

The Truth International

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New Government

Allies divided on coming general elections' schedule

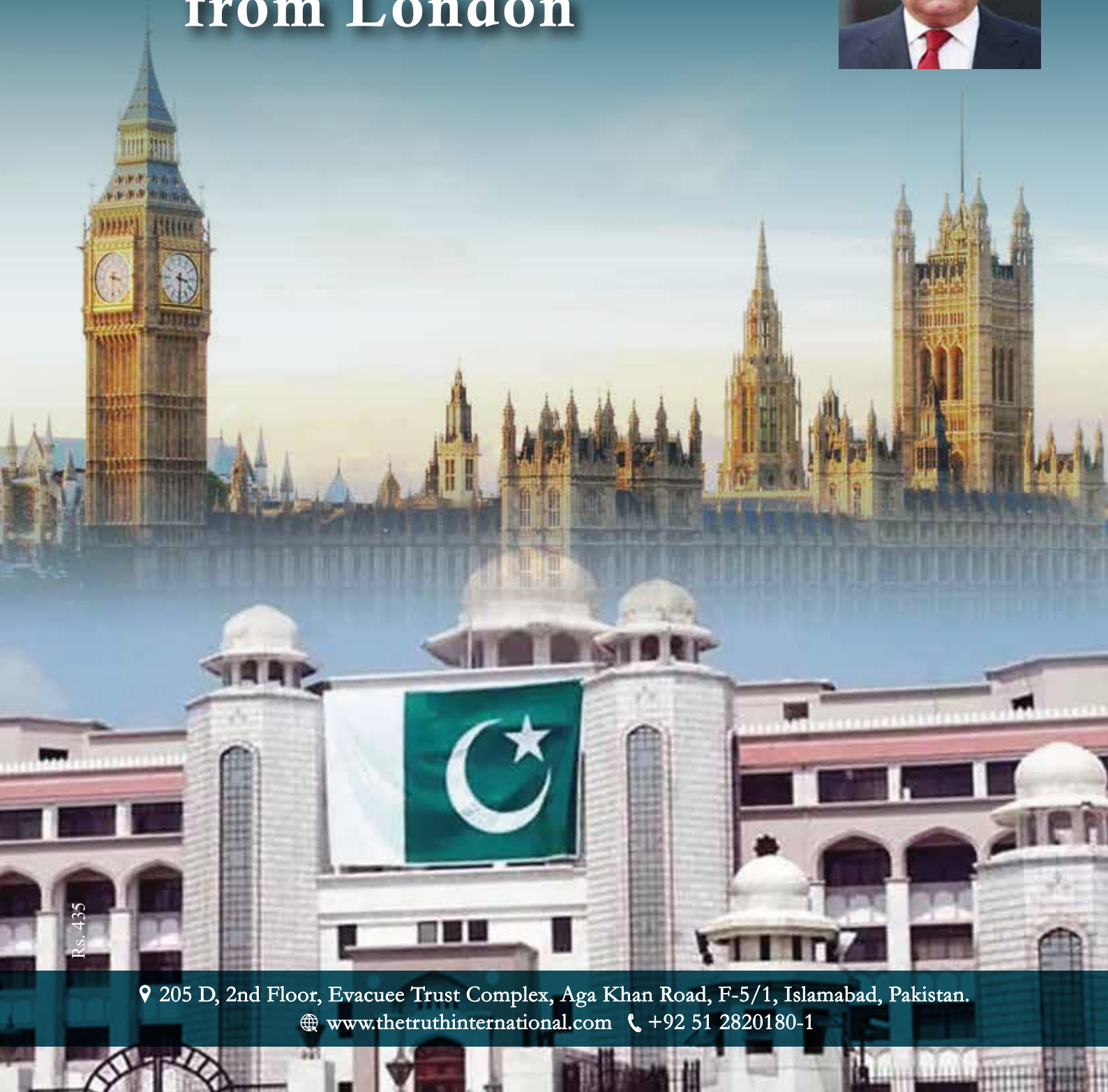
New Foreign Minister

The uphill journey ahead of Bilawal Bhutto

Economic Mess

The tricky task of economic stabilisation

Managing Islamabad from London



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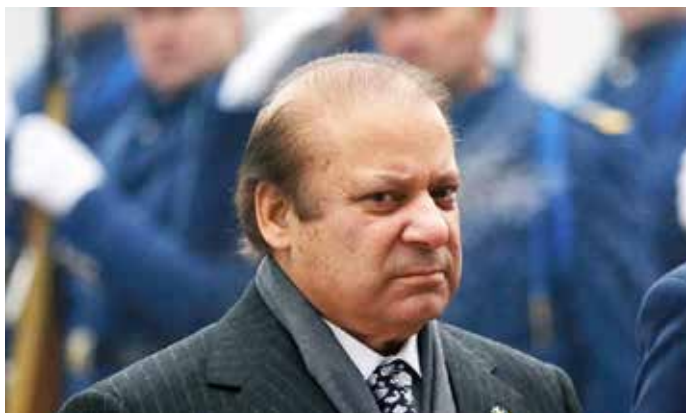
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No honeymoon period for Shehbaz Sharif

By Hammad Ghaznavi



The new coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is faced with huge economic and political challenges, multiplying by the day. Fearing popular backlash, the government so far seems reluctant to make tough decisions, especially on the economic front. But there is no escape, as subsidy on petroleum products is bleeding the economy fast. The foreign reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan are touching new lows, trade deficit is climbing to unprecedented heights, the Rupee is plunging, and stock market is falling. The new government finds itself in the middle of a colossal crisis straightaway.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan in his last days, violating the agreement with the IMF, fixed the prices of petrol till June, leaving the new government between a rock and a hard place: increase the prices and get the flak, or leave the prices as such and default, since the continuation of the IMF programme is dependent on withdrawing the petrol subsidy forthwith. No international money lending institution is ready to deal with Pakistan until the agreement with the IMF is honoured. How to manage a 'great escape'? That's the question. Willy nilly, the situation suggests, the government will have to budge before the IMF at the end of the day. How can the impact of the increased prices on the common man be reduced? That's what the government is pondering.

There is no respite for the coalition govern-

ment on the political front to boot. Imran Khan is on the roads, addressing public rallies across the country, mounting pressure on the government and other powerful institutions to announce fresh elections. To counter Khan's onslaught, PML-N's Maryam Nawaz is among the masses as well. The streets are heated, adding to the political temperature. Former PM seems to have one point political agenda at the moment – fresh elections, which he describes as the panacea for all ills plaguing the country today. Fresh mandate, Khan argues, can bring about political stability, a major ingredient of economic stability.

A deeper look reveals that elections probably have to wait for a plethora of reasons. For one, the IMF does not deal with interim governments, so in all likelihood Pakistan's financial woes will worsen under a caretaker setup. PPP's co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari has recently reiterated the Opposition's stance. "First, there will be electoral reforms," he said. The Opposition also wants to legislate on the NAB before elections are called. "The false cases against the opposition leaders have to be taken care of before the caretaker setup," says a federal minister from Lahore. The Election Commission has already announced that it will be unable to conduct elections before October.

Besides, the appointment of the next army chief is considered by many as the primary issue that has to be resolved under the incumbent coalition government. It is

argued that the timeframe for this appointment, which is till November this year, is perhaps a major factor in the decision regarding the timing of the next general elections. Insiders insist that the former PM wanted to have his 'own man' as the next COAS, the primary reason for his friction with the institution. IK still wants to have a say in this appointment, and the only way to achieve that, in his opinion, seems quick elections and his return to power. Lots of ifs and buts involved, but IK seems desperate considering it a 'now or never' situation. Hence, he is fighting for his political survival while he still has support among the ranks.

Now, it is a no holds barred battle for IK. He and his party continuously threaten that Pakistan is faced with two choices, immediate elections or civil war. His ally Shiekh Rashid has warned that the upcoming long march and dharna can turn bloody. Khan and Co seem to be treating it as their last chance to get back into power game. These efforts by IK may not yield the desired result in the preferred timeframe, but one thing he can certainly achieve – political instability.

Political and economic stability does not appear around the corner. It seems a long road but some baby steps in the right direction can revive hope. Political forces, without inviting the army to take sides, must try to resolve the present crisis within the realm of constitution.

How can the courts keep quiet?

Imran faces a plethora of cases



By MA Niazi

The apparent decision of the federal government to institute cases under Article 6 of the Constitution raises perhaps more dust than it settles, and forces the whole nation to confront some of the problems that exist in the drafting of the Constitution, apart from indicating the ways in the present crisis where the Constitution was violated.

The fact of the violation is perhaps the best place to begin. The whole idea of a constitution is that it cannot be violated. The most blatant example was the Deputy Speaker's ruling that the motion of no-confidence, instead of being voted upon, was dismissed. The Constitution is clear; once such motion comes before the House, it can only be disposed of by a vote. If there is a problem with the motion, it should not have been admitted.

However Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri thought that the motion could be disposed of by being ruled out of order at that stage. He interpreted the Constitution to reach that conclusion. A full bench of the Supreme Court took suo motu notice of the matter, and reached a different interpreta-

tion of the Constitution, ruled that the Deputy Speaker's ruling was illegal, and the rest is history.

The prosecution would rest on the premise that the Deputy Speaker was attempting to subvert, even to suspend it, the Constitution (surely there is no one willing even to argue that there was any attempt to abrogate). While disobedience of the Constitution points in that direction, prosecution would also have to show that he had the intention of preventing it from operating.

Similarly, Punjab Governor Umar Sarfraz Cheema is thought to have been guilty of an offence under Article 6 because of his refusal to administer the oath of office to Hamza Shehbaz. It is true that the Constitution does not contemplate a situation in which the Governor of a province could refuse to swear in a duly elected Chief Minister. But is that refusal to obey the Constitution a subversion of it?

The same applies to the President. His refusal to act promptly on the advice of the Prime Minister may be a violation of the Constitution, but in itself cannot be

construed as an offence of subversion, suspension or abrogation.

The language of Article 6 is such that it is easiest applied to military coups. At the time it was drafted, there had been two military coups, both of which had been accompanied by an abrogation of the Constitution. This was followed by the promulgation of an interim constitution as CMLA Order No. 1. The 1973 Constitution was followed by two impositions of Martial law, but on neither occasion was the Constitution abrogated.

The debate should perhaps look at the Constitution itself. It is not a matter of the Deputy Speaker having been right or wrong, but why the Constitution does not provide for foreign interference or conspiracies.

Article 6 has made slow progress, with General Musharraf's 1999 coup becoming the first where the coupmakers were sentenced under the High Treason Act, when General Musharraf was sentenced to be hanged.

However, one of the issues with that was

that General Musharraf was tried alone, even though the coup could not have occurred without the active participation of a large number of other officers, some of high rank, and men. However, one effect seems to have been that there has been no military coup since, but a hybrid regime was introduced, where both the major political parties were sidelined, and the path to power for the PTI was ensured.

Now, it seems, those civilians who tried to perpetuate the hybrid regime are to be tried. However, they will not be tried as accomplices to the hybrid regime but as those who tried to subvert the Constitution in their own right.

The take-no-prisoners attitude of the PTI towards the Constitution meant that friction was caused between the three pillars of state. The judiciary, in the shape of the Supreme Court for the Deputy Speaker and the President, and the Lahore High Court for the Punjab Governor, found itself forced to tear down those walls which were supposed to exist between the Judiciary, the Legislative and the Executive. However, the courts concerned were also aware of their duty to interpret the Constitution.

If one of the other two branches misinterprets the Constitution, is the Judiciary supposed to shrug its collective shoulders and do nothing? It must be remembered that, of the three, the judiciary is the only one independent of the others. In a Parliamentary system, the Executive is given to whoever controls the Lower House of Legislature. If the Executive loses its majority in the Legislature, it is ousted.

Of course, when martial law is imposed, the head of the army (and calling him Chief of Army Staff instead of Commander-in-Chief of the Army didn't help) gathers legislative and executive powers into his hands, by virtue of being able to do so, without any constitutional provision allowing him to do so. The ability of a COAS to have his orders obeyed is the reason he has the potential to stage coups.

However, the COAS' ability to obtain the reins of government without having a majority in the National Assembly seemed to have been attempted to be imitated by Imran Khan, who no longer had a majority in the National Assembly. That there



should be a new Assembly (as a result of fresh elections) is a demand by the PTI, but there was the episode of the Supreme Court ordering the Speaker what to do. The Legislature is free of interference, and the jurisdiction of the courts has been specifically ousted. True, that is for proceedings, to avoid members appealing the Speaker's rulings on such matters as who was to have the floor, or in any way giving any court appellate jurisdiction over the Speaker. Unfortunately, that has now happened, and even if the courts reject as inadmissible, they are still likely to face a number of petitions asking that the Speaker's ruling be reversed because it violates the Constitution.

However, one area in which The Supreme Court oversees the Legislature is in its ability to strike down any law it has passed, or portion thereof. Similarly, it is constantly giving instructions to federal and provincial governments to act according to the courts' interpretation of the law, not its own. This has led it to examine actions by the Executive and decide whether they are legal or not. Judgments may contain passages where the executive has been asked to keep the courts out of disputes, especially asking politicians not to get political disputes settled by courts, but judges have not shrunk from overseeing executive actions

whenever there is a doubt about their constitutionality.

Because of this, while the courts may find legislators turning to it, there would be no surge in petitions challenging executive actions. However, it perhaps cannot be over-emphasized that there was no real way the courts could have refused to do what theory did. If a constitutional official, whether by reason of sudden insanity or misplaced loyalty to a party rather than his or her oath of office, acts contrary to the Constitution (and not just potentially, but clearly and blatantly), how can the courts refuse to intervene?

The debate should perhaps look at the Constitution itself. It is not a matter of the Deputy Speaker having been right or wrong, but why the Constitution does not provide for foreign interference or conspiracies.

However, the Constitution is the least of Imran's worries. First is the Medina incident, and there he already finds himself embroiled in litigation. Then there is the toshakhana case. Then there are the alleged misdeeds of Ms Farhat Shehzadi aka 'Gogi'. But before any of these, he must negotiate the shoals of Article 6.

Poisonous Demagoguery Masquerading as Politics

Imran Khan's brand of politics is fraught with untold dangers for the nation, but its shelf life is limited



By Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain

Ever since his ouster from power last month, the former Prime minister, Imran Khan has practiced a brand of agitational politics that may only be described as demagoguery, a manipulative approach that appeals to the worst nature of people.

Khan's demagoguery is not based on reason, issues, and doing the right thing. It is based on stirring up fear and hatred to control people. As a consequence, the country has been left deeply divided, its society greatly polarised, and the people completely disoriented. And it has made Pakistani politics look ugly, nasty, and dropping it to its lowest depths.

Demagoguery is regarded as one of the most destructive kinds of politics, and it is looked down upon in mature democracies. In our part of the world, however, it is also all too common. Khan may not be the only practitioner of this brand of politics in Pakistan, but he is without doubt the most formidable.

Khan's refusal to admit that its political nemesis, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has not only outsmarted him in a parliamentary vote of no-confidence but also supplanted him in power has become the main driver of its current political protests.

Instead of acknowledging its political defeat, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has concocted a political narrative in which it blames a Washington-backed conspiracy for its fall from power. PTI has alleged that this conspiracy was carried out through local agents, namely, the PDM leaders, as early as last June, and was executed in April this year, leading to Imran Khan's ouster from power.

Imran Khan has pedalled this manifestly false narrative in all the public rallies held in major cities of Pakistan. PTI is threatening a million march toward Islamabad at the end of May to force the PDM to resign and extract from it the

promise of immediate and early elections. PTI hope to ride its current wave of popularity and win a big majority in the next elections.

But the most worrisome aspect of this patently false narrative is its acceptance by major chunks of the youth of Pakistan who have been enamoured of Imran Khan and are blindsided by his demagoguery and doublespeak.

Imran Khan has used allegories selectively from the (Muslim) history of the subcontinent to excoriate and discredit the current military leadership as guilty of treachery, by likening them to Mir Jaffer and Mir Sadiq.

Mir Jaffer was the commander of the Bengali army under Siraj ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, but betrayed him during the Battle of Plassey and succeeded him as Nawab of Bengal after the British victory in 1757.

Mir Sadiq, a cabinet minister of Tipu



Sultan of Mysore, allegedly betrayed his master during the Siege of Srirangapatam, paving the way for a British victory in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War in 1798–99.

In Urdu, both these names have become synonymous with treachery and betrayal. By using these cultural references, Khan is insinuating that Pakistan's military leaders indulged in the worst kind of treachery – simply because they did not help him crush by brute force the democratic process that ousted him from power.

Like all totalitarian regimes of the past, Imran Khan is relying on propaganda, half-truths and at times total lies about himself to drive the point home that he lost power due to a Washington-based conspiracy. As a hegemon, the US wanted to keep Pakistan enslaved and did not want the country to have an “independent foreign policy”.

Imran Khan has successfully used digital platforms and the power of social media to incorrectly project himself as a modern day

attempts to forcibly drag the Pakistan military into their political feuds.

A group of retired army officers has also condemned such attacks on military's high command and stated that those accusing Pakistan's military's top leadership, as traitors are actually themselves traitors.

One of the main reasons why Imran Khan has hurled such baseless allegations against the military in his public rallies is that he fears the current government will expose many wrong doings of the fallen PTI regimes including many instances of cases of mega corruption involving Ms. Farah Gogi, Malam Jabba, Ring Road and the alleged plethora of corrupt practices carried out in Punjab under Mr. Usman Buzdar's tenure as chief Minister.

The longer the present coalition set up stays, the greater the chance of PTI's corrupt practices being brought to light, especially PTI's involvement in the foreign funding case. To avoid being exposed for its share of corrupt practices, PTI has adopted a very aggressive posture and has repeated its demand for an early elections.

But in so doing Mr. Imran Khan is treading a dangerous path. He mistakenly thinks that by getting the urban Pakistani youth on his side he can win the battle of narratives against the Pakistan state. History is replete with examples where such attempts have ended up in smoke.

False narratives perforce have a limited life span and people cannot be fooled forever. Imran Khan is a fake leader who uses the sacred name of Islam for his persona political aggrandisement, but he cannot escape the judgment of history for too long.

He may seem to be riding the crest of a wave of popularity but the truth will catch up with him soon. Till that time of true reckoning, he is at liberty to speak and spin the truth as he likes. But his chicanery is pushing the country towards violent chaos, anarchy, and instability.

It is unfortunate that as a result of one man's poisonous and psychopathic demagoguery, Pakistan has reached a dangerous tipping point of disequilibrium. It would take a long time to undo the damage.



Not only that, he has been fulminating against the honourable judges of the Supreme Court and has repeatedly accused them of being biased against PTI. In fact, he has questioned the credibility of all those individuals and institutions that disagree with his twisted version of contemporary history.

The most unfortunate aspect of this political demagoguery is that there is no counter-attempt by powers that be to present a real picture to the people of Pakistan. There is little realisation that left unanswered and unchallenged, the PTI's ongoing vilification campaign against the current government, the military leadership, the superior judiciary, has more than a good chance to succeed.

messiah out to create a just society – à la “Madina ki Riasat”, at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) nearly fourteen hundred years ago.

He has been able to cast his ouster from power as a “grand conspiracy” hatched by external forces and internal “enemies of Pakistan” which is aimed at the perpetual enslavement of Pakistani peoples. Following his latest outburst against the COAS in which Imran Khan drew an analogy between Mir Jaffer and the current COAS, there has been a severe reaction from the top army leadership.

An ISPR statement took an exception to such a blatantly false characterisation and asked all political forces to refrain from



A House Divided on Elections and Economic Issues

PM Sharif in London to confer with Nawaz Sharif before deciding future course of action

By Naveed Miraj

The political pressure built up by former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the success of his narrative of 'foreign conspiracy' in the public coupled with the economic challenges has become a serious headache for the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), the main stakeholder in the current coalition government.

According to sources close to the top leadership of PML-N, the party's supreme leader Nawaz Sharif sees immediate general elections as the only solution to come out of this quagmire while Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who is also the President of PML-N thinks otherwise.

The sources recalled that Nawaz Sharif was against ousting former Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence motion, as he wanted him to complete his term in a situation where the prices of essential commodities were on the rise and the popularity of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on the decline.

"He however got convinced on the no confidence motion when he was informed that Khan is plotting to secure another term in office after appointing his favourite person at one of the most coveted and powerful seats in November this year", a source said.

The sources say that after the ouster of Khan, Nawaz Sharif wants an early general election, as he is confident that at present his party enjoys sufficient support in the masses to secure a full five-year term in office.

"He has a firm belief that the current setup cannot take difficult economic decisions and the soaring prices of essential commodities will only hurt the popularity of the PML-N in the days and months ahead – the benefit of which then will be taken by the political opponents in the elections.

Similarly, the sources said that the PML-N supremo believes that a government with a full five-year term will be in a better position to negotiate a new and better deal with International Monetary Fund (IMF).



Currently the IMF is pressurising the coalition government to do away with the fuel subsidies to secure another tranche under the existing loan program.

"Given the falling foreign exchange reserves and rupee depreciation, the government has no other option but agree to the demand of the international lender and doing so entails serious setbacks on the political front," the source said, adding price hike will only provide fertile grounds to the PTI to further strengthen its narrative in the masses.

"We had built the whole campaign against the PTI government on the issue of price hike and if we failed to check this trend and if the prices continued their upward trend, this will only damage the popularity of the PML-N especially in Punjab."

When the sources were asked as to why Shehbaz Sharif was opposing early election, they said that the Prime Minister had his own reasons. Firstly, Shehbaz Sharif believes that he can take the economic matters towards improvement in a matter of few months, and if this happens, he considers this will benefit the party ahead of the polls and undermine the narrative of the PTI.

"Only a slight improvement on the economic front will send a very positive message to the masses that the PML-N has the leadership capability to take the country in the right direction," said a person close to the thought process of the PM.

The sources however admitted that this is double-edged sword and the situation can go either way.

"Shehbaz Sharif also favours an extension of the current loan program with the IMF to stabilise the rupee and bolster the foreign exchange reserves." Most importantly, the sources said, the Prime Minister wanted to make the top appointment in the Army due in November this year.

When asked that final say on important matters has always rested with Nawaz Sharif and in the current circumstances whose opinion will prevail, the sources said this is the reason that the party Quaid has convened an important meeting in London which will also be attended by the PM Shehbaz Sharif.

The meeting will be attended by all the senior party leaders and it will discuss the current political situation as well as economic issues facing the country.

"It is absolutely right that Nawaz Sharif has a firm hold on the party and his decisions are always respected but the point of view of other leaders including that of Shehbaz Sharif will also be listened to and then a unanimous decision will be taken regarding future course of action."

The sources said if the party meeting in London agrees on early general elections, then the coalition partners will also be taken on board.



Dharna Then and Now

How PTI's dharna in 2022 would be different from its dharna of 2014



By Sarfraz Raja

The year 2022 will certainly be unique in political history of the country when people are witnessing long marches by almost all top political parties in less than six months' time.

Earlier this year, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led a long march from Karachi to Islamabad in February, followed next month by Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and other parties which were part of PDM.

Now Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is all set to stage a long march of its own. The party of the ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan is hitting the road almost directly following its removal from power. After staging public gatherings and rallies across the country in first week of April, it is now set to march on Islamabad in latter half May.

Demands and plan

After an unexpected (for him) and rather unceremonious exit from the prime minister's house, Imran Khan is demanding immediate elections. Interestingly, some months earlier this was also a demand by the parties now in power. After snatching

the top seat through a constitutional no-confidence move, they are now aiming for some electoral reforms through the parliament calling general elections.

The PTI, on its part, will be placated by nothing less than an immediate announcement of general elections. After a series of successful gatherings, the former ruling party feels encouraged to go for a final round of protest March towards Islamabad.

Imran Khan is repeatedly claiming and asking his party to bring two million people to the capital city which itself has a population of around two million. PTI has an initial plan to stage a sit-in in capital similar to their 2014 protest, till the announcement of general election date.

However, this time around, it might not be the same ground to play.

Key differences from 2014

In 2014, the PTI sit-in at Islamabad's D-Chowk continued for 126 days, but the party had to leave empty-handed. Their sought resignation of the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which they could not get it and had to call off their sit-in suddenly

after the shocking Army Public School attack on 16 Dec 2014 in Peshawar.

Now they are with a rather softer and bit justified demand of new elections as there are many in government ranks that are supporting new elections and secondly there are not much time left in general elections. Still it looks difficult for PTI to get this goal through their protest strategy for many reasons and some concerns are also raised in their party meetings.

Weather factor

May and June are among the hottest months of the year in Islamabad. The previous PTI dharna was in August-September, which are less harsh but to survive in heat of June for a longer period wouldn't be an easy task for participants and extra efforts and finances would be needed to provide shelters and drinking water, etc.

Missing important support

For the 2014 dharna, PTI had a major support of Dr Tahir ulQadri led Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT), which had a much better organised strength and in fact PAT



supporters were the backbone of that dharna.

This time around, Imran Khan is on a solo flight with no other party on board. In fact he is having this March against all other parties including his previous allies who are now part of government. Even more importantly, PTI misses support from some powerful quarters.

In relative political isolation and relying upon only his own party strength, dharna promises to be a tall order for Khan.

Finance issues

To hold a drawn out sit-in could be a game of not millions but billions of rupees. PTI enjoyed support of some eminent businessman financiers in 2014 like Jahangir Khan Tareen and Abdul Aleem Khan who were among major contributors of 2014 dharna. The two have since parted ways with Khan and there are no similar financiers in sight to replace them.

To manage a long sit-in might not be possible on just party funding, especially when you have to go for elections after a short period of time and need finances for elections campaign too.

Place of protest

In 2014, PTI had their dharna at Islamabad's D-Chowk, which is in red zone and a central place among all government

offices. The blockade at D-Chowk had disturbed government businesses, functioning of parliament, and even apex court.

This time around, they would not be allowed to enter Red Zone as of court decisions and possible places for their gathering could be F-9 Park or Shakarparian Parade Ground, which are far away from the city centre and a sit-in there would not disturb government functions and public activities.

Government strategy

The Ministry of Interior under Rana Sanaulah Khan is making a comprehensive plan to tackle PTI protestors. The Minister is on the record saying that PTI would not be allowed to protest like 2014 when they entered Red zone forcibly.

Officials say that when approached for permission of protest gathering, district administration would allow them on certain terms and conditions. Government sources say that PTI protesters wouldn't be allowed to take law into hands at any cost and only on a surety of peaceful protest they would be allowed for that activity.

Protest would be limited to a certain area specified for them. The management of the jalsa would have also be given a certain time for their protest and any interference in public life would not be allowed. Violations of these terms and conditions would be

dealt with iron hands, official sources claimed.

PTI is going all out for their campaign of new elections but it has been not just a political but technical issue too. Is election commission of Pakistan is in position to hold immediate elections? The answer is no, as issues like delimitations are yet to be addressed and certain time is required to complete all these requirements.

Imran Khan has already shown his mistrust of Election Commission, demanding resignation of not only the Chief Election Commissioner but also of members. Now the question is, would he accept elections under present Election Commission or any new Election Commission constituted by Shehbaz Sharif government? The answer is a big no.

Would Imran Khan accept any caretaker set up constituted by incumbent government to hold the elections as mentioned in the Constitution? The answer again is a certain no. So what would Imran Khan accept and what not is also a big hurdle in the way of immediate elections.

So it is not a matter of just an election announcement but lots of other issues have to be settled beforehand. There are few voices in PTI too who think realistically that this matter could not be solved on roads but rather has to be decided on the table.





The Uphill Journey Ahead of Foreign Minister Bhutto

Coming from an illustrious family tradition of building bridges, the relative greenhorn will be aided by the veteran Hina Rabbani Khar

By Umer Farooq

When Pakistan's young Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari visits Washington sometime next week, he will feel the coldness that exists in the relations between two former allies.

It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that the young Bhutto will have to reconstruct the relations between Islamabad and Washington from the ground up in the light of the new regional realities that have emerged after successive US Administrations decided to embrace New Delhi as their new strategic partner in the South Asian region.

A parallel reality of Pakistan inching closer to Moscow and Beijing – America's two global rivals – cannot escape the eyes of policymakers in Washington. Amid these global and regional realignments, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari will have to perform the task of negotiating with policymakers in Washington during his visit.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken extended an invitation to Foreign Minister Bhutto, "An invitation was also extended by the Secretary of State for Pakistan's participation in the Ministerial meeting on Global Food Security to be held in New York on May 18."

Building on the Pakistan-US cooperation in dealing with the pandemic during the last two years, Blinken also invited Pakistan to the Second Global Covid Summit to be held virtually later this month.

In the first exchange of views with the US Secretary of State in a telephonic conversation, Bilawal Bhutto said a constructive and sustained engagement between the two countries based on mutual respect and mutual interest was vital to promote peace, development, and security in the region and beyond, Geo News reported.

Bilawal Bhutto emphasised that Pakistan's vision was focused on human development, regional connectivity, and a peaceful neighbourhood.



However, Foreign Minister Bhutto would be visiting Washington as a representative of a coalition government whose fate still hangs in balance. He will be facing a protest march from a determined opposition, whose leader, Imran Khan has just being ousted from power and who in turn is making all out efforts to dislodge the coalition government from power.

Bilawal Bhutto's Washington visit will be taking place under the shadow of Imran Khan's long march and under the shadow of his allegations that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's "Imported Government" was brought into power by the Biden Administration as part of an American conspiracy to dislodge Imran Khan from power.

The US State Department and White House have repeatedly rejected Imran Khan's allegations but it is obvious that Bilawal Bhutto's Washington visit cannot simply ignore the political environment created by Imran Khan's allegation.

Many analysts think that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif gave the whole Foreign Ministry to someone from outside his party because there are hardly any difference between PMLN and PPP on vital foreign policy issues.

"I don't think there will be any difference or tensions in the running of foreign policy despite the fact that both the Federal Foreign Minister and State Minister for

Foreign Affairs are from PPP and Prime Minister is from PMLN" said political analyst and columnist, Zaigham Khan, "It is because there are hardly any difference between the two parties on foreign policy front".

Bilawal Bhutto will, however, be received with great anticipation in Washington just because of the charisma usually ascribed to the Bhutto family in Western capitals.

In addition, Bilawal Bhutto will be an asset for the government on two counts, according to Zaigham Khan, "Firstly, Bilawal Bhutto is educated in Western university in the art of politics and diplomacy. So at least at the theoretical level, he is well versed with all the issues which are confronting Pakistani diplomacy.

"Secondly, he has the charisma which he inherited from his mother. Remember, in the eyes of the West, she is a martyr in the war against terror. So Bilawal will be well received in Western capitals"

It is true, he said, that Bilawal doesn't have any practical experience of running a ministry, "but here he will be assisted by his pair, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar who has the experience of running the ministry singlehandedly" he said.

Reports in the media suggest that Hina Rabbani Khar would be part of the Foreign Minister Bhutto's delegation.



Bilawal Bhutto is the second political heavyweight after his grandfather to occupy the office of Foreign Minister in Pakistan's history. Bhutto family is traditionally credited with developing close relations with China, Gulf and Muslim world. However, both elder Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto had a deep-seated appeal in Western capitals as well.

There is another very far reaching geostrategic context to Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto's Washington visit that is also linked to Pakistan's present domestic political situation: After withdrawal from Afghanistan, Washington has a dwindling strategic interest in this region as demonstrated by the fact that the US doesn't have any military presence either in South Asia or the adjacent Central and South Western Asia.

The dwindling US interest in this region is matched by the increasing interest shown by Moscow and Beijing in further developing military and strategic relations with Islamabad. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan's allegations that Washington was unhappy with him after he paid a visit to Moscow provide subtext to this geostrategic drama unfolding in our region.

The warm welcome that awaits Bilawal Bhutto in Washington could generate another controversy in Pakistan's domestic political situation if Imran Khan opts to use the images of young Bhutto's Washington visit for his aggressive anti-American political campaign.

Bilawal Bhutto's visit to Washington, it seems, will have the backing of Pakistan's powerful military establishment, which also seems to be interested in reviving old warmth in relations with the Biden Administration.

In Islamabad it is often said that it is the military establishment that sets the broad framework for the country's foreign policy. The process of setting this framework used to take place behind closed doors in the Pakistani capital. Not anymore.

This time, Chief of the Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa in a speech delivered on 1 April 2022 set the policy framework for the new coalition government that took oath on 11 April 2022. The speech was delivered publicly at Islamabad Security

Dialogue – a formal forum organised by the National Security Division of Government of Pakistan – and General Bajwa could be clearly seen setting the framework for foreign policy for the government of Pakistan.

It was not lost on the observers that only a day ago, the then Prime Minister of the country Imran Khan had accused Washington of conspiring to remove him from office – and that his belligerence had no bearing on General Bajwa's speech, wherein the latter had dubbed the United States as a longstanding strategic partner.

By the time of General Bajwa's speech, it had become clear to all and sundry in Islamabad that the then Prime Minister Imran Khan had lost majority in the national assembly and would be voted out of power within days; and that Shehbaz Sharif, PMLN President, would be the new prime minister was known to everybody.

General Bajwa in his speech clearly welcomed the idea of peace talks with India and indicated that Pakistan would never again become part of a camp politics in the new emerging cold war like rivalry at the world level. This was the time when the then Prime Minister Imran Khan had come all out to launch a diatribe against alleged American interference in Pakistani politics.

Was General Bajwa through his speech setting the foreign policy agenda for the new government that everyone knew would be assuming power within a week?

"Well we can say that his speech contained the foreign policy framework for the new government", said former Ambassador, Abdul Basit—a senior ex-diplomat who has served as Pakistan's High Commissioner in New Delhi. "I think the new government would not even slightly disagree with what General Bajwa said in his speech".

Most successive Pakistani governments have normally acted pliant towards the military's preferences on foreign policy issues in the post-Musharraf period. There never has been any occasion in the post-Musharraf period when any civil government has differed with the military's diktats on foreign policy.

Apparently, in the last few days of Imran Khan government, the divergence between

General Bajwa and Khan's views on foreign policy became discernible, especially when General Bajwa contradicted Khan on relations with Washington in his 1 April speech.

Abdul Basit, however, opined that there was a great need for consensus in the process of foreign policy making. In this connection, he said that former Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi was a great consensus builder among the political forces as well as between the state institutions.

"I think Bilawal Bhutto as the new Foreign Minister has the potential to act as a new consensus builder" said Ambassador Abdul Basit.

Many analysts are of the opinion that General Bajwa's April speech clearly had implications for the country's domestic political scene. General Bajwa mentioned Washington as a strategic partner in his speech and this was not well received in the otherwise docile environment of Pakistani foreign policy making circles.

"Look at how cold are relations are with Washington and then note that General Bajwa is describing Washington as our strategic partner" said a retired Pakistani diplomat.

In this situation, someone who has signalled his intentions to antagonise the West (especially Washington) and by default wants to land into a tight embrace with Russia and China, could find himself on the wrong side of Pakistan's military establishment.

It is not clear whether former Prime Minister Imran Khan has thought through the foreign policy import of his diatribes against Washington and its diplomats. But his loud-mouthing Washington has the potential to gravely injure our relations with the United States.

Ironically, Nawaz Sharif has spent the last few years in the political wilderness, but he is still standing firmly on his position to normalise relations with India – a position that gels well with General Bajwa's persistent desire to remove all political hurdles in the way of realising the economic potential of Pakistan.



Welcome to the Office, Mr Prime Minister

Here is a laundry list of the problems lying in wait for the new government



By Sajad Jatoi

If the people of Pakistan were irked by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's lofty claims and tough rhetoric, they have every right to feel relieved that they would no longer have to hear his hollow pledges of creating a Naya and corruption-free Pakistan in the image of Riasat-e-Madina.

But they would do well to remember that Khan's ouster in and by itself does not solve anything. Nor is the election of Shehbaz Sharif to the hot seat by the Parliament on April 11 – two days after Khan's ouster in a parliamentary vote of no-confidence, is a panacea per se.

The people should, therefore, be asking how the new PM will salvage the situation.

No doubt it is encouraging that with the exit of the PTI government, the slide of the rupee against the dollar has stopped. But there is no denying that the coalition government has formidable challenges ahead. So let us see what those challenges are that the government needs to tackle.

To begin with, the biggest and most urgent issue is runaway inflation. Over the period of three-and-a-half years of PTI government, we saw the prices of basic commodities go through the roof.

Although it was partly because of international price hikes, there is no denying that elements within Khan's government were skimming fat margins off every essential item from wheat to sugar to cooking oil to medicines.

The upshot is that consumer prices of nearly every item have doubled or in some cases tripled, which has made it hard for people of lower classes to make both ends meet.

For instance, a 1-liter sachet of a particular brand of cooking oil which cost PKR 170 in 2018 now costs PKR 430, about a 150 percent increase in four years. What magic wand will a new PM use to reverse this situation?

More worrying, however, is that the salaries of employees and wages of labour-

ers have failed to keep pace with the rampant inflation. Although the federal government led by Imran Khan had raised the salaries of its employees to bridge the gap, the employees of provincial governments did not get any raises other than the usual increase of 10 to 15 percent in annual budgets.

The recent announcement by PM Sharif of a ten percent raise for pensioners and employees taking home less than PKR 100,000 a month is heartening. But will these populist announcements be enough to mitigate the financial burden of people? Let us wait and see.

The situation is more pathetic for menial workers and daily wage earners who are still unable to get the approved minimum wages. This time the new prime minister has set their wages at PKR 25,000. Again, let us see how the younger Sharif his decree is implemented.

Even if the new government is able to contain the currency devaluation and



inflation, the list of problems does not end here. The economy is riddled with problems. The IMF is withholding a USD 1-billion tranche, which it was to release in March. Pakistan needs this money to avert balance of payment issues.

The international lender had withheld the tranche saying it would hold talks with the new government. Let us see what deal the government is able to strike with it. Will it negotiate and reach an agreement that is in favour of the people?

The exports of the country are very low in comparison with the imports. What's more, the gap is widening by the day, adding to the trade deficit. Foreign direct investment is drying out. So what strategy would PM Shahbaz adopt to increase exports, decrease imports, and attract FDI?

Climate change and its implications are also looming large in Pakistan. As a result

of it, global warming has become a considerable threat that Pakistan has yet to deal with. It is manifesting in the shape of frequent heatwaves, changing weather patterns, flash flooding, and droughts. What policy changes will the new government make to tackle climate change?

A dreadful water crisis is brewing in our backyard that warrants immediate action. Per capita availability of water in our country is plunging to new depths. Compared with over 5,000 cubic meters available to every Pakistani in 1951, it is now below 1,000 cubic meters.

The previous government did not take any effective measures. As a result, we are facing a water crisis. This will manifest itself in the Khareef season and will affect inter-provincial harmony. So now when a new government has assumed power, it is relevant to ask how it will deal with the water crisis.

Last but not least, the new government faces gigantic foreign policy challenges. In particular, the country's relations with the Western world are strained. Let us see how the new government formulates new foreign policy.

Against this backdrop, while it is understandable for people to feel elated by Khan's ouster through a vote of no-confidence, making him the first PM in the country's history to be shown the door through this constitutionally mandated democratic process, his removal does not mean that issues facing the country have been resolved.

They are unaddressed so far and will persist unless the new government adopts well considered and informed policies. Let us be optimistic and hope it becomes successful in dealing with all these issues.





How Will the Tussle Over Punjab End?

Pakistan's largest province has become the last trench of Imran Khan's struggle to brew a constitutional crisis



By Ahmad Waleed

Ever since former Prime Minister Imran Khan sensed he has lost the confidence of the majority in the National Assembly, his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party seems to have deliberately taken the path of refusals to create as many hurdles as it can in the path of his political adversaries.

The journey down the path began when his handpicked Speaker Asad Qaisar refused to hold voting in the National Assembly over the non-confidence motion brought by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition in an unprecedented and unconstitutional move. The vote went ahead anyway when the judiciary rose to protect the constitution and Khan was ousted.

Ever since, his loyalists holding key constitutional offices have stuck to the path of refusal in stark disregard of the Constitution, law, and democratic traditions. The pattern started to emerge when Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Pervez Elahi refused to allow peaceful election of Punjab Chief Minister.

This was followed by Punjab Governor Umar Sarfraz Cheema refusing to administer the oath of office to the newly

elected Chief Minister. The President then refused multiple times to remove the Punjab Governor.

The wrangling took a tragicomic turn when the Cheema sought the army's help to remain in control of the most populous province of the country. He wrote to the army chief that he as governor had a role to play "in the implementation of the constitutional framework in the province".

Cheema then went on to assert he would have the newly sworn-in Chief Minister Hamza Shahbaz arrested if he is granted the assistance of one subedar and four jawans from the army. He has since been seen off from the Governor's House, but Speaker Punjab Assembly has doggedly declined to accept Cheema's removal from the gubernatorial office.

Based on this position, Elahi refuses to assume charge as Acting Governor of Punjab, repudiating his constitutional mandate and creating a crisis that shows no signs of going away as we go to press.

Earlier, when Elahi declined to administer oath of office to Hamza Shahbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister elect was only able to take

oath after the Lahore High Court directed the National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf to officiate.

Now, Hamza Shahbaz has become the Chief Minister, but his cabinet is yet to take oath. The unprecedented crisis has led the rival parties to bash and blame each other for the impasse that has brought the working of the bureaucratic and administrative affairs of the province to a grinding halt with the bureaucracy in a fix over how to execute the routine work.

When President Arif Alvi rejected the advice of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to remove Governor Punjab Omar Sarfraz Cheema from office, a statement issued from the President's Secretariat maintained that Alvi had conveyed to the Prime Minister that the governor could not be removed without his approval.

The two sides remained deadlocked for a good while over the matter, each citing provisions of the Constitution. The President referred to the clause 3 of Article 101 of the Constitution stating 'the Governor shall hold office during the pleasure of the President'.



He interpreted this to mean the incumbent governor could not be removed as there was neither any allegation of misconduct nor conviction by any court of law nor of any act committed by him contrary to the Constitution of Pakistan.

“It is my duty as Head of the State to represent the unity of the Islamic republic of Pakistan in terms of Article 41 of the Constitution”, the president told the PM. He also gave another reason for rejecting the Prime Minister’s advice: That it would be “unfair and against the norms of justice” to remove the governor.

The president also emphasised that it was essential that the governor continue to serve his office to “encourage and promote a healthy and clean democratic system, where members are not coerced or bought to bring about an illegitimate change and Article 63 (A) of the Constitution specifically discourage such activities”. He also questioned the validity of the resignation of the former chief minister Usman Buzdar.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, however, sent a summary to the President for the removal of Cheema, nominating Baligh-ur-Rehman for the office of governor. Legal and political experts termed the president’s move to reject the PM’s summary as a deliberate attempt to create a constitutional crisis as the President was bound to act in accordance with the advice of the

cabinet and the Prime Minister.

The Cabinet Division later issued a notification saying, “In terms of Article 101 and Proviso to Article 48(1) of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan read with serial No 2D of Schedule V-B to the Rules of Business, 1972 and the Prime Minister’s advice rendered on April 17, 2022 and May 1, 2022 for removal of Governor of the Punjab Mr Omar Sarfraz Cheema ceases to hold office of the governor with immediate effect”.

The notification said the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab should perform the functions of Governor Punjab as Acting Governor until the appointment of a new Governor in accordance with the Article 104 of the Constitution.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Chaudhry Fawad Hussain supported the decision taken by the President saying it was a “100 percent” correct and constitutional decision which should be respected. Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Ahsan Bhoon, on the other hand, said that the president decision was a violation of the Constitution. He said the rejection on the part of the President would eventually end up in the courts of law.

“Pakistan has a parliamentary structure and not a presidential system and the general scheme of the Constitution says that it’s

binding on the president to act upon the PM’s advice,” opined Mr Ahmed Bilal Mehboob of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT).

He said a bad precedent had been set and if the practice continued, it would create another power centre in the country and shake the foundation of the parliamentary structure. “In this way, the president can even reject the summary for the appointment or removal of an army chief”, he feared.

He also objected to the language used in the official statement by the President for using the words “strongly rejected”. He said there was no need for using such a language in official communication.

However, Fawad Chaudhry says, “The prime minister and the cabinet’s advice is binding upon the President for the appointment of a person but not for the removal.”

In sum, it seems Khan and his loyalists are hell bent on creating a constitutional crisis in the country with a view to derailing the fragile democratic process in the country. The people of Punjab are paying the price of an unrelenting tussle between the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the PTI-PML-Q combine. It is far from clear how this tussle will end.





Cacophony is the Symphony

Can harmony be the strong suit of a government cobbled together from a dozen different political parties?

By **Qurban Baloch**

As the new coalition government at the helm of affairs in Pakistan navigates through tumultuous waters, the journey seems full of twists and turns, with a surprise lying in wait at every juncture.

In the latest such development, while his hands are full fighting a hundred different economic crises, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has embarked on a trip to London along with a gaggle of his cabinet ministers to confer with his party supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif.

Another riveting tale of political wheeling and dealing is playing out in Sindh, where government's allies Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) are kick-starting implementation on the 18 points of the Charter of Rights. However, it already seems like the journey will be long and difficult.

A charter of rights

Implementation of the charter of rights signed on 30 March 2022 between Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) has begun, MQM-P MNA Mr Usama Qadri told the The Truth International.

Those who agreed to officiate as the guarantors between the two parties include President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Prime of Minister of Pakistan Mian Shehbaz Sharif; Ameer of Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and President of Pakistan Democratic Front (PDM) Maulana Fazlur Rehman; Senior Leader of Balochistan Awami Party MNA Khalid Hussain Magsi; and head of Balochistan National Party Sardar Akhtar Mengal.

Qadri said a few of the points have been implemented as of now while work was in progress for the rest. He claimed that MQM-P's demands were related to the common people and the party wanted a prosperous Sindh while working with the PPP.

He said that a committee had been formed



to prepare and introduce the Local Government Act according to the decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

"Formation of a scrutiny committee on appointments of bogus domicile of interior Sindh on urban quota is under process", Qadri said. "We already agreed to link the National Finance Commission (NFC) with Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) and hope that the implementation is completed during the current month."

About the appointments of local people on grade BS-1 to BS-15, Usama Qadri claimed that for the first time, the Sindh government had restricted the appointment of Karachi Police for local people.

He, however, hedged his bet, saying while a recruitment advertisement by Karachi Police restricted the appointments to local people, but his party would be satisfied only when the provincial government implements the provision during the appointment process.

"We and the Sindh government are on the same page on transparent census according to the Constitution of Pakistan", he said.

Asked about his party's prospects of joining the Sindh cabinet, Qadri said that it was not in the agreement but if it was the desire of coalition partners for his party to work together for the prosperity of Sindh, MQM-P would be happy to join. "We think that both parties can jointly to take Sindh on development path".

The league in London

For the first time after assuming office of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Shehbaz Sharif reached London on 11 May with senior party colleagues, reportedly on a call from party supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif. The party's senior leadership discussed political situation of the country including financial challenges and future strategy of the party as well as the federal and Punjab governments.

Before leaving for London, the Prime Minister of Pakistan met with a few leaders of the government's allied parties. He had one-on-one meetings with the President of Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM) Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Aimal Wali Khan, senior leader of the Awami National Party (ANP) and took them into confidence about the London visit.

On Prime Minister's London visit, PMs Advisor on Kashmir Affairs and senior leader of Pakistan People's Mr Qamar Zaman Kaira talking with media claimed that London meeting is PML-N's internal matter so there was no need for PM Shehbaz to take allied parties into confidence.

Still, PML-N supremo Mian Nawaz Sharif's move to summon all senior leaders to London for consultation has given rise to whispers that Mian Nawaz is forcing decisions from London. If true, this may sow the seeds of mistrust among the ranks of the ruling coalition.



Charter of Rights Between PPP and MQM-P

Following is the agreement, titled the "Charter of Rights for The People of Sindh" hereby entered into on the 30th March 2022, Islamabad between the leadership of the PPP through Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and the MQM-P through its Convener Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui.

Preamble:

That parties now, therefore, agree as follows.

1. The decision of Supreme Court of Pakistan regarding local Government shall be implemented in letter and spirit within one month with mutual agreement.
2. The position in jobs shall be holistically assessed and the deficiency, if any, of those hailing from urban/rural Sindh shall be removed by enhancing the quota for them. Once the Parity of 60:40 is achieved, the agreed job quota of 60:40 shall be fully observed.
3. Issue of fake domiciles shall be jointly addressed by constituting a commission with mutual consultation to investigate and cancel the fake domicile in every district of Sindh. The commission shall also give recommendation to develop a transparent procedure in the respect.
4. A quota observance joint committee, comprising of legislators with equal representation shall be constituted to monitor the observance of job quota in recruitment process.
5. In recruitment of officials from BS-1 to BS-15, the principle of local representation provided in the recruitment rules shall be strictly followed as per law.
6. Local policing shall be introduced to address the issue of lawlessness and street crimes in accordance with law.
7. False and fabricated cases shall be withdrawn/discharged in accordance with law.
8. Development needs of Urban and Rural Sindh shall be asserted by a joint committee a development package shall be announced and implemented in a given time frame of single financial year. The committee shall also monitor the progress.
9. It is jointly agreed that in order to avoid ghettoization and channelize growth of the city in planned manner the Master Plan Of Karachi be prepared immediately.
10. It is Jointly agreed that transport system be upgraded.
11. It jointly agreed that a public-sector Women University be established in Karachi.
12. It is jointly agreed that Safe City project to be completed immediately to improve law and order in Karachi.
13. It is jointly agreed that Cottage Industrial Zone shall be established to provide employment.
14. It is jointly agreed that rehabilitation of infrastructure in the industrial areas of city on priority shall be ensured.
15. It is jointly agreed that Health and Education sector shall be given attention and immediate investment shall be made in these sectors.
16. It is jointly agreed that establishment of Hyderabad University shall be facilitated.
17. It is jointly agreed that a Commission shall be established with mutual agreement to resolve issues of occupied evacuee land as per law.
18. All major political, administrative and economic decisions in Sindh shall be taken mutual consultation.

In Witness ,all parties hereto shall jointly and severally ensure that all stipulation in this government are implementation in letter and spirit.

The Tricky Task of Economic Stabilisation

Shehbaz Sharif's coalition government seems balking at biting the bullet of fiscal reform



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan's new government finds itself between the devil and the deep sea. If it accepts all recommendations of the IMF, it can trigger a flood of inflation. If, on the other hand, it defers the decision any further, it risks delaying the IMF loan, which can intensify economic deterioration. It is difficult to tell at this point which prong will cost the ruling coalition more in terms of political capital.

Economic uncertainty has deepened further with an unexpected delay in government's talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the completion of the seventh review for the stalled Enhanced Fund Facility (EFF) program.

That the markets have taken a dim view of this delay is evident from a slide of the rupee to PKR 190 a dollar in the inter-bank on Wednesday (11 May) while in the open market, the US currency is trading around PKR 191.50. Dwindling forex reserves,

ballooning trade deficit and current account deficit, and an alarming expansion in imports have all taken a toll on the value of rupee.

On 11 May, Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) 100-index lost another 600 points in the morning session, falling to 42,892 points as investors remained on the side-lines, waiting for a positive news to take fresh positions in the market. This was in addition to a dizzying 1500 points erosion on Monday (9 May).

A few days after becoming Finance Minister, Miftah Ismail flanked by Dr Ayesha Ghous Pasha and Governor State Bank made a dash to Washington and convinced the IMF officials for increasing amount of loan for Pakistan to USD 8 billion, from the original USD 6 billion.

However, the two sides could not hold further discussions for the seventh review of the EFF program as the IMF demanded Pakistan honour its earlier

commitment – made and the broken by the ousted PM Imran Khan – to withdraw an untargeted fuel subsidy that has broken Pakistan budget for years.

This time around, the Fund would like Pakistan to roll out the withdrawal – leading to a spike in petroleum and power prices – as a prior action for the completion of the seventh review.

In this situation, before making any decision, the top leadership of Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have rushed to London on the call of party supremo Nawaz Sharif and former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

This important sitting of the top leadership of the PML-N in London is expected to thrash out – among other things – the decisions about the IMF program and its reform agenda. Revival of the EFF program as soon as possible has become the foremost challenge for the new government to curb flight of the

US dollar, strengthen value of rupee, support economic stability, and build dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Forex reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan have fallen to below USD 11 billion as of the first week of May 2022. These reserves of the SBP are barely enough to meet two months' national import bill as the quantum of monthly imports has surged close to USD 6 billion.

Friends in need

The second major challenge for the government is to secure additional financing from the Saudi government, which has linked the provision of additional USD 3 billion deposits to revival of Pakistan's IMF programme.

Saudi Arabia has agreed to the Pakistan government's request to enhance the size of financing from USD 3 billion to USD 6 billion in the shape of deposits with the State Bank of Pakistan, but Saudi authorities want the government to finalise a deal

with the IMF first.

The United Arab Emirates and China, from where the government is expected to receive more than USD 5 billion, have taken a similar approach. The coalition government is seeking a rescheduling of the USD 2.5 billion Chinese debt, additional financing of USD 3-4 billion and USD 2-3 billion in deposits is being sought from the UAE government.

Apart from this, the government has convinced the Saudi authorities to double the size of double the size of provision of oil on deferred payment, from USD 1.2 billion a year to USD 2.4 billion a year with monthly supply of oil worth at least USD 200 million.

In 2021, Saudi Arabia made a deposit of USD 3 billion with the State Bank of Pakistan for one year (2021-22) at a 4 percent mark-up under a support package for strengthening the country's foreign reserves. The support package also included a USD 1.2 billion oil financing facility with

USD 100 million oil supply per month on deferred payment.

Talks with IMF

Meanwhile, IMF Resident Director in Islamabad Esther Perez Ruiz said that the IMF team is expected to hold discussions with Pakistani officials about seventh review in May. She, however, neither dropped a date for the talks nor the venue of meetings. Media reports, nonetheless, indicated that IMF and Pakistani officials would hold discussions in Doha, Qatar, for the seventh review of economy and resumption of the IMF programme probably from May 18, 2022.

The positive conclusion of talks will lead to the approval of USD 8 billion IMF loan with disbursement of USD 2 billion next tranche in May or early June as the government needs this support to prepare the new budget for 2022-23.



Dollar Can Come Down to PKR 160, Economist

Dr. Ashfaq Hassan believes early general elections are essential to stabilise economy

By Dr. Ashfaq Hassan

When former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said the rupee-dollar can be brought to PKR 160/USD, many of us took it as a political position taken by a politician to taunt the former government. But eminent economist Dr Ashfaq Hassan believes the assertion at face value – and seconds it.

In a televised interview the other day, when the host drew his attention to Dar's assertion and sought his opinion, Hassan simply said he agreed with the statement. But he showed no love lost for former State Bank of Pakistan Governor Dr Reza Baqir, describing him as a living example of an economic hitman as defined in John Perkins' book "The Confessions of an Economic Hitman."

Dr. Hassan offered his analysis of the prevailing economic situation in Pakistan and how best to avoid a deterioration of the situation. He expressed regret over the country's key policymakers' lack of intent to drive the country out of the current political and economic crisis driven by intense polarisation.

He drew a parallel between the Sri Lankan crisis and the recent developments in Pakistan, maintaining each day of policy inaction was taking Pakistan toward a Sri Lankan-style crisis.

Asked what steps the incumbent government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) needs to take on an urgent basis, Mr. Hassan said the government should devise a fixed timeframe for budget and subsequently announce a caretaker setup which should then hold early elections. This will rapidly bring down the political temperature.

Commenting on the bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan, he said the government should reach out to the US through backdoor channels to foster a relationship of trust and goodwill based on shared interests.

Asked about his opinion on the petrol subsidy announced by the previous



government, he said that it is impossible to categorise consumers based on fixed eligibility criteria and then issue them subsidy cards. Hence, the PTI government provided an across-the-board subsidy to alleviate the effects of global inflation driven by the Ukraine crisis.

He said the previous government could afford this owing to the Federal Board of Revenue's surplus tax collection – PKR 262 billion more than the target. The subsidy cost the government PKR 250 billion back then.

FBR's confession that if imports are stopped it will lose out a major chunk of its revenue is an admission of failure, Mr. Hassan opined. "FBR is conveniently generating revenue through the port of entry while turning away from domestic tax collection," he said.

Describing measures needed to put the economy on an even keel, he said that the government needed to reduce the import bill by imposing a hefty customs duty on luxury items such as 1300+ cc cars and expensive mobile phones. This would dampen the demand for motor fuel driven by rapidly increasing vehicular traffic.

While labelling the incumbent government's decision to increase the workweek from five to six days as cruel, he said, "Every month we import 1bn liters of petrol – 34 million litres a day". Mr. Hassan requested the government to revisit its decision and revert to a 5-day work week out of which one day should be work from home.

He assured that this wouldn't hamper productivity in any way. Electricity will be saved and fuel bills will be reduced. Furthermore, he suggested a policy of gas rationing to conserve natural resources.

Explaining how the foreign exchange reserves are lost, he said 150 million dollars are spent on [international] travel every month. This came down to 10 million dollars during the pandemic. He suggested the imposition of hefty taxes on leisure travellers to conserve foreign exchange reserves.

"Only two categories, Pakistani expatriates and students should be left out," he said while adding that even business meetings can be held online.

When the talk show host invited the attention of Mr. Hassan to FBR Chairman's removal he said, "Two things contributed to FBR's performance under the outgoing chairman: Reza Baqir and international commodity prices. Reza Baqir significantly devalued the currency, and commodity prices remained high due to the pandemic. This allowed FBR to collect more taxes in PKR terms.

Commenting on the record inflation which is presently peaking at 13 percent but is likely to climb further when subsidies are withdrawn, Mr. Hassan identified the "writ of the state" as very important in tackling the ongoing wave of inflation. "It is not possible without early elections," he said.

Time is running out

By Ali Khizar

Pakistan is entering a near impossible situation. The country has probably never seen such weak political and economic conditions all at the same time. The government is a coalition of a number of parties, and they fear political backlash of unpopular (but much needed) economic decisions. Unfortunately, there is no luxury of time. Forex reserves are dwindling. There is no respite to global commodity prices. It's a matter of weeks (not months) before the economy can no longer survive on its own.

All lenders are eying IMF's (International Monetary Fund's) nod before making firm commitments, and the IMF wants adjustment in energy pricing before staff level talks can begin. On the other hand, the government needs to bring coalition partners on board and desires to weaken IK's popularity before undertaking these unpopular adjustments. All these cannot happen at once. The government must swallow the bitter pill.

The conditions today are difficult than what they were back in 2018. The new government at the time had a fresh electoral mandate and forex reserves buffers wasn't as thin. Moreover, global commodity prices were not in a super cycle as they are today. Eventually, the government went to the IMF and had a deal. Moreover, the establishment and government were on the same page. The coalition government wasn't as tenuous as it is today. And opposition didn't have such strong teeth, as is the case today.

The objective of the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) to form a new government was to oust Imran. The stated goal is achieved. Coalition partners such as PPP are not as interested in the performance of this government. Thus, they are not prepared to support unpopular decisions.

The buck stops with the PML-N leadership. Clearly, the architects of vote-of no-confidence move miscalculated. They may have had appreciation for tough economic conditions, but didn't anticipate the backlash they had to face. It is not the popularity of IK, but the public outburst that is primarily



fueling the resentment against the incumbents. That further hampers their ability to take difficult decisions.

There is no time to do politics. There is no time to put IK on the back foot. There is no time to waste. The criticism against the PTI led government was that it was a "selected" and incompetent one. One of the main objections was that it was not able to negotiate well with the IMF. It faced criticism for not dealing well with the energy mess such as failing to increase the tariffs and petroleum prices. Now Sirs, you are in power. Please demonstrate competency by fixing the mess and earn public's trust.

The import bill is growing out of control. The fiscal deficit is unsustainable. How can a weak government have the luxury to run large subsidies? The argument is that the PTI government has left landmines for the incumbents. Landmines are usually laid when the government is completing its five years (like it happened in 2008 and 2018).

PTI decided to freeze the petroleum prices on 28th Feb 2022. There was no (or little subsidy) at that time. On 8th March, VONC was presented. The subsidy increased to Rs 26-35/ liter on 15th March. And by next revision on 1st April, IK was a lame duck, and the subsidy had grown to Rs24-41/liter.

Then by 15th April, the new government was already in place and the subsidy had risen to Rs 21-51/liter while there was no change in the pricing. Now the subsidy is running at Rs 30-73/liter with no change. How can this be a landmine laid by PTI? The highest slippages have taken place in the last one-month alone.

Unfortunately, no substantive economic decisions have been taken by the new the government yet. There is no decision on the new SBP (State Bank of Pakistan) governor. The petroleum pricing revision is pending. Time is running out fast. Pakistan's food and energy import bill (including coal and LNG) has crossed goods' exports. This is not sustainable. Actions must be taken soon.

It's time either to act now or wait for the disaster. Saudi Arabia has made it crystal clear that there is no support without bringing the IMF on board. The UAE has a similar response. China is asking for the same. The World Bank and Asian Development Banks always wait for the IMF's nod in days of low SBP forex reserves (less than three months cover). Even China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment bank (AIIB) is not ready to help without the IMF. All the roads lead to the IMF. Act now without any further loss of time.

A fiscal quagmire?



By Waqar Masood Khan

A few days ago, Ministry of Finance released the details of fiscal operations covering three quarters Jul-Mar 2021-22. An examination of the data reveals a great deal of information regarding the direction of the economy. Accordingly, in this article, we would review the three-quarters fiscal results and make an attempt to project the final year outcome based on several factors including the past trends in recent years.

Let us first look at the budgetary estimates announced during the budget for FY-2022. The total federal budget deficit was estimated at Rs 3,990 billion. Furthermore, it was also provided that provinces would contribute a surplus of Rs.570 billion.

Thus the overall fiscal deficit (OFD) was estimated at Rs 3,420 billion. Given that the initial nominal GDP was estimated at Rs 53,867 billion, the federal deficit was 7.4% whereas the OFD was 6.3%. Subsequently, after the rebasing of the national accounts in early 2022, the new nominal GDP was assessed at Rs 63,978 billion. Accordingly,

at the budget estimates, federal deficit and OFD were estimated at 6.2% and 5.3%, respectively.

It may be noted that it is the nominal deficit which is targeted under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme simply because it serves the purpose of austerity. Based on old GDP, in its Sixth Review report, the IMF had revised its estimate for deficit to 6.9% compared to 5.6% programmed at the time of the budget.

It may further be pointed out that last year (FY2021) the federal deficit and OFD were realized at Rs 3,541 billion and Rs 3,376 billion or 7.1% and 7.0%, respectively. Notice that FY2022 budget estimates stipulated slight improvement in fiscal numbers.

The above estimates would serve as the benchmarks for our analysis of budgetary performance. The Jul-Mar FY2022 fiscal operations reveal that the OFD was recorded at Rs 2,566 billion or 4% of GDP and federal deficit was Rs.3165 or 5%.

Compared to this, for the same period last year OFD was Rs 1,652 billion or 3.5% of GDP and the federal deficit was Rs 2,065 billion or 4.5%.

Note the fact that the difference between OFD and federal deficit is the provincial surplus. Thus in both last year and in the present, the provincial deficit was nearly 1% of GDP, which is very significant. This shows the final fiscal outcome would be vulnerable to the actual size of the provincial surplus.

We identify the following risks to the final fiscal outcome based on the reasons stated therein.

First, the size of subsidies is clearly out of line with the budgeted target. The budget made a provision of Rs 682 billion. In the first nine months, an expenditure of Rs 575 billion has been recorded which is 84% of the budget.

There have been many heads of subsidies where significant overruns have been reported. Two of these heads are the

subsidy to exports sector for LNG, which is guaranteed at \$6.5 mmbtu compared to the actual procurement at \$27 mmbtu and excessive accumulation of nearly Rs.500 billion in the power sector.

Second, the interest rate of 7% which was the basis for working out interest on domestic debt has risen since September and now stands at 12.25%, with T-bill rates rising to nearly 15%. For greater part of the fiscal year, interest rate was above 7%, the policy rate which was reached in June 21. One percent increase in average interest rate would contribute Rs.250 billion in debt service and thus lead to overrun in expenditure.

Third, the PM's Relief Package announced by the previous government, freezing petroleum prices and reducing electricity price by 20% until June 2022, would have a major impact on the fiscal outcome. The previous government had estimated a cost of Rs. 460 billion but the present finance minister has put it higher than Rs 750 billion.

The reasons for varying estimates is simply because of unknown future petroleum

prices, which so far have been rising since the announcement of the package. Whatever the final cost, it would have a significant impact on budget overrun.

Fourth, the provincial surplus seems on track at least in the first three quarters. The real challenge is to maintain its momentum in the fourth quarter. The provinces also have the habit of making huge outlays in the fourth quarter. Last year, the surplus was Rs 410 billion in first three quarters and then dropped to Rs 313 billion in the fourth. When provinces would be asked to chip-in for subsidies their surplus would fall significantly.

Finally, even if we restrict our attention to historical pattern of deficit in the last quarter, we see a grim scenario. In the last three fiscal years, the average deficit incurred in the last quarter was 4.5%. This alone shows that the fiscal outcome would be significantly off the budget target.

At 8.5% the nominal deficit would Rs 5,440 billion much higher than IMF's revised projection of Rs 3,761 billion at the time of Sixth Review. This is full Rs 2,000 billion above the budgeted level. This is close to Rs

5,600 billion which the new finance minister has stated in his many press conferences.

We have so far assumed that the new government would not significantly alter the economic scene in the next two months. This is a reality as the government has not touched the PM's Relief Package but has added many of its own subsidies on flour and sugar. There is talk of more such subsidies in next few days which would make things more intractable on the fiscal side.

The fiscal policy is at the core of economic stability. With such a high fiscal deficit, it is inevitable to see a rising current account deficit also. Which in turn poses financing challenges as our reserves come under huge pressure as at present.

The reserves have fallen to \$10.4 billion, which was nearly the level when PTI Government started its term. More importantly, the country should brace for higher inflation in the near future also. With so much over-spending, money supply would be excessive and would translate into higher prices even without imported inflation.



Resisting temptation for popular relief

Our fragile national economy cannot afford another spate of popular relief measures



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

In 2020, along with Covid-19, the world was warned about two other crises that could hit it hard: a global recession and a food crisis. Fortunately, Pakistan fared better than its neighbours in terms of Covid-19 impact. The smart, rather than total, lockdowns helped save livelihoods and by the end of 2020, it seemed that we had survived the triple crises.

However, things started changing in 2021. With a slight lag, inflation, which had started in the developed economies due to generous fiscal stimuli and reduced production of goods and services had started affecting the developing countries. Pakistan was no exception.

A quicker than expected global recovery from Covid-19 spurred demand, especially the demand for energy. The prices of a basket of oil, coal and gas doubled in five months from May to October 2021. Pakistan had to import fuel, pulses, edible oil and fertilisers at a high price. This had a two-pronged impact: rising current account deficit and higher inflation.

Come 2022, mounting tensions between Russia and Ukraine started taking their toll on the global energy prices. The value of Pakistan's oil imports doubled (with a marginal increase in volume). The rupee slid down to 185 a dollar in March 2022 from 155 in March 2021.

It was difficult to contain cost-push inflation without compromising scarce foreign exchange reserves. Facing an upbeat opposition, the PTI government took the populist path, turning down several recommendations by the OGRA to pass on fuel prices to consumers and announcing an across the board 'energy relief package' consisting of a freeze on retail prices of petroleum products and a subsidy of electricity consumption. Both these measures led to a galloping current account deficit, putting further pressure on the value of the rupee.

As a part of the Pakistan Democratic Movement's campaign against the PTI government, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) launched a protest against high

inflation called the "mehngai mukao march" on March 26. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and other PDM parties too promised relief from inflation after ousting the PTI government (through better governance). The energy relief package was seen as an appeasement measure and a sign of weakness on the part of the government. No wonder several opposition leaders pointed out that it was announced under opposition pressure.

The coalition government realises that subsidising energy across the board is not good policy. First, because it is not a very efficient use of subsidies. Second, because it hurts fiscal balance and is not sustainable. And third, because not reducing the demand for imported energy negatively affects the balance of payments.

An important point, easy to miss amidst the ongoing political polarisation, is that it is in the interest of the PTI, the PML-N and the PPP not to 'politicise' the economic policies. Whoever gets to lead the government after the next elections should inherit a healthy economy.

The economic and energy managers of the PML-N have therefore announced a roll back of the energy relief package, comparing its impact to that of landmines. The finance minister has also assured the International Monetary Fund during the “Spring meetings” that the new government will withdraw the package and wishes to revive the IMF programme.

Political compulsions and regard for economic realities do not always work in the same direction. Even though reviving the IMF package is crucial to the macroeconomic stability of Pakistan, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif will find it hard to risk loss of political capital by withdrawing in one go the popular relief on energy announced by his predecessor. After taking oath of office last month, he has decided not to withdraw the subsidies till May 16.

The high food and fuel prices are not a transitory phenomenon and the government cannot adequately deal with it using an ad hoc approach.

The World Bank’s recently released Commodity Markets Outlook report reveals that the increase in energy prices over the past two years (Covid-19 and the Ukraine war) has been the largest since the 1973 oil crisis. According to the World Bank, the average annual oil prices would remain 40 percent higher, natural gas prices would be 100 percent higher, and coal prices would be 80 percent higher in 2022 compared to 2021.

On food inflation, the outlook report notes that price increases for food commodities — of which Russia and Ukraine are large producers — and fertilisers, which rely on natural gas as feedstock, have been the largest since 2008.

The conclusion of the report that the food and energy price shocks from the Ukraine war could last for years merits special attention of our political leaders, both on the treasury and opposition benches.

Irrespective of how earnestly Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and former prime

minister Imran Khan might wish to provide relief to the masses by shielding them from soaring energy prices, Pakistan has to deal with the twin deficits — a rupee deficit (fiscal deficit) and a dollar deficit (current account deficit). After dealing with the balance of payments crisis for the current financial year, it will have to arrange for another \$35 billion. Our fragile national economy cannot afford popular relief measures.

In taking measures to increase job opportunities for the masses, the government should resist the temptation to provide popular relief. It should also ensure, through data triangulation using the BISP, NADRA and FBR databases that the subsidies it provides are well targeted and not across the board.

An important point, easy to miss amidst the ongoing political polarisation, is that it is in the interest of the PTI, the PML-N and the PPP not to ‘politicise’ the economic policies. Whoever gets to lead the government after the next elections should inherit a healthy economy.



Spanish Cultural Show



On Wednesday, May 11, 2022, the Embassy of Spain in Pakistan, in partnership with the Islamabad Club, staged a "Spanish Cultural Show" at the Islamabad Club Cricket Oval.

A huge number of Club members and their families, as well as Ambassadors and senior diplomats from key embassies in Islamabad, attended the celebration. In the lush Green Islamabad Club Cricket Oval, the audience enjoyed the show.

During his remarks, the Ambassador of Spain thanked the Administrator of the Islamabad Club, Sardar Ahmad Nawaz Sukhera, for his collaboration and support in making the Cultural Show a big success and unforgettable one.

In his presentation, the Administrator of the Islamabad Club pledged the Club's complete assistance to the Embassies/High Commissions in Islamabad in hosting similar beautiful events in the future.





Walking the Tightrope of Fiscal Reform

Withdrawal of the fuel subsidy is too fraught a process to be left to donor diktats



By Naqi Akbar

It is always a sweet recipe for any government, political or military, to offer subsidised commodities to the public as it saves abuses and scorn. However, the somewhat smooth sailing thus achieved is more of a self-deception.

Given the volume of population of a country, the volume of the commodity used; its demand nature; the inelastic demand nature in case of an essential item; are all the deciding factors for the economic managers to consider before taking the plunge.

Subsidy in other words means that government is ready to subject its kitty to extreme pressure on a daily basis to cater to the public demand.

Today in Pakistan, as the country looks to draw up another federal budget and another funding arrangement with the IMF, the issue of managing subsidies has been a catch 22 situation for both the outgoing Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and the incumbent coalition led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

Under immense pressure to remove subsidy on POL products as per the standard IMF diktat, the PTI government signed the covenant but broke it more than once during the early months of the current calendar year for the fear of public backlash.

It may be pointed out here that a mix of bad foreign exchange parity and the Brent price peg for POL products combined together to make a price tag of PKR 150 per litre for any user whether driving a four wheeler or a two wheeler.

If the subsidy is removed, as has been suggested in a number of summaries forwarded by the price regulatory authority Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA), the pump price could be close to PKR 230 per litre.

However, what has been witnessed is that despite immense pressure on the public exchequer to manage that subsidy in a country of 220 million with majority having access to fuel burning modes of transport, both the governments have shrunk away

from exercising that option.

The government formed in the aftermath of in house change in mid-April 2022 despite its apparent political confidence has so far sat on the OGRA summery. That is happening despite the fact that both the outgoing adviser for economy and the succeeding administration economy manager both stood united in lamenting the continuation of the subsidy policy.

The withdrawal of subsidies have been the buzzword of many IMF reforms since the 80s. The first series of food riots in the states of Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa were triggered in the 1980s by removal of subsidy on food items and specifically grain.

The governments, in both cases dictatorships, were made to believe that in doing so they will be saving funds for reinvestment in more productive ventures. It is another story that move created a law and order issue situation that had to be quelled at great expense.

These experiments in the 80s made way for the widening the ambit of subsidy to fuel and energy prices. The story of many countries dealing with the IMF program has been that they should cut down the expenses on subsidy. Apparently, we feel that it was only the issue of a government under the IMF program forced to take unpopular decisions.

A deeper look in the specific case of Pakistan suggests that withdrawal of subsidy has been instrumental in beefing up the production cost graphs where bulk energy usages are involved. Manufacturing units using POL, electric power generated through the POL input, invariably had to pass on the impact to the end user.

The overall impact on economy in Pakistan is that the manufacturing sectors has characteristically adopted a high-cost economy profile. The first impact is flight of the capital and the other impact is downward trends in growth. Pakistan story since the 1988 IMF programs has been precisely that. It has yet to register the growth rate that can prove that economy is growing, and people standards of living improving.

Pakistani manufacturing sector has been able to sustain itself. However, its business policy advocacy has always centred on the business community's sensitivity to have a price competitive environment. The administrations at the centre have always favoured withdrawal of this or that subsidy to qualify for an IMF program needed to fund and sustain an inefficient public sector government.

Against the backdrop of these ground mechanics, any withdrawal of subsidy bid by the government, whether caretaker or properly elected, will not just determine the level of popularity of the old or the new versions of Pakistan. It has the potential to hit hard at the economic viability of any production, trade or service providing activity in Pakistan.

Now Pakistan – already reaping the “benefits” of a free-floating, market-driven exchange rate – is under the gun to withdraw the subsidy on basic POL in the near future. This would be tantamount to ushering in a devastating wave of cost-push inflation, which can hit simultaneously at the purchasing power, the rising cost of production and transportation and the

non-viability of making sense of any economic activity.

The administration forced to make this tough call by the end of the month, in the form of Finance Bill in June, or a few months down the line, will have to balance out the popular and macroeconomic impact of the move.

The popular and macroeconomic impact can be managed if not completely diminished. Experiences in the case of India subsidy removal program can merit attention for the Pakistani economic planners. When faced with nearly 27 percent increase in subsidy expenditures in 2012-13, the Indian policymakers planned a gradual phase out.



It may however, be pointed out that Indian economy was not afflicted with a free-floating currency, making any subsidy removal even more chaotic in nature.

The economists divided the subsidy minimisation into 3 categories depending upon the households targeted: 6 months, 18 months and 36 months. While the affording households were exposed to the price shock, the households likely to get the hit were divided into the above-mentioned timeline categories.

The hardest hit were placed in 3 years, a bit better economically in 18 months, and comparatively better ones in 6 months category. What were the tasks set for the Indian government were better monitoring and capping of the subsidies. The most

important component was placing the cash equivalent to the subsidy in the accounts of the targeted sections of society.

The Iranians also undertook similar exercise in 2010-2015 period, to apply withdrawal of subsidy with cash handouts put into the accounts of the targeted sections of society. These time-honoured subsidy measures allowed the administration to save almost 20 percent more budgetary allocations over the period.

Here, keeping in view the chaotic state of affairs in our own country, any meaningful fiscal reform with a political cost or baggage will be hard to imagine. However, any such plan would need political will to selectively negotiate with IMF the overall

prescriptions of the economy as well as the extent of subsidy to be managed.

Consequently, the next six months can usher in political instability, partly triggered by political factors and partly by macroeconomic and microeconomic factors. The policymakers, the stakeholders, and the originating governments will have to show a higher level of long-term maturity in the place of short-term expediency to get over that looming crisis.

While our Indian and Iranian neighbours were better off to have started the processes much earlier, for us Pakistanis, the stakes are too high to be ignored. Creative economic management is needed besides the requisite political will to do the needful.

Afghanistan on a Slow Burn

The Afghan situations has implications for the region and the world



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

The growing unrest in Afghanistan is slowly disrupting peace in the neighbouring countries. Militancy has once again made its way back to Pakistan's border regions. Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran believe that an unstable Afghanistan in the neighbourhood is not in anyone's interest but there is no consensus on what is the solution for stability in the post-US withdrawal war-ravaged country.

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan on 15 August 2021, all the neighbouring countries breathed a sigh of relief that the situation would now be peaceful after the departure of the United States and the Western troops. Little did anyone know then that another catastrophe was lying in wait.

The situation has also worsened because of a US freeze on Afghanistan's national capital. Most regional analysts now believe that the world powers, especially the West, want to see a fragmented Afghanistan. This impression deepens after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Pakistan itself is currently under constant attack through infiltration from Afghanistan. Pakistan is facing threats and attacks from three factions,

although by far the most attacks have been carried out by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The other two militant organisations targeting Pakistan from time to time are the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISKP) and insurgents from Balochistan.

As far as the TTP is concerned, the government has repeatedly approached the organisation for talks. The group stepped up its attacks after the last failed talks. The TTP later announced violent anti-Pakistan "Operation Al-Badr" during the holy month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, security forces were attacked in several districts including Tank, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, and North and South Waziristan. After the last attack of this operation in the Charsadda district, a ten-day ceasefire was declared on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, two more factions announced to join TTP. On the other hand, the tribes of South Waziristan appealed to the TTP to extend the ceasefire.

Sources say that once again an atmosphere of dialogue is developing.

If the talks succeed, the TTP threat will have been neutralised. But obviously, like any other movement, some of its fighters may not agree to the peace.

There are many fighters who have parted ways with the movement due to differences. This is how ISKP was founded in the region when Hafiz Saeed Khan from Orakzai split from the TTP in 2015 and took over the leadership of ISKP. Along with them, many fighters of TTP also joined ISKP.

It should be noted that last year when the West withdrew, the biggest attack in Afghanistan was carried out by ISKP. If there is one major challenge after the economic hardships for the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan over the past year, it is ISKP.

ISKP has not only continued its attacks on public gatherings but has also continued to target Taliban leaders. On 24 April, Maulvi Abdul Fateh, a senior Taliban officer in Petroleum and Mining, was assassinated by the ISKP in Badakhshan province.

It is worth mentioning that Badakhshan province shares a border with China in the Wahan district. ISKP has claimed responsibility for the attack.

From September 2021 to December 2021, ISKP carried out 119 attacks in Afghanistan, including more than 90 attacks directly targeting the Afghan Taliban. Similarly, ISKP has continued its attacks across the border in Pakistan's Bajaur district.

As feared, ISKP continues to target Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) leaders in Bajaur. So far, four local Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leaders have been killed. This is the first time ISKP has threatened a political party in Pakistan, publishing a seven-page fatwa targeting JUI.

At the moment, it is being said in the ISKP propaganda campaign that JUI is backing the Afghan Taliban, but in the long run, the issue could escalate further. Several local TTP commanders from Bajaur have joined ISKP. There are similar reports from Momand and other districts too.

With the recent escalation of attacks by Baloch insurgents, it is being said that Baloch resistance organisations have links with some elements of ISKP or TTP.

Apart from Pakistan, Afghanistan's chaotic influence on Central Asian states is growing rapidly. ISKP's media organ Al-Azaim has begun publishing in Central Asian languages. For example, since 1 February, Al-Azaim has published two books in Uzbek including a long text slandering the Taliban as slaves of China, Russia, the US, Pakistan, and Turkey. Both appear in Latin

alphabet used in Uzbekistan. Al-Azaim has also released at least 15 audio recordings in the Uzbek language.

Besides, ISKP propaganda material is being spread rapidly in Tajik and Kyrgyz regions. On 18 April, social media accounts linked to the ISKP reportedly circulated a statement to say that they had launched multiple rockets at an Uzbek military unit near the city of Termez.

The claims were accompanied by video clip of the rockets allegedly used in the assault. The launching pad was reportedly in Hairatan, a border town in the northern Afghan province of Balkh. The terror group also released a photo and video of the projectiles to back its claims.

This month, Islamic State militants based in Afghanistan claim to have mounted yet another attack on a neighbouring country Tajikistan. Authorities in Dushanbe have said only that bullets were shot across the border during fighting between Taliban forces and fighters with the ISKP.

ISKP online propaganda resources stated on 7 May that its militants had fired seven rockets into Tajikistan and that they were targeting the country's armed forces. They claimed that they fired the rockets from a launcher mounted on a vehicle and that the border guard opened fire after they carried out their strike, but that they managed to escape.

Clearly, the Taliban are coming under increasing pressures in the northern parts of the country, where they have been challenged by a non-Pashtun faction that goes by Northern Resistance Force (NRF).

The NRF claims to have weakened the Taliban in the Panjshir Valley. The Taliban, on the other hand, have called it propaganda. But eyewitnesses have seen the arrival of a fresh Taliban forces entering the valley.

Contrary to history, the Taliban do not seem to be facing much resistance in the north this time. However, the fighting could spread chaos and send shockwaves into neighbouring countries.

As far as Iran is concerned, it is facing the problem of the arrival of new Afghan refugees. On the other hand, ISKP is trying hard to leave a terror imprint on Iranian soil. In April, two clerics were stabbed to death in the Iranian city of Mashhad. Local officials feared ISKP-linked Afghans caused the assassination.

In a situation where the West has left Afghanistan mired in deep trouble, every neighbouring country is facing domestic and border problems and challenges. The situation is reminiscent of the 1980s and 1990s. This does not augur well for the region or the world, but is anybody looking?



Why Justice and Equity Will Remain Elusive in a P5-Dominated World

The UNSC was designed to safeguard the interests of the P5, not to ensure global peace



By Arsim Tariq

“The United Nations as now constructed is incapable of freeing mankind from the scourge of war.” – Larry L. Leonard

The global community has once again found itself in a controversial debate over the limitless veto power and the impunity the Big Five enjoy in the United Nations Security Council at the expense of the UN Charter.

Only this time, the UN is officially a part of this discourse that will force the Security Council’s five permanent members – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia – to justify exercising their veto rights. The 193 member states adopted the resolution by consensus in the last week of April 2022.

The Security Council reform has been proposed at the United Nations for years but has garnered new momentum in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Currently, the five permanent members have (or, shall we say, had) the authority to reject any resolution proposed by the Security Council while the ten rotating members do not possess such authority.

Institutional inequality and hegemonic politics are apparent in the favour of these entrenched great powers, specifically the West, even though the Big Five is responsible for carrying out plenty of illegal interventions in relatively weaker states including Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and now Ukraine. Perhaps that is what Larry Leonard meant when he associated the veto power with Frankenstein.

The debate, however, emerged after the Russian Federation used its veto to block the draft resolution on the immediate cessation of Russia’s military offensive against Ukraine. Since 1992, the three major powers, Russia, the US, and China, have used their veto powers to preserve their national interests and security with no regard to the norms and legal frameworks of the UN.

Although the incorporation of the veto provision in the UN Charter was a mistake, its frequent application in the Security Council voting sessions has been far worse. The Security Council and General Assembly voting procedures are “far more liberal” under the UN Charter than the League

Covenant, but voting in League organs has never been a problem. The League’s organs did not obtain satisfying outcomes, but this was not entirely attributable to the voting system.

On the other hand, the Security Council’s flawed voting system has been a source of concern for the United Nations’ sincere subscribers ever since its establishment. Leland Goodrich and Edvard Hambro argued that no article of the Charter has generated more controversy than Article 27.

Larry Leonard in his seminal book, *International Organization*, contended that no issue at the United Nations has garnered as much public attention as the Security Council’s voting system generally referred as the veto. In the same manner, Palmer and Perkins asserted that nothing has done more to erode popular faith in the United Nations than the Security Council’s regular use, or misuse, of the veto.

The veto power has slowed the process of drafting peace accords and stalled reconstruction efforts in war-torn areas of the

world. The Big Five argued the veto provision was intended to ensure the Council's efficacy, but it has effectively paralyzed the Council's operations. Its frequent (mis)use has impaired the Security Council's ability to act decisively in a number of critical matters.

One of the primary reasons why many states and International Relations scholars, especially in the Global South, despise the veto power is that permanent members occasionally use it to shield friendly states from condemnation or economic sanctions with whom they have close economic and diplomatic ties.

This conveys the plainly incorrect signal that states in close proximity to one of the Big Five can get away with repeated human rights breaches or unlawful military incursions into neighboring states. Regrettably, instances of this type abound.

Malaysia, for example, complained to the Council in 1964 of Indonesian aggression when the latter dropped armed paratroopers on its territory. However, the Soviet Union vetoed a draft resolution that "deplored" the incident and urged the parties to refrain from threatening or using force.

The UNSC debates on the apartheid system in South Africa (and Southern Rhodesia) and Israel's human rights breaches are very well-known. No fewer than 56 vetoes were lodged to block resolutions against South Africa (26 by the United Kingdom, 20 by the United States, and 10 by France).

For example, in 1986, the United Kingdom and the United States blocked draft resolutions condemning South African attacks on Angola, Zambia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. The same permanent members vetoed economic sanctions against the apartheid administration in 1987 and 1988, despite continuous human rights breaches.

On the other hand, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict accounts for approximately half of all US vetoes. The US has vetoed at least 52 resolutions critical of Israel since 1972. For five decades, the US has misused its authority as a UNSC permanent member to support its 'strategic ally'. Even during the Gaza crisis of May 2021, the US vetoed three resolutions, calling for an immediate ceasefire between Israeli forces and Hamas, within a week.

Washington's unwavering support to Israel has enabled it to stymie resolutions condemning violence against protesters,

illegal Israeli settlements established in the occupied West Bank since 1967, and even calls for an investigative process into the 1990 assassination of seven Palestinian workers by a former Israeli soldier.

Now Russia, being the most frequent user of veto, is blocking all resolutions against its invasion of Ukraine. The Russian abuse of power and the hypocrisy of the US is a cause of concern for the very structure of the UNSC under which it operates.

On the other hand, it is rather difficult to abolish the veto power altogether. In a world dominated by power politics, some form of authority will remain in the hands of the hegemonic states in the global North, and the fate of global peace and the global South will remain at the mercy of the decisions the North makes whenever feasible to them – unless the South resists and de-schools itself from the imperial and hegemonic ideas disseminated by the North.

The veto power, however, is another symptom, not a cause, of the diseased system dominated by the North. Justice and equity will remain distant dreams under this system, designed to perpetuate the hegemony of the powerful few.



The Fallout of Russia-Ukraine War

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

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

First and foremost and essentially, the Ukraine War is a human tragedy that will have far reaching consequences for the world. If we look at the world economy, it is seriously impacted by the war in a number of ways.

All the major financial institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have cut the growth forecast of the world economy. It is estimated that all major economies will grow with a reduced growth rate. The impact on the emerging and developing economies will be severe.

The world economies are interdependent as a result of globalisation. This interdependence has been under serious strain for some time due to the trade war between the US and China. The Ukraine War has exacerbated this war. One of the outcomes of which is disrupted supply chains and protectionist policies of many countries for fear of shortages of food and raw materials.

This has resulted in inflationary pressure throughout the world. Russia and Ukraine are major grain exporters and their exports are greatly hampered by the war. Not only are their exports disrupted for the existing grain stocks but the worry is that planting area for the next crops is also greatly reduced. Harvesting is also likely to be hampered by ongoing war. Russia and Ukraine together account for almost 20 percent of the world's corn exports and 30 percent wheat exports.

The agricultural fertiliser industry is heavily dependent on natural gas. The price of fertiliser is going to be much higher due to very high price of natural gas as a result of a combination of factors, war being one of the main contributing factors.

This situation does not bode well for the poor of the world. There will be significant food shortages and continued inflation all around the world.

The problem further complicates as other producers raise trade barriers to ensure food supply to their own populations. Food shortages and inflation together make a

perfect cocktail for social unrest which can result in toppling many weak governments leaving death and destruction in its wake.

Even in more developed countries, the high inflation is resulting in lower real incomes, lower business confidence, increased uncertainty, and disrupted trade resulting in reduced economic activity, putting more pressure on governments' exchequers, and catapulting budgetary estimates.

The poorer segments of the society will be hit hardest by these developments. Cost of living is a big problem at the moment for rich economies, whereas sustaining life will be a problem for many in the developing world.



This is another human tragedy in the making far and beyond the killing fields of Ukraine. If nothing is done, millions of people can die of starvation or malnutrition. The vulnerable sections of societies will suffer disproportionately of this impending catastrophe.

The high prices of gas and oil will have a knock-on effect on the cost of production and transportation of goods, further fuelling the inflationary pressure resulting in the weakening of national currencies and bringing in imported inflation having a snowball effect on inflation overall.

Russia is also a major producer and exporter of titanium and palladium, necessary raw materials especially for car and computer industries. The sanctions are jeopardising both industries resulting in reduced production, higher prices and unemployment.

The heavy dependence of Europe on Russian oil and especially gas poses insurmountable problems for Europe. This has cushioned the impact of sanctions as exports of oil and gas are not cut off and are being paid off.

There is a lot of rhetoric about Europe getting rid of the shackles of Russian energy but the fact remains that it is easier said than done as some of the European countries are 100 percent dependent on Russian gas.

The biggest economy of Europe, Germany is 49 percent dependent on Russian gas. Even before the war, CNG terminals were being set up to reduce this dependence but after the war the process had been accelerated. However, it is obvious that CNG will never be able to completely replace Russian energy supplies.

Some of the European banks and financial institutions are also under pressure because of sanctions and their risk premium has increased for their exposure to the Russian economy. At the same time the churning wheel of many industries has slowed down.

The war on currencies' front is another important aspect that needs to be watched closely as it can have far reaching consequences.

The demographic configuration of many European countries in the light of massive emigration of Ukrainians is another issue that is likely to result in significant social and economic complications.

However, it is not doom and gloom for everyone involved in the war. Some countries are least affected and are instead reaping the rewards of war and will continue to do so unless warring parties and other most affected nations realise the situation and put an end to this mad affair.

On the Strategic front, this war is to result, slowly and gradually, in lasting reshaping and redrawing of strategic positions of different nations.

(To be continued)

Can The Russia-Ukraine Conflict Spark World War III?

Lavrov's sabre-rattling apart, Russia lacks the wherewithal to take on a unified front of Western powers

By Shahmir Niazi

When Russia launched a full-scale offensive against Ukraine in February, it was feared that the conflict may trigger World War III. NATO members led by the US rose to support of Ukraine, providing it with sophisticated weapons, transport vehicles, relief goods, and economic support.

The ensuing refugee crisis became Europe's largest since World War II with more than 5.8 million Ukrainians leaving the country and a quarter of the population internally displaced.

At the outset of the Russian offensive, there were signs that the conflict could spur a full-scale war between NATO and Russia. However, more than two months into the Russian offensive, better sense seems to have prevailed and global superpowers Russia and the US have resisted the temptation of going all-out against each other.

Perhaps it is due to the liberal democracies' war fatigue that Western countries have stopped at hitting Russia with harsh economic sanctions. Even as NATO continues to equip Ukrainian forces with weapons, equipment, and valuable intelligence, the stated policy of non-engagement in a direct military offensive against Russia has not changed.

On 10 May, the United States Congress passed a landmark USD 40-billion aid package for Ukraine on the quick heels of the House passing USD 13.6 billion in emergency aid to support the Ukrainian military and civilians.

What, then, prompted Russia's most senior lawmaker, State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin to accuse the US of active military involvement and coordination with Ukrainian armed forces over military operations against Russia? "Washington is essentially coordinating and developing military operations, thereby directly participating in military actions against our country," he said.

Volodin's accusation is important since he often voices the Kremlin's official view, but

can it be accepted at face value? To assess if the US or its NATO allies can afford to actively participate in the conflict on the battlefield, one needs to look at Putin's repeated threats to employ nuclear weapons against its adversaries.

Expecting Moscow to escalate the war into other theatres in an effective way by conventional means, is unrealistic. This offers all the more reason to believe Putin's assertion.

During the ongoing conflict, Russia has suffered thousands of casualties, and loss of tanks, fighter jets, armoured vehicles, and ships, and the Russian economy has shrunk by 45 percent since the war began.

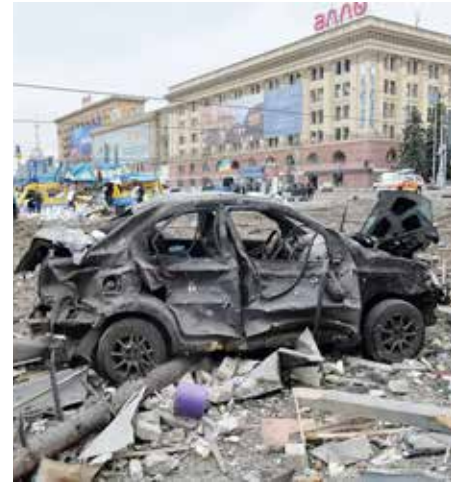
Russia's top diplomat Sergei Lavrov recently warned Ukraine against provoking World War III and underlined the possibility of the conflict escalating into the nuclear realm. He said, "Russia's threat of a nuclear conflict should not be underestimated."

He said, "NATO has effectively entered into a war with Russia through proxies and is arming those proxies," he said while adding that NATO forces are "pouring oil on the fire."

Lavrov further said that everyone is reciting incantations that in no case can we allow World War III. "The danger is serious," he said. "It is real. It should not be underestimated."

These repeated threats have raised the cost of NATO's direct engagement with Russia on the battlefield. How far the nuclear deterrent will help avoid World War III, only time will tell.

In Moscow, there is a feeling of isolation. It has no powerful allies to come to its aid if a world war begins. China which is Russia's strongest ally, as reflected in the Summit meeting between President Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin during the Olympics, has largely remained on the sidelines since the war started. Perhaps it is assessing the situation and gauging the ability of the West to respond in kind if it decides to use military means to occupy Taiwan.



The cautious policy adopted by Beijing can be ascertained from its decision to abstain from voting against the UN resolution demanding Russia ceasing operations in Ukraine. Similarly, India has remained largely neutral on the conflict. This lack of enthusiasm for the war shown by Russia's closest allies has significantly reduced the chances of the conflict escalating into an all-out global war.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin while on a visit to Kyiv said: "The US wants to see Ukraine remain a sovereign, democratic country, but also wants to see Russia weakened to the point where it can't do things like invading Ukraine."

Austin's remarks indicated a major shift in US strategic calculus since earlier it claimed the goal of American military aid was to help Ukraine win and to defend Ukraine's NATO neighbours against Russian threats. The additional objective of significantly weakening Russia by imposing harsh economic sanctions and draining its military's motivation and capacity by sustaining a prolonged conflict – will likely intensify tensions between the two superpowers.

Nevertheless, it would be premature to raise the prospects of a World War III especially when Russia has an ailing economy smaller in size than that of New York State; unavailability of strong allies; and a logistically weak military incapable of matching the military prowess of the US.

Muslim View of the End Times

A look at Muslim Eschatology and its impact on world affairs



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Previous articles have covered Jewish and Christian eschatological impact on world affairs. This article will review the impact of Muslim eschatology on world affairs. It is based on a study titled 'Vision of Apocalypse' by Robert Leonhard conducted at National Security Analysis Department of the Johns Hopkins University, Maryland of 2010.

Both Jews and Christians share a wide spectrum of thinking about the relevance of ancient prophecy, with some believing in a literal, personal Messiah, others believing in a messianic age, and still others dismissing prophecy altogether.

But within the population of more than 1.5 billion Muslims, the divergence of faith concerning the fundamentals of eschatology—belief in a divinely commissioned future ruler and a final judgement for mankind—is much narrower. Almost all Muslims believe in the future arrival of Al-Mahdi, the awaited one; and they anticipate an apocalyptic resolution of human history resulting in God's victory over evil. The person of Mahdi, however, is not mentioned in the Quran; his identity comes from hadith.

A number of factors play into this remarkable convergence of belief. Islam is a young religion (1400 years old) compared to Judaism and Christianity. Although Muslim world has endured many religious upheavals and changes over the past fourteen centuries, it has not suffered on a scale similar to the Jewish Diaspora or the Christian wars of religion in the 16th and 17th centuries.

For Jews and Christians, these disasters fundamentally

changed their religions and served as catalysts for significant denominational splits. The violence that they both perpetrated and suffered was transformational, leading to previously unheard-of concepts, including the privatization of religious beliefs, freedom of religion and conscience, and the separation of church and state. It also led to the development of dramatically different schools of interpretation concerning apocalyptic prophecies.

Muslims have likewise suffered catastrophes throughout their history, but none of them led to permanent and fundamental changes that altered the way faithful think about the end of history. Similarly, although many Muslim communities exist within modern, democratic societies, a majority of believers do not hold to the "sacred tenet of secularity" within the Western world. Instead, they believe that governance and Islam should be connected, and this idea is a major theme of Muslim eschatology.

If belief in the end times prophecies of the Quran and Hadith is practically universal within Muslims, the study of eschatology historically remained the purview of conservative scholars from classical times to the mid-20th century. Apocalyptic beliefs would an occasion excite some popular movement within the community of the faithful; would-be Mahdis occasionally arose and were disposed of but in general only the recognized scholars had the authority to pronounce on matters of prophecy.

The Six-Day War changed all that. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 was a cataclysmic event for Muslims in general and Arab Muslims in particular. The Israelis' decisive defeat of

the Arab alliance shattered the hopes and pride of many and led to societal introspection and a renewed determination to continue the resistance against Zionism.

In the wake of the disaster, Arab aspirations shifted away from previous devotion to socialism and post-colonial nationalism and instead sought answers from within the Islamic religion. There, it found a system of thought that could accommodate perpetual warfare. It found a narrative about the future that seemed to fit current events and give believers hope when their own governments failed them.

With renewed popular fervor for literature about Islamic prophecy, scholars trained in classical methods no longer enjoyed a monopoly on studying, writing and teaching (not to say agitating) about the subject. Instead, a generation of radicals – few of them trained in old traditions – have taken pen in hand and composed a seemingly endless stream of exciting, innovative, and compelling narratives about the End times.

Most agree that the apocalypse is happening now or in the very near future. The topic found its way into the Hamas Charter, policy discussion in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and onto Arab streets, where it became a handmaiden of Jihad. In Afghanistan and Pakistan Hadith about armies from Khorasan and Ghuzwa-e-Hind (scared war with Hindustan) have incited the activism of Islamic activists and mujahideen.

Recent apocalyptic writings cover strong themes of anti-Islamic conspiracies globally, with special reference to the diabolical role of the Jews, freemasons, Western politicians, and corrupt Arab rulers. They are full of resentment at the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They express extreme antisemitism and anger on ill treatment of Palestinians. Israel on the map is viewed as a dagger in the heart of Islam.

Writers point to the series of wars involving Byzantines (West) and Muslims. The two world wars, the Gulf wars, the war in Bosnia, and of course, recent operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan – are all considered events nearing End Times.

Virtually every apocalyptic writer draws from the 'anti-Jewish' hadith from Sahih Bokhari compilation: "The day of resurrection will not arrive until the Muslims make war against the Jews and kill them, and until a Jew hiding behind a rock and tree, and the rock and tree will say: Oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!"

Such Hadiths and trends in recent writings include repeated mention of imminence of End Times. Concluding that a global conspiracy against followers of Islam is underway and the impending nature of conflict is a reality.

They claim that all these wars were incited by the secret Jewish organizations under the leadership of Dajjal (Antichrist), with the aim of uprooting Islamic societies, even Islamic blocs in Europe, so that Muslims would not have even a single independent state, where someday, sharia instead of Western governance system could be implemented.

The first Gulf war of 1991, between the Byzantines (predominantly

western coalition forces) and the Muslims was the first apocalyptic war, one of the signs of End times. The US, they claim, is under control of the Jews and deeply involved in the world conspiracy to deprive and destroy Islamic impending dominance.

Making use of various Hadiths that associate tall buildings with End Times signs and manifestation of materialistic human arrogance, Muslim apocalyptists focused their contempt on New York city. The 9/11 attacks and the repeated attention of would-be terrorists there emanate in part from the hatred inspired by these writings.



The drama and ultimate victory for Islam envisioned by the Quran, the Hadiths, and recent apocalyptic writings have served as an inspiration and hope for Muslims throughout the Middle East and the world who are unhappy with their current circumstances, this study claims.

In the Muslim history, three major political happenings justified their legitimacy by End Times prophecies. During the successful overthrow of Umayyad dynasty by the Abbasids, key role of black flag bearing armies of Abu Muslim Khorasani was projected as valid End Times sign.

The Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt legitimized themselves by projecting to be the awaited Mahdi. Their first two rulers used the title al Mahdi. In 1258 AD, invasion of Baghdad and ransacking of the Capital was interpreted as invasion of Gog and Magog and nothing could be done to avoid the disaster, a major sign of Muslim End Times prophecy.

(To be continued)

In the next article, reflection of End Times prophecies in Hamas charter, eschatological vision of post revolution Iran and impact of Ghuzwa-e-Hind(holy war with India) on Muslim activism in the subcontinent will be elaborated.

Business Leaders Call for Restoration of Fiscal Prudence

PM Sharif's charter of economy idea finds takers among the country's top business people



By Azeem Waqas

The coalition government headed by Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) is up against economic challenges of gigantic proportions. Perhaps even more problematically, it is a political government torn between the choices of populist versus sound policies ahead of a general election.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan Business Council (PBC) has cautioned Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to not allow the country to experience the kind of challenges confronting Sri Lanka and secure bilateral and multilateral funding. Revival of the IMF program will also be crucial in this connection.

PBC has asked the Prime Minister Sharif to avoid any further populist measures that result in increasing the inflation, which is at 13.7 percent for May 2022 – highest in 27 month.

The highbrow business forum presented immediate economic imperatives for the new government. Foremost amongst these is restoring fiscal prudence, stemming the pressure on the forex reserves, and reviving the IMF programme.

It demanded the government restore fiscal prudence by withdrawing the

untargeted subsidy on fuel and replace it with targeted assistance through BISF.

PBC suggested maintaining a competitive exchange rate target REER (Real Effective Exchange Rate) range of 95-105 and avoid unsustainable measures to prop up the PKR.

Chief Executive Pakistan Business Council Ali Ahsan Malik said that there is scarcity in the market due to burgeoning imports. At the moment, REER is at 96 and government should try to maintain it at this level.

Ahsan Malik feared that if the IMF program does not revive early Saudi Arabia might withdraw its USD 3 billion deposit from the Central Bank, and, if the overseas Pakistanis start withdrawing dollars from Roshan digital accounts, the country's reserves will be in negative.

Even after one month in power, PMLN economic team is confused on economic front it has not yet given a positive signal in the market. The economy is waiting for a helping hand.

Renowned economist Professor Atif Mian has said in a webinar that Pakistan needs to communicate with the rest of the world that it has a new

credible regime that has macro-prudential regulations.

“First of all Exchange rate has to be flexible. Pakistan has moved in that direction in recent past, which is good”, he said. “Other is the capital account liberalisation – which is not in the right direction at the moment.

“For a country like Pakistan you have to use capital accounts very judiciously. You want to encourage investment coming from outside as much as possible as long as that investment is going to green field industry.”

Professor Mian says that Pakistan has to clearly define the rules of the game for foreign investors like China. Capital Accounts should be open for foreign investors who can increase high-tech exports. This will have a positive impact on our balance of payment position.

For the upcoming budget, PBC proposed the FBR to stem the pressure on forex reserves by reducing imports, raising regulatory duty (RD) on import of non-essentials as RD is impractical on fuel imports; limit import; and promote work from home.

The forum also advocates early closure

of commercial centers and wedding halls and rationing of fuel for private vehicles. It recommends the government support exports, deliver a regionally competitive energy tariff, consider additional incentives for non-textile exports, and widen the geographical dispersion of export-oriented industries.

Islamabad based economist Dr. Sajid Amin worries that the government seems rapidly losing the trust of the markets. To minimise uncertainty, it needs to clearly communicate its economic agenda and an action plan to achieve it; its position on petroleum subsidies and IMF; the outcome of KSA and UAE visits; and the tenure it plans to stay.

He further said that politics and uncertainty around IMF program is already adversely affecting market sentiment and expectations. "PSX and PKR are under pressure. The government must understand that economic and political costs of not engaging IMF at this stage are much higher and long lasting."

For equitable taxation in the country, PBC demanded of FBR to accelerate reforms to broaden the tax base; increase the advance and withholding tax rates on non-filers; and avoid knee-jerk revenue seeking measures that impact the long-term health of the economy.

PBC suggested to review anomalies that arose from hasty changes to meet the claimed demands of the IMF; multiple taxation of interoperate dividends and other anomalies in group taxation; and phase down the inequitable minimum and advance taxes on the formal sector that raise the cost of doing business.

PBC says that stable and competitive energy is essential for industry, and advocates liberation of the industry from legacies of past energy contracts, cross subsidies, systemic inefficiencies, and theft. It asked the government to fast-track construction of additional LNG terminals.

Proposing measures for the formalisation of the economy, it said that the use of cash in the economy should be discouraged. Restrictions on use of cash above a certain limit would also help.

The transit treaty with Afghanistan has been misused through diversion of goods to Pakistan. The Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) has expired.

With the evolving situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan needs to look to renegotiate the treaty with clauses putting in quantitative and qualitative restrictions on what can transit, insist on letters of credit, charge duty and GST on import which would only be refunded to the Afghan government on

exit, track and monitor containers, strengthen inspection of empty containers returning to Pakistan and make physical controls along the border stronger.

The civil and military authorities need to be on the same page to do this. Electronic Data Interchange with key trading partners should be deployed to check under-invoicing of imports.

The provinces have little incentive to check smuggling as customs duty and GST evaded are federal taxes and do not hurt their revenues. Provinces may be incentivised to conduct raids on shops that deal in smuggled goods. Positive lessons from the success of cell phone registration with PTA and Urdu language labelling requirement for imported food items can be applied to other smuggling prone goods.

For the medium to longer term, PBC believes a Charter of Economy with cross-party consensus is essential. Finance Bill 2022 needs to foster an environment which promotes investments in the manufacturing and services sector leading to the creation of jobs, which increases value-added exports and ultimately benefits the government in the form of greater revenues, increased documentation of the economy and a broader tax base.



The Pakistan Business Council

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Mooting the Return of Nawaz Sharif

The constitution and legal provisions as well as the political imperatives surrounding the issue



By Asadullah

ISLAMABAD: The return of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to the corridors of power has given rise to widespread discussion – or rather speculation – about the return to Pakistan of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government has reportedly indicated it has the legal authority to suspend his sentence. The freshly ousted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) would love to see such a plan materialise, because it would allow it to go on offensive and feeds its political narrative.

The fact of the matter is that although there are ample powers available with the federal and provincial governments to pardon, remit or suspend the sentence of a convict, the seasoned Mr Sharif is unlikely to go along with any such course of action.

From the legal point of view, Mr Sharif's nephew Hamza Shahbaz, the incumbent Chief Minister Punjab is the competent authority to undo his sentence in Avenfield Apartment and Al-Azizia references, while in centre, the constitution empowers President to pardon a convict.

The Accountability Court of Islamabad on 06 July 2018 sentenced Mr Sharif to 10 years imprisonment in Avenfield Apartment reference, while the former PM was sentenced to 07 years imprisonment in Al-Azizia reference. The Accountability Judge however allowed Mr Sharif to undergo sentence in Kot Lakhpat Jail.

In September 2018, Islamabad High Court (IHC) suspended the sentence of Mr Sharif and his incarcerated daughter Maryam Nawaz in Avenfield reference. However, Mr Sharif was again arrested in Al-Azizia reference. Interestingly, the petition for Mr Sharif's release was filed by his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif now Prime Minister of Pakistan.

He was released for 08 weeks on bail and the court empowered the Punjab government to decide further extension in his bail or suspension of sentence.

Interestingly, there are ample powers in the law that allows Punjab government now headed by Hamza Shahbaz to suspend the sentence of Mr Sharif or even remit his entire sentence.

The issue of executive power to suspend the sentence of any prisoner cropped up during the hearing of the petition, when it was debated whether or not the executive has such powers. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which is the prosecution agency in this case, was of the view that the executive does.

NAB's Additional Prosecutor General Jahanzeb Khan Bharwana conceded before the court that the executive did have the authority under Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898.

In response to the query of the IHC, whether the provincial government would be Punjab or Islamabad Capital Territory regime, it was submitted that it would be the Government of Punjab as the sentence is being carried out in the Kot Lakhpat Jail, Lahore which falls within the territory of Punjab.

The law

Article 45 of the Constitution of Pakistan says: "The President shall have power to grant pardon, reprieve and respite, and to remit, suspend or commute the sentence passed by any court, tribunal or other authorities".

The prison rules

The executive or jail authorities do have powers to release a prisoner who is critically ill under Rules 143 and 164 of Pakistan Prison Rules, 1978. The Pakistan Prison Rules, 1978 prescribe procedure for release of prisoners on bail suffering from disease.

Rule 143 of said Rules reads as under: "The Superintendent will refer the case for release of prisoner suffering from serious illness with the consent of the Officer in-charge of the prosecution in whose jurisdiction the prisoner's offence was committed, provided that

- (a) the disease is likely to prove fatal if the prisoner remains in prison;
- (b) there is reasonable chance of recovery if the prisoner is released;
- (c) the prisoner has not done any willful act, since he has been in prison, to produce or aggravate his disease;
- (d) the Medical Officer and the Medical Superintendent of the District Head-quarter Hospital recommended the release and certify that the disease is of the nature prescribed; and
- (e) the prisoner has not more than six months to remain in prison before the expiry of his sentence".

Likewise, Rule 146 of the Prison Rules, reads: "The Superintendent may recommend a prisoner for premature release who owing to old age, infirmity or illness is permanently incapacitated from the commission of further crime of the nature of that for which he has been convicted. The case shall be submitted to Government through the Inspector General. It shall be accompanied by the recommendations of The Medical Officer. The Inspector General will, in all such cases, obtain the Medical opinion of the Medical Board which will be convened by the Director of Health Services".

The CrPC

Moreover, under Section 401 of CrPC, the provincial government or executive authority has ample power to suspend the sentence of any prisoner on any ground whatsoever.

It reads: "Power to suspend or remit sentences. (1) When any person has been sentenced to punishment for an offence, that

Provincial Government may at any time without conditions or upon any conditions which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he has been sentenced."

The court's nod

A two-member division bench of the IHC had already given a nod to the executive to suspend or remit the sentence of Mr Sharif on 29 October 2019. The order stated: "The provisions, of the above sub-section shall also apply to any order passed by a Criminal Court under any section of this Code or of any other law, which restricts the liberty of any person or imposes any liability upon him or his property.



"Nothing herein contained shall be deemed to interfere with the right of the President or of the Central Government when such right is delegated to it to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment. The Provincial Government can, on its own, pass any order regarding the suspension of sentence."

The rationale behind Section 401 CrPC is that the Provincial government on its own can scrutinize the matter and where for reasons it believes that the sentence is to be suspended can do so without even the convicted person agitating the matter, observed the court in the order.

Legal view

Senior lawyer Raja Inam Ameen Minhas said that the government from time to time remits the sentence of prisoners especially on the eve of festivity. He however said that the remission or suspension of sentence does not set aside the conviction.

He explains that the difference between the conviction and suspension of sentence, that

in the criminal jurisprudence, there is indeed a marked difference between conviction and sentence. Conviction is finding someone guilty positively of the offence charged with whereas sentence is the punishment for being guilty of that offence.

According to him, Mr Sharif has to pursue the pending appeal before the IHC for setting aside the conviction.

It may be mentioned that the Supreme Court in the case of Nawaz Sharif versus State authored in 2009 discussed the President's power to pardon the convict under Article 45 of the Constitution. The apex court has held that effect of grant of pardon, even in full, was not the same as an order of acquittal by a court of law.

It means that the despite being pardoned or remission of sentence, Mr Sharif cannot hold any public office.

Government stance

Federal Minister for Interior Rana Sanaullah while talking to media said that the government has ample powers to suspend the sentence of Mr Sharif. He said that Mr Sharif can approach the courts for setting aside the conviction. He however said that it is now depends upon Mr Sharif as to when he would seek such remedy.

A senior leader of PML-N however said that in the current scenario, when the PTI is trying to take advantage of any minor relief by Sharif family even if it is provided in the law, the former prime minister may not seek this relief.

Mr Sharif may surrender before the relevant courts, may prefer return to jail to apply to get appropriate relief, he said.

What Will a Comprehensive Solution to Climate Change Look Like?

The impact of climate change on global socioeconomic development cannot be underestimated



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

With the world's attention riveted to Russia's war on Ukraine, the issue of climate change and its pernicious impact on socioeconomic wellbeing of humans everywhere in the world has been somewhat eclipsed. The fact, however, remains that from Papua New Guinea to Poland, global warming is dampening economic growth prospects and its repercussions are becoming ubiquitous.

Global warming is also rattling countries historically dependent on hydropower and fisheries for economic sustenance. Its negative impact on GDP growth rates, industrial productivity, and sustainable development cannot be underestimated.

The natural disaster that recently unfolded in the Hunza valley in Pakistan is a stark reminder that neglecting climate change as a policy issue can have disastrous impacts. Agrarian economies continue to be disproportionately affected by this crisis as considerable harm to agricultural produce is leading to massive starvation as has been the case in the Horn of Africa in 2022 which witnessed one of its worst droughts in recent decades.

The effects are also felt in urban centres which otherwise benefit from a robust infrastructure and adequate water supplies. Cape Town in South Africa for example, which is known for its exotic scenery, amazing tourist appeal, and undisputed status as one of Africa's most prosperous cities is in serious danger of drought and water shortages which could become a reality in the year 2022.

The truth is that human survival relies on a strong and resilient ecosystem regardless of the geographical location. Even worse off than agrarian economies are populations already grappling with massive poverty, soaring inflation and widespread unemployment, who risk erosion of their ecosystems.

While the Covid-19 global pandemic has undoubtedly jolted job markets in affluent countries such as Singapore, the truth is that callousness and lack of attention to the detrimental effects of global warming by global policymakers is adding to economic quagmires confronting states.

One example is the fact that Russia's war in Ukraine is scorching global

wheat production and contributing to food insecurity, yet this cannot detract from the other reality that countries such as Djibouti and Somalia are witnessing serious food shortages which are divorced from the crisis in Europe.

Another example is the crisis in Sri Lanka which can be attributed to the Rajapaksa dynasty's systematic corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and economic mismanagement. The island's quagmire may worsen if the sea level of the Indian Ocean rises which can cause massive destruction.

Tackling such problems entails that the basics remain the same. Economic activity will be threatened if noxious gases and CO2 emissions are released by industrialised countries into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

Decades of research and campaigning by figures such as former US Presidential candidate Al Gore have established the casual factors which could result in the unfortunate demise of the human race. Yet little effort has been invested in ensuring that emissions are capped,

particularly from top polluters such as the United States.

In turn, countries which bear the brunt of climate change are often in the periphery yet witness the melting of glaciers, desertification, and deforestation as witnessed in the Amazon Rainforest crisis in Brazil under the Bolsonaro administration.

This has a direct impact on socioeconomic mobility of people given that livelihoods for unskilled labour are inadvertently taken away due to global mismanagement which is not of their own doing.

Economically, forests, lakes, rivers, and oceans are reservoirs for survival and global trade heavily relies on the natural environment. Rewards of natural resources which include raw metals, coal, aluminium, and phosphate can only materialise if we can prevent the attendant soil erosion or dilapidation of natural landscapes.

So far only countries such as New Zealand and Iceland have retained their environments and preserved their ecosystems for sustainable development. Other nations facing severe financial constraints are unable to invest in critical infrastructure cannot afford the luxury of preserving large swathes of land.

Incremental steps need to be adopted instead such as the billion tree tsunami program launched by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government which

was aimed at mitigating the effects of atmospheric pollutants on Pakistan's environment and contributing towards better air quality for citizens.

Hence, countries at the same stage of development need to ensure that incremental but meaningful steps are undertaken to stymie the state of free fall witnessed in the global environment.

The socioeconomic costs, however, are monumental from this state of free fall. The year 2022 is witnessing varying tides of populism, climate denialism, nativism, and far right advocacy which is pushing the world towards increased polarisation in the absence of dialogue and discussions.

The rise of far right candidates who do not prioritise preserving the global environment for example only serves to dampen optimism otherwise championed by centre-left or centrist parties across Europe, the Americas, and Asia.

Climate denialism continues to become deeply entrenched in state machineries which has meant that policy making centred on crass capitalism will trump environmental priorities and promote unequal distribution of resources.

This in turn breeds resentment from local populations which seek to challenge the social contract with the state and seek regime change. Hence, movements which agitate for addressing economic quagmires

will be directly impacted if the ecosystem sustaining human survival is harmed through brazen neglect by central authorities.

The question, however, would always centre on the way forward for all stakeholders involved. The truth is that climate change in the year 2022 needs to be treated as an issue of global security and must go beyond mere advocacy from conservationists and lobby groups.

Environmentalism as part of policymaking or guiding principles in bilateral relationships between countries can usher in great potential to offset the pessimism from the reductionist environment that the globe finds itself in in 2022.

Shifting to renewable energy from hydrocarbons in European states, for example, is a step which should be emulated and encouraged by countries seeking to improve their global environmental standing. This trend needs to be global and transcend localised efforts which centre solely on community empowerment.

The United Nations General Assembly should devote more time to debating how to build environmental resilience and address the pernicious effects of global warming. A comprehensive solution to the problem of climate change will inevitably ensure that the socioeconomic costs of global warming are shared by all.



Kabul River and Andhra-Telangana Heatwave



By Fawad Ali and Joydeep Gupta

For decades, Pakistan has been seeking an agreement with Afghanistan on the Kabul River. But a treaty agreeing the management and allocation of water between the two countries remains a dim prospect.

Flowing from Afghanistan to Pakistan where it meets the Indus, the Kabul River is a source of drinking water, irrigation, hydropower, livelihoods and recreational activities to an estimated 20 million people in the two countries. Despite repeated attempts to launch joint projects, and the rising urgency to equitably distribute the river's resources as climate change alters its flow, little progress is likely to be made on negotiations.

Ikramuddin Kamil, special assistant on water and energy at Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told The Third Pole: "In the current situation, Afghanistan is not in a position to sign a treaty with Pakistan as the international [convention] on transboundary rivers favours the early developers."

A Kabul River treaty is becoming more urgent

The need for an agreement on the transboundary river – a major tributary of

the Indus – is becoming more urgent in downstream Pakistan. More people in the downstream country depend solely on the river for water than in Afghanistan.

"[Pakistan's] population is on the rise and so is the demand for water. Therefore, an accord regarding this river is a must in light of upper and lower riparian rights for better management of water, regional development, peace and the overall environment," said Nasir Ghafoor, chief engineer for development at the Irrigation Department in the state government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the state where the Kabul River enters Pakistan.

Islamabad remains cautious

Pakistan has been seeking a Kabul River agreement for decades, especially since the early 2000s when the Afghanistan government at the time proposed the Kama hydropower project on the Kunar River. The Kunar River starts in Pakistan (called the Chitral in its upper reaches) then enters Afghanistan, where it flows into the Kabul River.

Though projects by Afghanistan may not materialise in the foreseeable future, if they

are completed Pakistan has the option to carry out the Kunar River diversion project, said Khan. This would affect all hydroelectric and irrigation systems on the Kabul River in Afghanistan, turn land barren and aquifers dry, have devastating environmental and humanitarian impacts, and possibly lead to mass migration, he added.

It will have serious consequences in downstream areas of the Kabul river basin in Pakistan as well. Syed Mehar Ali Shah, Pakistan's Indus Water Commissioner, pointed out that the Kabul River provides water for irrigation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone, the Kabul River irrigates almost 32,000 hectares through four major canals, according to Mamrez Khan, executive engineer in the state's Irrigation Department. Plus, there are around 1,000 smaller irrigation canals leading from the river to farms.

"The river recharges aquifers of Mohmand, Khyber, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera and Mardan districts, providing drinking water to millions of people," said Mehboob Alam, general manager projects for water and sanitation services in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

As South Asia remains in the grip of a punishing heat wave that has pushed temperatures past 120F (50C) in some areas, there is a significant strain on water supplies. The region is already hard-hit by climate change. Extreme heat is common in May. But not in April and March, both of which were the hottest across much of India for more than a century.

The probability of deadly heat waves due to climate change, such as the one that killed around 2,500 people in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in 2015, has risen ten times.

The heat wave that killed around 2,500 people in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the last week of May 2015 is directly attributable to climate change. Global warming has increased the likelihood of such a heat wave in the region from being a once-in-100-years event to a once-in-10-years event, a tenfold increase in probability. If the pollutants that blanket the sky above Hyderabad and much of the region were removed, such a heat wave may occur once every two years.

These are the three main conclusions of an analysis of the 2015 heat wave carried out by a group of researchers in India and abroad. Karsten Haustein of the University of Oxford, who is part of the group, said the researchers had found “very strong attribution, linking more extreme heat waves to human-induced climate change.”

The findings have clear implications for planners in South Asia. For one, they have to be far more ready for extreme heat waves than they are now. On top of that, they have to be aware that if and when pollution from industrial activities and transport is cleaned up, it will lead to stronger heat waves, as it has done in North America and Europe.

The blanket of pollution that envelopes South Asia much of the time does have the effect of preventing some of the sun’s heat from reaching the earth’s surface. This does not mean air pollution is “good” — it kills seven million people a year worldwide and may have an adverse impact on rainfall. What it does mean is that planners have to be ready for even higher temperatures.

Attribution science

In this project, the scientists had studied two events in India – the very heavy rainfall in Chennai on 1 December 2015, and the Andhra-Telangana heat wave. Krishna Achuta Rao of Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, co-researcher in the Chennai study, said that his team could not find any reason to attribute the rainfall to climate change.

The heat wave, however, was clearly due to climate change, the scientists said after studying masses of weather data and running iterations of climate models.



Policy implications

Will these findings change anything on the ground? Not unless the scientists can get even more specific, and forecast the month when the heat wave will take place or the number of days it will go on, said Nagendra K. Biyani of the disaster management department in the Andhra Pradesh government.

However, given the number of people who fall ill and die during heat waves in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana almost every year, the current plans are clearly inadequate. A good model exists in the Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan, which reduced the number of deaths during a 47-degrees Celsius heat wave from 700 in 2010 to 20 in 2015. Biyani said a similar plan has been developed for Vijayawada, but the problem is that decision making remains fragmented between various ministries and various branches of the municipal corporation.

Heat index

While acknowledging that communication and coordination are crucial, scientists are going ahead with their work. Another study by Achuta Rao, with Michael Wehner, Dáithí Stone and Hari Krishnan in Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and Federico Castillo in University of California at Berkeley, pointed out that high humidity often worsens the effect of a heat wave.

The May 2015 heat wave in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was followed by a heat wave in Karachi that killed at least 700

people, though the temperatures in Pakistan’s largest city were at least five to six degrees lower than in south-central India. The key reason was a relative humidity of 35-70% in Karachi, far higher than the 20% recorded at most weather stations in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

This is known, and weather experts in North America and Europe have developed what is called a heat index, a combination of temperature, relative humidity and other factors. However, it is not applicable in South Asia. Scientists are now working on developing a heat index that will be useful to policymakers.

Attribution science is in its infancy, but its utility to policymakers is already apparent, as long as the scientists come up with their results quickly after a heat wave or a storm or a similar event, and as long as these results are communicated without any delay to policymakers and people.

The Challenges of Policing Digital Spaces

The crucial question of maintaining one rulebook for all markets



By Mishaal Ashraf

Digital rights (and wrongs) have come under sharp focus in recent times because of how some parties and people are leveraging digital platforms to spread falsehoods, spew hate, and troll opponents. There is an increasing realisation that social media platforms must find or invent the tools to separate the good from the bad and to make digital spaces safe for all.

Consequently, Twitter, projected to have approximately 340 million users by 2024, has announced an expansion in its Private Information Policy. With the goal to provide safe and secure tools to ensure privacy, Twitter's new policy expansion is said to include the sharing of private media.

Previously, there was a blanket prohibition on the publication of people's private information and contact details. But due to the consistent airing of personal images and videos without consent of the primary party, a careful revision has taken place.

Now, Twitter is gearing to take strict action against unauthorised sharing of private media is even if the abusive element is not present. Without the consent of the individual in question, there is no manner in which this form of private media can be shared via Twitter.

This is an attempt to safeguard users from emotional and physical harm because in the past, women, activists and reformers have faced significant repercussions for their posts.

This is a massive addition to the previous policy and a reiteration has surfaced which reinforces the need to curtail threats of expose, sharing of information that could potentially facilitate hacking as well as request of bounty or financial reward for concealing someone's private information as the cost of their consent or lack thereof.

Pertinent to note is that this does not apply to public figures when it is done

so in the interest of the public. However, if the intention is to engage in harassment, intimidation or tactics meant to silence an individual, even if it is a public figure, Twitter will remove the said media. This comes alongside the willingness of the company to ensure that images which are used as communal social work or to help others remain on the platform.

According to Twitter Safety, "Feeling safe on Twitter is different for everyone, and our teams are constantly working to understand and address these needs. We know our work will never be done, and we will continue to invest in making our product and policies more robust and transparent to continue to earn the trust of the people using our service."

While this particular policy pertains to safety and security of individuals' private media, there is yet another issue that has been popping up quite often Twitter's discriminatory application of

rules in South Asia. According to leading activists and authors, Twitter has been part of a campaign to shun certain narratives in this part of the world.

For examples, accusations were levelled against Twitter during the polls in India whereby Twitter blocked over 200 accounts opposing the ruling government whilst the complete opposite was done in the US to overthrow President Donald Trump last year.

Audrey Tushke, Associate Professor of South Asian History at Rutgers University said, "The United States has much stronger laws protecting freedom of expression for individuals and also protecting private companies from government censorship and control."

She also thinks that the preferential treatment given to the citizens of United States cannot be ignored anymore, "One wonders if, as a US-based company, Twitter's leadership might just care a little bit less about democracy and justice for South Asians versus at their home countries."

Apar Gupta, Executive Director of a digital rights advocacy organisation, International Freedom Foundation, says that governments in South Asian countries like India rely on local laws to issue withholding requests, ban applications, and control the flow of information on the internet without making it public knowledge.

Earlier this year, Section 69A of the Information Technology Act was imposed in India which prevents intermediaries like Twitter from disclosing any information about blocking of an account or tweet to the public.

The clause takes away the citizens' right to challenge blocking of online content which reiterates Tushke's claim that social media companies' prioritise the rights and safety of people from the global North, whereas the rights of people in other parts of the world are burdened by complex legal orders.

Contrary to Twitter's expansion of privacy policy, abusive and trolling behaviours were completely overlooked. For example, a few months ago, female Pakistani journal-

ist Gharidah Farooqi was victimised by a hate campaign after she posted a personal opinion online. However, no action was taken to curtail the abusive activities or the constant trolling that ensued for several days following.

There are various examples throughout this region which beg the question of whether Twitter is truly committed to providing security to its users globally or if that right is restricted to a particular community, race or region.

To further the cause of digital rights in this part of the world, it is important that platforms like Twitter maintain a level of neutrality to ensure that one does not feel pitted against the other.

Granted, the line dividing freedom of expression and harassment or trolling is thin, but it is still fine enough to be recognised. And those who have the technology and access to curtail any sort of hate must exercise it worldwide to ensure that the internet becomes a safe space for all concerned.



EU law targets Big Tech over hate speech, disinformation

The European Union has reached a landmark deal to take aim at hate speech, disinformation and other harmful content online



By Kelvin Chan and Raf Casert

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union reached a landmark deal early Saturday to take aim at hate speech, disinformation and other harmful online content.

The law will force big tech companies to police themselves harder, make it easier for users to flag problems and empower regulators to punish noncompliance with billions in fines.

EU officials finally clinched the agreement in principle in the early hours of Saturday. The Digital Services Act will overhaul the digital rulebook for 27 countries and cement Europe's reputation as the global leader in reining in the power of social media companies and other digital platforms, such as Facebook, Google and Amazon.

"With the DSA, the time of big online platforms behaving like they are 'too big to care' is coming to an end," said EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton.

EU Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager added that "with today's agreement we ensure that platforms are held accountable for the risks their services can pose to society and citizens."

The act is the EU's third significant law targeting the tech industry, a notable contrast with the U.S., where lobbyists representing Silicon Valley's interests have largely succeeded in keeping federal lawmakers at bay. While the Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission have filed major antitrust actions against Google and Facebook, Congress remains politically divided on efforts to address competition, online privacy, disinformation and more.

The EU's new rules, which are designed to protect internet users and their "fundamental rights online," should make tech companies more accountable for content created by users and amplified by their platforms' algorithms.

Breton said they will have plenty of stick to back up their laws.

"It entrusts the Commission with supervising very large platforms, including the possibility to impose effective and dissuasive sanctions of up to 6% of global turnover or even a ban on operating in the EU single market in case of repeated serious breaches," he said.

The tentative agreement was reached

between the EU parliament and member states. It still needs to be officially rubber-stamped by those institutions but should pose no political problem.

"The DSA is nothing short of a paradigm shift in tech regulation. It's the first major attempt to set rules and standards for algorithmic systems in digital media markets," said Ben Scott, a former tech policy advisor to Hillary Clinton who's now executive director of advocacy group Reset.

Negotiators had been hoping to hammer out a deal before French elections Sunday. A new French government could stake out different positions on digital content.

The need to regulate Big Tech more effectively came into sharper focus after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Russia was found to have used social media platforms to try to influence the country's vote. Tech companies like Facebook and Twitter promised to crack down on disinformation, but the problems have only worsened. During the pandemic, health misinformation blossomed and again the companies were slow to act, cracking down

after years of allowing anti-vaccine falsehoods to thrive on their platforms.

Under the EU law, governments would be able to request companies take down a wide range of content that would be deemed illegal, including material that promotes terrorism, child sexual abuse, hate speech and commercial scams. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter would have to give users tools to flag such content in an “easy and effective way” so that it can be swiftly removed. Online marketplaces like Amazon would have to do the same for dodgy products, such as counterfeit sneakers or unsafe toys.

These systems will be standardized so that they will work the same way on any online platform.

The tech giants have been lobbying furiously in Brussels to water down the EU rules.

Twitter said Saturday it would review the rules “in detail” and that it supports “smart, forward thinking regulation that balances the need to tackle online harm with protecting the Open Internet.”

Google said in a statement on Friday that it looks forward to “working with policymakers to get the remaining technical details right to ensure the law works for everyone.” Amazon referred to a blog post from last year that said it welcomed measures that enhance trust in online services. Facebook didn’t respond to requests for comment.

The Digital Services Act would ban ads targeted at minors, as well as ads targeted at users based on their gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. It would also ban deceptive techniques companies use to nudge

people into doing things they didn’t intend to, such as signing up for services that are easy to opt into, but hard to decline.

To show they’re making progress on limiting these practices, tech companies would have to carry out annual risk assessments of their platforms.

Up until now, regulators have had no access to the inner workings at Google, Facebook and other popular services. But under the new law, the companies will have to be more transparent and provide information to regulators and independent researchers on content-moderation efforts. This could mean, for example, making YouTube turn over data on whether its recommendation algorithm has been directing users to more Russian propaganda than normal.

To enforce the new rules, the European Commission is expected to hire more than 200 new staffers. To pay for it, tech companies will be charged a “supervisory fee,” which could be up to 0.1% of their annual global net income, depending on the negotiations.

Experts said the new rules will likely spark copycat regulatory efforts by governments in other countries, while tech companies will also face pressure to roll out the rules beyond the EU’s borders.

“If Joe Biden stands at the podium and says ‘By golly, why don’t American consumers deserve the same protections that Google and Facebook are giving to European consumers,’ it’s going to be difficult for those companies to deny the application of the same rules” elsewhere, Scott said.

But the companies aren’t likely to do so voluntarily, said Zach Meyers, senior research fellow at the Centre for European Reform think tank. There is just too much money on the line if a company like Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, is restricted in how it can target advertising at specific groups of users.

“The big tech firms will heavily resist other countries adopting similar rules, and I cannot imagine the firms voluntarily applying these rules outside the EU,” Meyers said.

The EU reached a separate agreement last month on its so-called Digital Markets Act, a law aimed at reining in the market power of tech giants and making them treat smaller rivals fairly.

And in 2018, the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation set the global standard for data privacy protection, though it has faced criticism for not being effective at changing the behavior of tech companies. Much of the problem centers on the fact that a company’s lead privacy regulator is in the country where its European head office is located, which for most tech companies is Ireland.

Irish regulators have opened dozens of data-privacy investigations, but have only issued judgements for a handful. Critics say the problem is understaffing, but the Irish regulator says the cases are complex and time-consuming.

EU officials say they have learned from that experience and will make the bloc’s executive Commission the enforcer for the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act.



Pakistani Players' Performances in County Championship 2022

By Ali Abdullah

The fourth round of the county championship concluded on Sunday and eight Pakistani players were in action. Many built on their performances from the third round.

Hasan Ali sustained his excellent performances, picking up yet another five-for this week against Hampshire. He started brilliantly, striking twice with the new ball to reduce Hampshire to 40 for 5 against Lancashire at the Ageas Bowl and ended with figures of 5 for 45 from his 15 overs in the first innings.

Hasan even struck a couple of sixes in his short outing with the bat, scoring 19 runs. In the second innings he took 1 for 72 before rain interrupted the match resulting in a draw. Hasan is now the joint-highest wicket-taker in County Championship Division 1 alongside Craig Overton and Keith Barker as he has picked up 20 wickets in 6 innings at an average of 15.35.

Haris Rauf continued his fierce form as he ripped apart Kent's top order in the first innings leaving them struggling with 20 for 3. Rauf finished with 5 for 65 from his 14 overs. However, he was unable to bowl during the second innings because of an injury, which will rule him out of Yorkshire's fixture against Essex this week.

Ottis Gibson the Headcoach of Yorkshire talking about Rauf's injury stated: "He's had a scan, and early suggestions are that it's not too bad." He further stated that, "Maybe with a week's rest and some work from the medical team, we'll get him back for next week."

Kent was able to resist the Yorkshire attack in the absence of Rauf as they managed to draw the match, with Ottis stating: "If we're being honest, had we had Haris today, it would have been a different outcome."

Maintaining his form, Hampshire's opening bowler proved his value again this week as he took 3 for 59 against Lancashire in 1st innings with all three dismissals caught in the slips. However, he wasn't too successful in batting as he was dismissed for a duck in both innings including a first-innings lbw to compatriot Hasan Ali.

Mohammad Amir made his return to red-ball cricket after a break of over two-and-a-half years, while we saw mixed reactions among the fans after he announced he would be making a comeback, his comeback was not as great as his fans were expecting it to be; Amir went wicketless in the 28 overs he bowled. He was picked as Gloucestershire's strike bowler and was seen swinging the ball both ways. To his hard luck, a few chances were missed during his overs including that of Jamie Smith – who made a career-best 234 not out and was dropped by James Bracey on 48 during Amir's over.

Shan Masood scored 60 and 42 runs respectively in both his innings against Glamorgan and this was the first time in the



season that he was unable to score a 50 in an inning. In April, he just fell 2 runs short of breaking the record of Nick Compton for the most runs scored. However, he is still well placed to become the first man since Graeme Hick in 1988 to reach 1000 first-class runs before the end of May as he currently has 713 runs in 6 innings at an average of 118.83.

Shaheen Shah Afridi maintained his hot form while bowling with the new ball during his very first, first-class match at Lord's. Shaheen nearly grabbed a hat-trick as he took two wickets in two balls for Middlesex against Leicestershire. He finished with three wickets in each innings helping his side Middlesex secure a convincing ten-wicket win.

When asked about Shaheen Shah Afridi, Middlesex Captain Peter Handscomb said

"It does help to have Shaheen Afridi coming in as the No. 1 bowler in the world – that lifts everyone," further adding that: "He brings something different that we don't have which is incredible."

Muhammad Rizwan scored only 27 runs in 3 innings. He has not had a great run this season in terms of his performances. He was able to regain form in the latest round as he shared a 154-run stand with Cheteshwar Pujara building up Sussex's lead before getting out for 79 runs.

Additionally, Rizwan bowled a few overs too. He also took a great diving catch in the slips to dismiss Scott Borthwick.

Azhar Ali remained in poor form in the fourth round of the championships. After scores of 2, 1, and 20 in his first three innings for Worcestershire, he made 6 and 5 runs against Nottinghamshire at Trent Bridge, making it just 34 runs in 5 innings with an average of 6.80.

The Championship will be in play till later this year but Pakistani players won't be a part of it for long due to national duties next month.

Pakistani Athletes Will Compete in Imam Reza Cup



The Athletics Federation of Pakistan (AFP) has decided to send a seven-member squad to the Imam Reza Cup being held in Iran from May 29 to 30. The competition will allow Pakistani athletes to prepare for other key international events such as the World Athletics Championships and Commonwealth Games (CWG).

The squad which is set to depart for Iran on May 28 includes five players Shajar Abbas (100m & 200m), Abdul Mueed (200m & 400m), Sharoz Khan (high jump), Kashif Majeed (long jump), and Mohammad Yasir (javelin throw), and two coaches Qazi Tanveer Hussain and Rana Sajjad Ahmad Khan.

“We’ve selected highly talented athletes to represent Pakistan at the Imam Reza Cup. This is a key competition in the build-up of our athletes to the World Athletics Championships and other important upcoming international events,” Athletics Federation of Pakistan (AFP) president retired Maj Gen Mohammad Akram Sahi said.

Previously, Pakistani athlete Arshad Nadeem who specializes in Javelin throw, in the build-up to the Tokyo Olympics 2020 improved his throw while participating in the Imam Reza Cup. This reveals the significance of this important international sporting tournament where athletes get the opportunity to compete against the world’s best sportsmen, improving their personal best scores.

“This is a World Athletics-approved tournament. This is the same event where our javelin thrower Arshad Nadeem improved his

personal best from 86.29 meters to 86.38 meters before featuring in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Hence, we believe that keeping in view the other upcoming international events, this tournament will help us a lot to gauge our athletes’ strong as well as weak areas,” the AFP president added.

In 2020, Arshad Nadeem became the first Pakistani athlete to qualify for the Olympics and the first to reach a track-and-field final. He finished fifth in the event. Arshad already has a bronze medal to his name from Asian Games, and Islamic Solidarity Games respectively.

Arshad along with another Javelin thrower Muhammad Yasir is currently training at South Africa’s Northwest University in Potchefstroom. The duo will compete in the World Athletics Championships which will be held in Oregon from July 15-24.

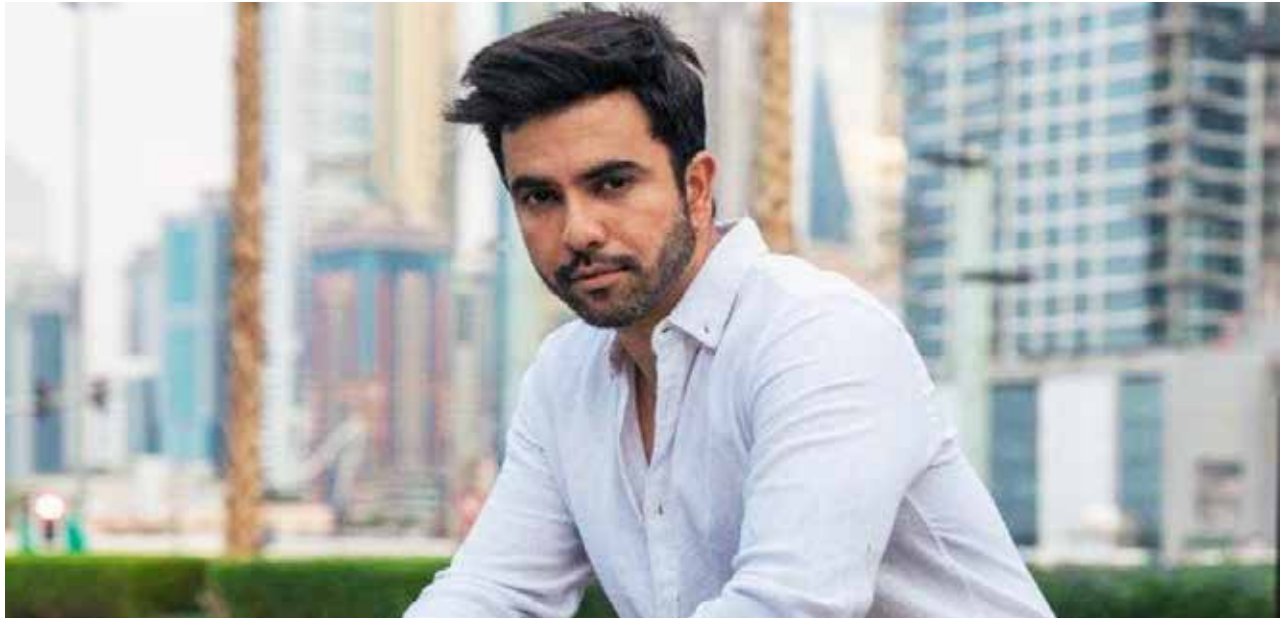
Pakistani athletes will also participate in other key events such as the upcoming Commonwealth Games in July and Islamic Solidarity Games in August. They will be held in the UK and Turkey respectively.

It’s important to note that Pakistani athletes had an even busier schedule before the postponement of the Asian Games due to Covid. The event was being held in Hangzhou China from Sept 10-25. China is following a zero Covid policy which requires the government to lock-up entire cities and towns if a covid case is detected.

By Ali Abdullah

Heart-to-Heart with Singer-Actor Junaid Khan

Meet the versatile entertainer who has won Lux Style Awards nominations for both his acting and singing



By Kaukab Jahan

Junaid Khan is one of the rare breed of Pakistan entertainers who have scored remarkable success in two major performing arts: Music and acting.

Khan started his showbiz career as a lead vocalist of the band Call, and released two commercially successful albums, Jilawatan and Dhoom. He turned to acting after the release of his second album Dhoom in 2011, and is best known for his roles in serials Sun Yaara (2016), Ishq Tamasha (2018) and Yaariyan (2019).

In 2012, he won two nominations at the Lux Style Awards, as an actor (Best TV Actor) and a singer (Best Album of the Year). He recently appeared for the first time in a comedy role in Ramazan special sitcom Hum Tum on Hum TV.

In this special interview with The Truth International, the versatile Junaid Khan talked openly about his dreams as an actor and his passion for music.

TTI: How was the experience of your recent Ramazan play Hum Tum?

JK: It was wonderful. The shooting schedule was very tight as we had to run it in Ramazan but we all enjoyed it. As it was a light entertainment play, we had a lot of fun on the shoot.

TTI: How was the experience of working with a big cast?

JK: It was great. We all came with a positive mind-set on the shoot and went to our homes in the evening waiting for the next day. We had created a really friendly atmosphere on the set. On top of this, it was a sitcom that kept all of us very chilled throughout the shoot.

TTI: How was it to be working with Danish Nawaz?

JK: Danish Nawaz is a wonderful and promising director. He himself is a humorous and funny person. I really admire his

style of direction. He is unmatched and phenomenal in doing comedy and sitcoms.

TTI: Hum Tum was your first comedy play. So why did it take you so long to do a comedy role?

JK: Yes, it is true. I had never done a comedy role before that. I didn't do sitcoms but yes I did a little comedy role in film. But as this play was slotted in the prime time of the channel and in Ramazan, and it was specifically focused on comedy, so I accepted it. I had a long negotiation with Hum TV before signing up and we locked it after a lot of discussion. I think it was the right decision. I loved working in that genre.

TTI: How did you find doing a comedy role?

JK: If you ask about this play, it was like what we do in real life. Gradually, the cast developed a comfort level with each other and then it was like sitting together with friends. I was lucky to have good chemistry with my co-stars and director and we improvised many things in the script on the sets.

TTI: A comedy role in Hum Tum was a surprise in your acting career. What surprise do you have in store for your music fans?

JK: Yes, it is coming very soon. I am working on a solo track, which is really very close to my heart. A video of the song will also be released. As to who will be featuring in it, I will reveal it later. The hint is that she is one of the top actresses of Pakistan and my close friend as well.

TTI: Which is more close to your heart, acting or music?

JK: Acting demands more time. More often than not, it is a long-hour shoot for the whole day. Now I think I should spare more time for music too, as it is the closest thing to my heart. It's great that I have figured out how I can manage things so I

can give more time to music, which I am. I am happy that I have the right team to work with me on my music.

TTI: You had a band named Call. Are you still working with them or have you gone solo?

JK: The band Call is still there but the members are already occupied in other projects. Xulfi was busy with Coke Studio Season 14. He had got a lot of things on his shoulders. So Call right now is not on the pace it should be. Until that happens, I want to focus on my solo career.

TTI: As you have resumed your music career, when are your fans going to see you in Coke Studio?

JK: Why not? Let's see. It might be in the next season. In this season we could not settle a few things which I hope would work out by the next season. I am focusing on it.

TTI: Many actors from Pakistan are now working in web series on international OTT platforms. Are you planning to surprise your fans with a project of this kind?

JK: Definitely. Many producers have already approached me with web series ideas. OTT is a different platform, very different from television. Of course it excites a lot, especially a male actor, who has very limited type of characters on television. Web series is a genre where you have opportunities to experiment new and do varied things. Of course I am looking at those avenues too.

TTI: Your debut film Kahay Dil Jidhar released last year. Is there any more in the pipeline?

JK: I would love to do more films. Art is a vast field and I will keep on exploring. In this journey, I would pick whatever suits me or clicks.

TTI: Where do you find more to your liking, film or drama?

JK: I think they both are very different mediums. Their acting methods are different. Television is the medium of close while film is big. Actors have to show their full body range on film screen. I tried things in films which I could not do in dramas. In television there are a lot of limitations with respect to characterisations and versatility.

I am lucky as an actor that I got a big margin of versatility in my first film. It was from a university-going boy to a professional police officer, which required two get ups and two body languages. It included dance and action as well

TTI: At this stage of your career, any specific role you want to do in any drama, film, or web series?

JK: There are many. Action is one of them. I attempted it a little in my recent film. I would also love to do thrillers. I have got some clips and scripts of suspense and crime series related to thrillers. I am really excited for them.

TTI: How do you remain in touch with your fans?

JK: I thank my fans a lot for their love and appreciation. I read their messages as much as I can on social media. I feel really grateful for their support. Keep loving!





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