urgency as great as it is today, to take firm action on climate change. Through experimenting with innovative adaptation and mitigation pathways, creating synergies, and accelerating sustainable development efforts, humans have to act now to secure a livable future for all.

Hopefully, the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report, coined by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as 'a code red for humanity' will raise enough alarm bells to awaken the global community on the impending loom that awaits us all if we do not take climate action now.

The Terrible Toll Climate Change Is Imposing on UK's Archaeological Remains

Every day, we discover a new aspect of the destruction climate change is wreaking on our world



Desk Report

News coming from the UK suggest archaeological remains at some 22,500 sites in the country may be in danger as the soils that protect them dry out due to climate change. This means climate change could undermine our future generations' understanding of our past.

"The problem is that changing weather patterns are drying out some peatlands – the waterlogged soils that cover about 10 percent of the UK", BBC Climate Editor Justin Rowlatt recently wrote.

While an archaeologist working at a "dry" site might find 10 percent of what was once there, at a peatland site they may find as much as 90 percent of the material culture of ancient communities, say archaeologists.

"Because peat contains very little oxygen, organic materials like wood, leather and textiles do not rot. They can survive for thousands of years, preserved by the stable anoxic chemistry of the soil."

But if the soils dry, oxygen can enter the system, kick-starting the process of decomposition. If that happens artefacts can, quite quickly, rot away. Excavating these poten-

tially huge sites could cost hundreds of millions of pounds and take decades, by which time they may have been badly damaged.

The trustees of Magna, a Roman fort alongside Hadrian's Wall, fear the process is already under way at the site. The warnings come as celebrations for the 1,900th anniversary of the start of construction of the wall begin this week.

The land at Magna has subsided by up to a metre in places in the past decade. It is evidence of "desiccation" - the drying of the peat layer - fears Dr Andrew Birley, the chief archaeologist at the site.

It means "an historical time capsule" is at risk, he says, because only a tiny part of the site has so far been excavated.

"This place has the potential to be quite frankly, amazing," Dr Birley believes. "Pretty much everything the Romans used here for 300 or 400 years could have been preserved in more or less the same state it was thrown away, which is an incredible opportunity."

Another fort a few miles along Hadrian's Wall gives an idea of the astonishing objects that could lie hidden at Magna.

Digs at Vindolanda have uncovered the world's oldest boxing gloves - so well-preserved that you can still see the imprint of the boxer's knuckles on one. More Roman footwear has been discovered here than at any other site in the world.

Day-to-day objects like this provide a unique connection to the lives of ordinary people in ancient times.

"This sort of stuff doesn't normally survive", says Dr Birley, who works at both sites. "It can give us amazing insights into what life was really like here on the Northern frontier almost 2,000 years ago."

He says the priority at Magna now is to try to work out what is happening underground. Boreholes have been dug, and electronic equipment measures the water flow and temperature every hour.

At Teesside University, Dr Gillian Taylor is analysing the chemicals in soil cores from the site to try to understand the processes at

work. It would be a “catastrophe” for any organic artefacts if the peat dries, she says.

“The risk is they will disappear. We will lose our heritage if we don’t look at what’s occurring now.”

Fearing the worst, Dr Birley is planning to dig the first test trenches at the site next year. As a small charity, it’s the earliest they can start given the cost and labour needed.

He says if it looks like the condition of the peat is changing rapidly and the treasures could be lost, a full excavation may be necessary.

And changing weather patterns are not just threatening the survival of Roman remains. Experts estimate that there are about 22,500 archaeological sites in or beneath peat in the UK.

Dr Rosie Everett, of Northumbria University, is part of a team that has been assessing the effect of climate change on peatland archaeology across the UK. She says a host of historic sites in peatlands are under threat, covering the entire sweep of the country’s history.

There are Palaeolithic pathways up to

12,000 years old, and Bronze Age burial sites as well as the remains of more modern settlements and industrial activities. “Peatlands represent such a small part of the ecology of Britain, but they have massive potential to tell us about our past,” says Dr Everett.

“The loss of peatlands would have big implications for the understanding of the country’s history but also for our climatic history and our environmental history,” says Dr Everett. That’s why she believes there should be greater efforts to protect them.

Dr Birley agrees. “If we lose places like this, we lose that direct connection to the people who lived in this island 2000 years ago,” he says. “We lose the chance to learn as much as we can about them. And we lose part of our own heritage and part of our own history.”

Climate experts and activists have long cried themselves hoarse over the brewing climate emergency. Government leaders profess to heed their calls but have been notoriously tardy in taking radical action.

Late last year, the UK hosted the 26th UN

Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) at the Scottish Event Campus (SEC) in Glasgow. The high-profile event brought together heads of state, climate experts, and campaigners from around the world to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change.

However, the eventual accord reached by the parties was widely deemed as inadequate.

Late last month, UK’s green light for a new oil and gas project in the North Sea, coming just months after the UK hosted the COP26 climate change summit, attracted broad criticism.

Although the reserves at the Abigail field are relatively small, campaigners say that new oil and gas fields are incompatible with the UK’s net-zero ambitions and its global position as a climate leader.

But the operations director of the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) told Sky News that oil and gas will continue to be part of the country’s energy mix for decades to come, even as the North Sea basin continues its decline and the transition to renewable energy gathers pace.



Australia clinches historic series after bold declaration against Pakistan

By Ali Abdullah

Australia visited Pakistan after 24 years for the historic Test series which began on March 4 at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. The visitors last toured in 1998.

In the first match, Pakistan won the toss and elected to bat. Imam ul Haq and Abdullah Shafique opened the innings for Pakistan. The pitch was flat, thus suitable for batting. The openers provided a decent start to Pakistan.

The first day of the first Test was dominated by the home side as just one wicket was lost. Imam-ul-Haq was the star of the day with his brilliant maiden century in Test Cricket. The opening partnership lasted for 34 overs, scoring 105 runs together, putting Australia on the back foot right from the start. However, on the final ball of the 34th over, Abdullah Shafique played a poor shot of Nathan Lyon's delivery, getting caught by Cummins.

That wicket offered the only respite for Australians on the first day. Afterward, Azhar Ali supported Imam-ul-Haq, piling up 140 runs together. During this stand, Imam completed his eighth international hundred and first-ever Test hundred, while Azhar Ali completed his 34th Test half-century.

At the end of the day, Pakistan had scored 245 runs with a scoring rate of 2.72. Imam-ul-Haq became the 11th Pakistani opener to smash a century against Australia in Test Cricket. On the other end, Azhar Ali was in no mood of going back to the pavilion. He scored 185 runs. Pakistan scored a grand total of 476 for 4 in the first innings. In response, Australia batted well, scoring 459 runs all out. It was not an easy pitch for the bowlers.

The Rawalpindi Test between Australia and Pakistan ended in a draw. Opening batsmen Imam-ul-Haq and Abdullah Shafique enjoyed their outing the most scoring a great number of runs. Imam-ul-Haq scored twin centuries in this Test, becoming the tenth Pakistani to do so. In the first innings, Imam scored a sensational 157 which was also his career-best score.

Imam took his time in both innings to score the runs. Collectively, he played 581 balls in this Test Match. After 157 in the first innings, Imam went on to score another hundred in the 2nd innings of the match. He became the 10th Pakistani batsman and the first left-handed batsman of his team to score twin hundreds in a Test Match. It was no easy feat against the Mighty Aussies, which makes it even more special.

Both the opening batsmen of Pakistan registered their career-best scores in this Test Match. Imam-ul-Haq for his twin centuries was awarded the Man of the Match award as well. Abdullah Shafique in particular gave credit to Pakistan's new batting coach Mohammad Yousuf. Abdullah admitted that he played a rash shot in the first innings to get out but he revealed that he spoke to Mohammad Yousuf about it and made improvements.



Apart from Imam-ul-Haq and Abdullah Shafique, Azhar Ali also smashed a big hundred in the first innings. He was the top scorer of the innings with 185. The Rawalpindi pitch was heavenly for batsmen, and Mohammad Yousuf's addition to the team proved a gamechanger for Pakistani batsmen who performed phenomenally well. In the bowling department, Nauman Ali was brilliant, picking 6 wickets in the game.

Pakistan was criticized for its slow approach in this Test. Many also believed that if the rain hadn't interrupted, there would've been a different outcome of this match.

The second Test match was played at the National Stadium Karachi (NSK). Australia won the toss, choosing to bat first. They batted brilliantly in the first innings. Usman Khawaja scored a brilliant century. In a post-match interview, Khawaja revealed that this is also his home ground and a few of his family members are sitting in the stands.

Pakistani batting line-up collapsed in the first innings, scoring a meager 148. In response, Australia batted again, setting a massive target of 506 runs.

Australia seemed well-placed to win the match easily. To their surprise, Pakistan came demonstrated incredible fighting spirit, Abdullah Shafique provided a good start with his 96, Rizwan scored a crucial century, and the skipper Babar Azam delivered when it mattered the most, amassing 196 runs. Unlucky for him, he just fell 4 runs short of a double century. It won't be wrong to say, his captain's knock saved Pakistan from losing the match. It was a record-breaking innings.

The final Test Match of Pakistan vs Australia Test Series was played at the Gaddafi Stadium Lahore (GSL). After the first two test matches had ended in a draw, both sides needed to win this match to claim the series. In the third Test, Australia was dismissed for 391 in their first innings, with Shaheen Shah Afridi playing a key role, picking up 4 wickets.

Pakistan had a chance to win this test match. Australia gave a target of 351 and Pakistan had 121 overs to chase this target. However, the target proved too tall for the Pakistani batting line-up which collapsed. Imam, Azhar Ali, and Babar were the only 3 batters to score 50 plus. Pakistan lost the match after getting all out for 235 runs. Australia won the series 1-0.

For Kaifi Khalil, Love Makes the World Go Round

The whiz kid from Lyari says Kana Yari speaks to his personal emotional odyssey



By **Kaukab Jahan**

Coke Studio Season 14 has introduced many new and emerging artists creating music in different genres. One of them is the young and talented Kaifi Khalil from Karachi's Lyari. He composed Kana Yari in which he sang as well along with folk singer Abdul Wahab Bugti, another singing sensation from Lyari.

The song was instant hit, making Khalil the star of the young generation. Despite the song being in Balochi language, the melody and tune has attracted millions of viewers and listeners and has garnered more than 14 million views on the Coke Studio YouTube platform in the first two months of its release.

The young and motivated Kaifi Khalil talked to The Truth International (TTI) about his ambitions and his concerns about the overall music scene of Pakistan.

TTI: How are you dealing with this fame?

KK: It is great. It gives me real happiness and satisfaction when I see that people are listening to my music and loving it. If you get love and respect for your work, what more can one ask for?

TTI: What does Kana Yari actually mean?

KK: I wrote this song after going through some real emotional situations in my life. Almost everyone in life goes through these emotions of love and betrayal. So I think whoever has listened to this song, can relate to it in some way.

TTI: Did you write the whole song or just the part you have sung?

KK: I composed the whole song but only wrote lyrics sung by me and Abdul Wahab Bugti, while Eva B wrote her rap part herself.

TTI: Now, how do you plan to carry this fame and name forward?

KK: I am composing new music that includes some Urdu songs as well. I am also planning to reproduce an acoustic version of Kana Yari in Urdu. I hope people will like this new and varied stuff from me.

TTI: Your fans also want to know where you were and what you were doing before getting onto the limelight.

KK: I was immersed in my own world of thoughts and I still want to be the same. I believe I would be seen by others only when I am absorbed in my own self.

TTI: How long have you been into music?

KK: I have been fond of music since my childhood. My utmost inspiration was sufi music, to which I was attracted very differently. I started to sing as well and when people around me listened to it, they encouraged me to work on some other genres of music as well. There I started as a musician. Actually, I love to sing and compose in my mother tongue Balochi but I can write and sing in Urdu as well.

TTI: How did you learn all this?

KK: I have been singing since a very young age but I learned guitar from Sir Amir Zaki. I have been his student for basic guitar techniques. As far as composing and arranging music is concerned it was only self-learning.

TTI: Where did you get the inspiration to fuse folk music with pop?

KK: Besides folk, I loved to listen to other genres as well, especially A R Rehman. I am still his fan. His music has a distinct style, which appeals to me a lot. So by listening to the giants like him, I also tried to compose my songs with fusion. Moreover, I want to produce each song with a different style and feel attached to it.

TTI: Do you have any plans to produce a music album?

KK: Yes. I want to but to release an album is a time-consuming and financially expensive task. As I do everything myself, I would prefer to release singles with some gaps in between. This new trend of digital releases has made things easier for musicians and engaging for the listeners.

TTI: Are you getting any support after this huge success in Coke Studio?

KK: Yes! I am getting a huge support from my fan following. I would like to thank them for their love and appreciation. This motivates me to produce more music for them. I believe in this way, I will continue to work more enthusiastically.

TTI: Do you get any financial assistance in this regard?

KK: No. Not at all. I only earn from my concerts.

TTI: Do you feel there should be some kind of financial or logistic support from government or authorities for the promotion of new artists?

KK: Yes, it should be. There are musicians even more deserving of support than I am. Because of the lack of any kind of support, I have become completely demotivated. So I would request the authorities to ensure there is some financial support or at least some studios they can use on minimal expenses.

TTI: Do you think other young musicians from Lyari would be inspired to follow their dreams after seeing your success?

KK: Yes, why not? There is a lot of talent hidden in the narrow lanes of Lyari. They will definitely emerge and will sing and compose in their own style. I believe there is so much more and new to come.



Oscars 2022: Take a glimpse at best red carpet fashion

Oscars 2022: *Take a glimpse at best red carpet fashion*

Oscar 2022 celebrated the unparalleled talent in Hollywood as the 94th Academy Awards ceremony was held at Dolby Theatre, Los Angeles on March 27 unveiling glamour, break out trends, and show-stopping looks.

As all eyes were on every red carpet appearance on the biggest night of Hollywood, stars didn't miss out the chance to leave everyone jaw-dropped with exceptional dresses.

Here are some of the best-dressed actors who stole spotlight at Oscars 2022:





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