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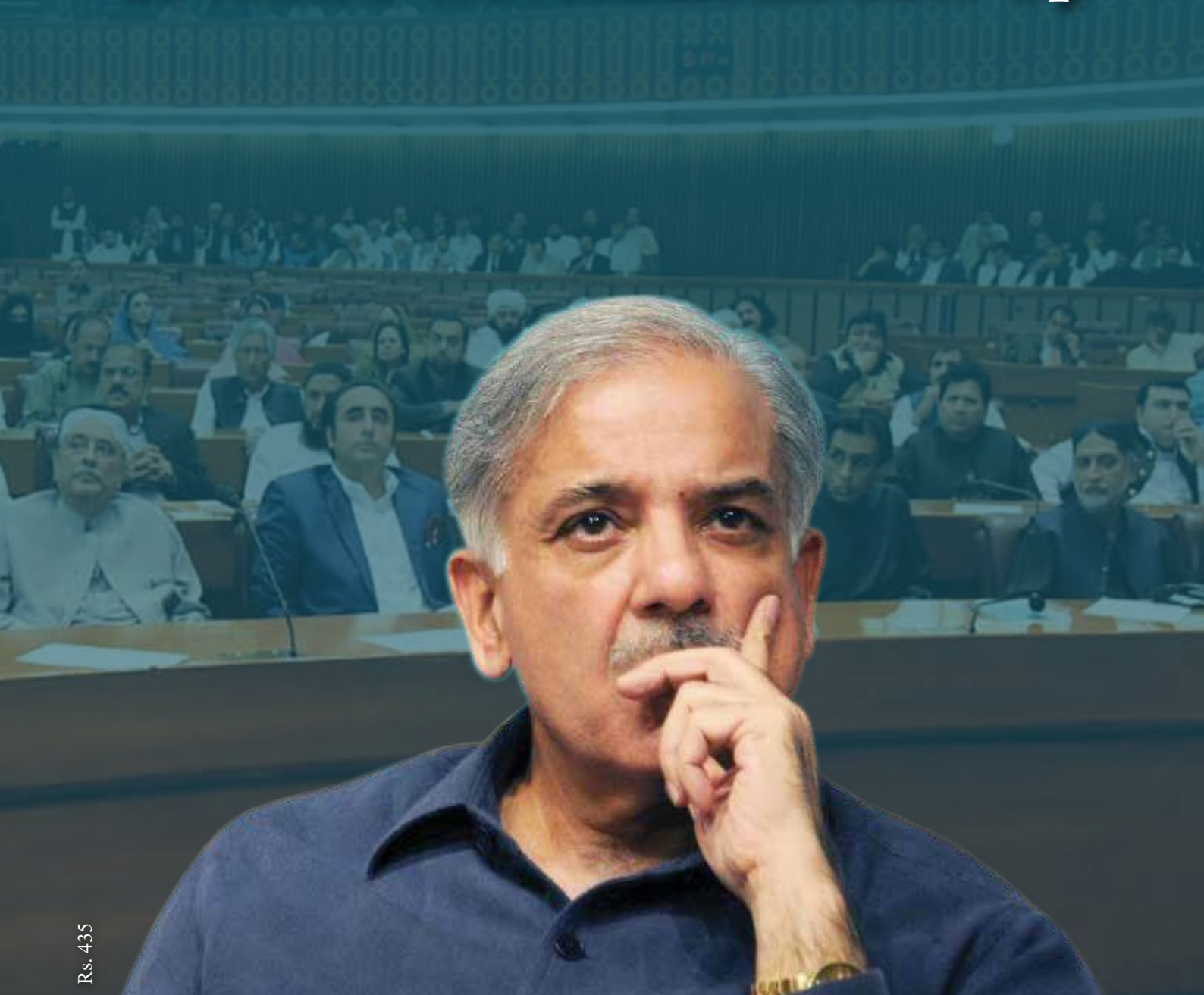
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The only 'Same Page' is constitution

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Will the regime change in Islamabad restore political stability in the country? Doesn't appear so. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan is vehemently fighting for his political survival, holding public rallies and threatening of a Long March to Islamabad in May. It's a no-holds-barred battle for Mr Khan, using all kinds of cards, to regain the 'paradise lost'. Interestingly, he has so far managed to charge his support base, still in disbelief of being 'jilted' by mighty of the land.

When the no-confidence motion was tabled against Mr Khan, he welcomed it saying that he was praying for this move to be tabled to teach the opposition a lesson and that he would take 'three wickets in one ball', alluding to the PDM leadership. Unsuccessfully, he visited all his political allies to win their support as for the vote of no-confidence. In a last ditch effort to rout the vote, he removed his blue-eyed boy in Punjab, Usman Buzdar, in exchange for PML-Q's three votes in the National Assembly. Nothing worked.

Here lied the genesis of an injudicious foreign conspiracy card that Mr Khan played with utmost disregard for the devastating impact it would have on Pakistan's foreign relations, particularly with the USA and Europe, our major military and trade partners with immense influence in IMF, World Bank and FATF. IK said it was a regime-change conspiracy hatched by the USA, with native collaborators (read, all opposition, courts,

garrison, etc). "Those who have committed a mistake shall correct it," said IK, without naming the Establishment. The keyboard warriors got supercharged, making rash trends against none other than the COAS.

Meanwhile, DGISPR and National Security Committee of the cabinet unequivocally refuted the conspiracy theory. It didn't, however, dissuade IK from selling his story and he remained adamant. Earlier, he raised the slogans of accountability of the corrupt. Now his opponents were 'traitors' to boot. The placards at his rallies read, 'Freedom or slavery'. He is the champion of national integrity for his followers, and the primary PTI social media trend against the new government is imported hukoomat namanzoor.

It is common knowledge that Imran Khan has significant support in the ranks. Four days after IK was voted out, a delegation of retired army officers met IK to share their concerns over the regime change. The politicization of the institutions is taking its toll in an unprecedented fashion. The COAS has been personally targeted on the social media for not saving IK's premiership.

It is not tough to comprehend the unparalleled support of IK among the young as well as retired officers. Over the generations, the officers are tutored to dislike 'corrupt politicians'. In the past, Rawal-



pindi has been supporting different politicians for different reasons at different times but that deep-seated dislike for politicians remained in-tact. IK was a different case. He was propped up by the Establishment for at least a decade as a politician without 'the essential vices of a politician'. He was projected as a man as clean and honest as it gets. He was treated as one of their own. All political choices in the country were decimated to ensure IK a smooth run. It was, many insist, at least a decade long plan. In the process, the institutions were seen by the common man as partisan and when the flak for IK's bad governance and inflation started coming in, all the signatories of the 'same page' came under pressure. Last October, when IK interfered in the transfer-posting of a key appointment in the army, the top men in uniform went back to the drawing board. The institution needed to be depoliticized, all agreed. The support base of Imran, perhaps not a keen student of history, fails to digest the shock. They are stunned, still grappling with the reality, construing it as a betrayal of mammoth proportions.

The failure of hybrid regime experiment, hopefully, has taught the establishment many a lesson. Meddling in politics is a dangerous thing, and its natural corollary is that one day politics reaches the cadres. To get out of this self-created mess, there is only one course. Go back to the constitution. The institutions don't afford to pick favourites in politics. Never again!

Smooth Sailing or Bumpy Ride?

Crystal-gazing the prospect of political stability under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif



By Sarfraz Raja

After a suspenseful March, the month of April marked a return to a relative normalcy with a new government in the saddle. But the ousted prime minister seems to have taken to the streets, threatening to usher in a new era of political instability.

Will the situation eventually stabilise? If yes, for how long? And when will the general election be held? Questions like these are taxing the minds of all and sundry in the federal capital and indeed across the nation, with the province of Punjab still neither here nor there.

Although no one in the country including those in power can satisfactorily answer these questions, we could still analyse the situation and draw reasonable conclusions for the days and months to come. This is precisely what we do in the following passages.

A government with no opposition

The new government led by Shahbaz Sharif enjoys the support of all parliamentary parties except the members of the former ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the great majority have who already have resigned en masse from their seats – along with Sheikh Rasheed of Awami Muslim League and about three to four

members of Pakistan Muslim League – Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA).

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif is the president of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The Pakistan Democratic Front (PDM), his ruling coalition, has representation from eight parties and independents from former federally Administered tribal areas and Baluchistan.

Although PM Sharif has a majority of just three to four members more than required figure of 172, it seems under no serious threat from within the Parliament, with the opposition benches occupied by around 20 members of a dissident's group of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). All others parties are part of the ruling coalition with no vocal opposition voices in the house.

Although the ruling coalition is far from monolithic, the differences among its member parties are not severe in nature and with only a rump of PTI playing the part of ceremonial opposition, the government faces no serious challenge from within the Parliament. On the other hand it would be a momentous task no doubt for Leader of the House to get everyone on board all the time.

Imran Khan led challenges

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) would go all out to distract smooth sailing for new regime and in fact they already have kicked off their campaign with resignations from National Assembly seats and countrywide huge public gatherings demanding immediate election. About 123 of PTI's 155 members resigned from their seats soon after the no-confidence passed against Imran Khan.

Of the PTI's total of 155 seats, 28 were seats reserved for women and non-Muslims, so technically it's 94 constituencies which could become vacant for by-election. But the new speaker of the house would re-ascertain these resignations as they claim the process was not followed as required by the law for approval of these resignations.

The National Assembly Secretariat is now likely to call every member for confirmation of their resignation in person and it is expected that many of those members who resigned would not come as it happened in 2014 when PTI members resigned during their Islamabad sit-in and their resignations remained pending.



Apparently, Imran Khan's plan is to demonstrate his street power but government sources are convinced that this is his anger over his removal from office which would dissipate with the passage of time and his movement would fizzle out.

The Punjab factor

With 63 percent of total population of the country, the Punjab province has always remained decisive in political stability in the country and who rules there rules more than half of the country. Historically, two different parties' rule in Islamabad and Punjab has always created unstable environment as it becomes difficult to govern in the centre with no power in Punjab.

This is why the former opposition alliance ensured their numbers for a change in Lahore too as they orchestrated Imran Khan's removal from Islamabad. However, despite showing a majority in the provincial house, the going has been tough for them up until now because of the spoiler's role played by Umar Sarfraz Cheema, the Punjab Governor appointed by Khan in the twilight of his rule.

If conditions become smooth and serene in the largest province according to their wishes and expectations, it would be easier for them in centre as well. Otherwise, it would become ever harder for the government to manage things for a longer period of time.

Possibility of early election

Immediate or early election are not just a demand of Imran Khan but also major government ally Maulana Fazlur Rahman has called for its need. Senior PMLN leaders like Khawaja Muhammad Asif while addressing the parliament also suggested for an early election to avoid any possibility of unrest in the country.

But there are some technical hurdles in immediate election as elaborated by election commission of Pakistan. Fresh delimitation of electoral constituency is mandatory under the Constitution after the reduction of National Assembly constituencies from 272 to 266 (with the merger of former federally administered tribal areas FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province).

The PTI, which is raring for immediate election, are challenging these delimitations in court, demanding that delimitations should be done in accordance with new census. If accepted, this request would lead to a further delay before the election. The Election Commission of Pakistan has already asked for seven months' time for their preparations including delimitations.

On other hand, the main agenda for the new ruling coalition is to reform election laws to ensure integrity and transparency of the election. These reforms include the use of electronic voting machines and a right to vote for overseas Pakistanis.



The PTI government had in fact unilaterally passed some legislation for eVoting and iVoting but that had become controversial with opposition's reservations and allegations of pre-poll rigging. Now the new government has decided to review these laws as part of new election reforms.

One important amendment which could be on cards is to mention a certain time period for disqualification of member under article 63 as no such duration is mentioned at the moment. The Supreme Court of Pakistan in cases against Nawaz Sharif and Jahangir Khan Tareen described it as a lifetime disqualification and had also asked the Parliament in their remarks to do some legislation if they want it to be clarified.

Sources in PMLN say that this would also be an article to amend in new reforms and if it could be done, PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif and PTI dissident Jahangir Tareen could become eligible to contest the next

election. But it would need constitutional amendment requiring two third majority from both houses which right now seems difficult. So unanimous and non-controversial electoral reform could be a challenge especially to get everyone on board.

Economic challenges

Present ruling parties when in opposition were criticizing PTI for their economic policies and the resultant inflation, unemployment etc. Now that they are in power, they have to tackle those problems themselves. As we already have statements by government economic team about

taking some unpopular decisions like increasing petroleum prices.

Firstly it would be a challenge to take all allies on board for such decisions as all of them were blaming previous set up for such hikes and then to defend in public as there is already strong opposition in form of Imran Khan to take them on. How new economic team would handle this situation matters the most.

Constitutionally, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif can stay in power for the remainder of the current National Assembly, which completes its term in 16 months. They could have smooth sailing inside the Parliament with no opposition. But they have to face the challenge of Imran Khan outside the Parliament, which would actually test of their nerves and temperament. How Imran Khan can carry the momentum he has right now would make all the difference between smooth sailing and a bumpy ride.



A Thorn in the Side of PM Sharif

President Arif Alvi is in no mood to cooperate with those who ousted his leader from power



By **Qurban Baloch**

Imran Khan may be out of the prime minister's office, but he still has friends in the corridors of power. Two prominent cases in point are President Arif Alvi and Governor Punjab Umar Sarfraz Cheema. The former in particular has become a thorn in the side of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, who managed to oust Khan from power.

Although Sharif's political coalition represents 67 percent of the country's population, his options against President Alvi are limited: Under the constitution, the only action a political government can take against the President is impeachment. However, the option is off the table for the government because it is well short of the required support in the parliament.

For an impeachment to succeed, it must be supported by no less than two-thirds of the total membership of the parliament. The only other way for Alvi's removal from the President's office would be resignation. He, on the other hand, has become so rigid since the removal of former Khan from power he has refused to cooperate with Sharif on several key occasions.

Administering oath of office to an elected

prime minister and the federal cabinet is a constitutional duty of the President, but Mr. Alvi did not fulfill his duty for Prime Minister Sharif or the first batch of his cabinet ministers.

Hence, it can be said with some certitude that the future relations of the President and Prime Minister will prove to be detrimental for governance, because only the President's approved bills passed from the Parliament can become law. Moreover, the government is bound to inform the President on numerous issues such as those of governance as well as send advice summaries for the appointment of key posts.

Two key articles of the Constitution are related to the procedure of the President's removal and power.

According Article 47 of the Constitution of Pakistan;

1. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution, the President may in accordance with the provision of this article, be removed from office on the grounds of physical or mental incapacity or impeached on a charge of violating the Constitution or gross misconduct.

2. Not less than one-half of the total membership of either House may give to the Speaker of the National Assembly or, as the case may be, the Chairman written notice of its intention to move a resolution for the removal of, or, as the case may be, to impeach, the President, and such notice shall set out the particulars of his capacity or of the charge against him.
3. If a notice under clause 2 is received by the Chairman, he shall transmit it forthwith to the Speaker.
4. The Speaker shall, within three days of receipt of a notice under clause 2 or 3, cause a copy of the notice to be transmitted to the Speaker.
5. The Speaker shall summon the two Houses to meet in a joint sitting not earlier than seven days and not later than fourteen days after receipt of notice by him.
6. The joint sitting may investigate or cause to be investigated the ground or the charge upon which the notice is founded.



7. The President shall have the right to appear and be represented during the investigation, if any, and before the joint sitting.
8. If, after consideration of the result of the investigation, if any, a resolution is passed at the joint sitting by the votes of not less than two-thirds of the total membership of (Majlis-e-Shora (Parliament) declaring that the President is unfit to hold the office due to incapacity or is guilty of violating the Constitution or of gross misconduct, the President shall cease to hold office immediately on the passing of the resolution.

For impeachment of the President, 295 votes (two-third) of both houses are required, 228 from the National Assembly and 67 members of the Senate of Pakistan. However, the government is short numbered from both houses.

Crunching the numbers

After formation of the new government, the total number of treasury benches in the National Assembly is 176 after the death of Iqbal Muhammad Ali. Otherwise, the total number is 177.

On the other hand, after resignations of the

This is still 65 members shy from the required number of 295 (two-third members of both Houses).

If it is hypothetically assumed that the whole parliament's total 218 present members (177 from treasury and 41 from opposition) 67 Senators, two-third from Senate, will move against the President, the total number will be 285, which is 10 votes short of the required number of 295 votes from both Houses.

The scenario above clearly indicates that in the prevailing condition, the treasury benches are unable to remove President Dr Arif Alvi from his post in any condition.

Sharif's woes

In the present situation, it is very hard for Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif to digest President Dr Arif Alvi easily, because even after ousting Imran Khan from power, his powerful comrade is present in the Presidency with ample power to erect hurdles for the new government. President's power under article 48 are as under.

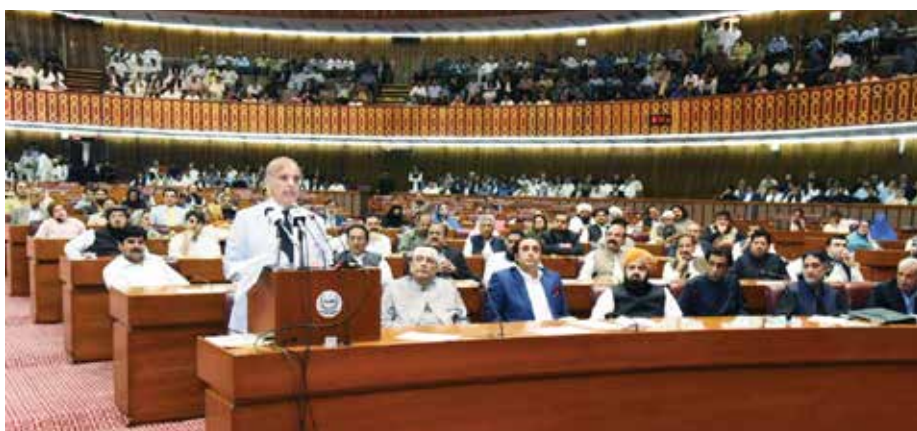
48. (1) In the exercise of his functions, the President shall act (on and) in accordance with the advice of the cabinet (or the Prime Minister)

Provided that (within fifteen days) the President may require the Cabinet or, as the case be, the Prime Minister to reconsider Such advice, either generally or otherwise, and the President shall (withi ten days) act in accordance with the advice tendered after such reconsideration.)

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in clause

(1), the President shall act in his discretion in respect of any matter in the respect of which he is empowered by the Constitution to do so (and validity of anything done by the President in his discretion shall not be called in question on any ground whatsoever.)

Hence proved, that the President manages to retain important control even post the 18th Amendment, that allows him to have much space to assert his position.



Therefore, for the removal of the President by impeachment on any ground, two-third votes of the Parliament (National Assembly and Senate) are compulsory.

Treasury vs opposition

Nowadays, the Parliament that consists of 442 members (324 of the National Assembly and 100 Senate of the Senate- after the demise of one member of the government's ally MQM-P Iqbal Mohamed Ali, and one member elected recently through by-polls still not having taken the oath). The remaining strength of the NA is 340.

A total of 123 resignations of the members of the Pakistan Tehreek- e- Insaf (PTI), the party of the former Prime Minister Imran Khan, are pending for the final decision via a notification from the Election Commission of Pakistan since the Acting Speaker of National Assembly Qasim Suri approved those before his resignation. After being elected as the new Speaker, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf on the first day ordered to hold the process and present all relevant record to him for verification one by one.

123 members of PTI from the total strength of 156 and former Federal Minister Shaikh Rasheed, the number of total members who have or intend to resign is 124 out of the total 165 in the opposition.

After resignation of 123 members, PTI's 33 members are still present in the house. The members from the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), 1 member of the Jamaat-e-Islami (Abdul Akbar Chitrali), Aijaz Ul Haq of PML-Zia, Former Federal Minister Zubeda Jalal of Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), and 2 members of Pakistan Muslim League Q, the opposition's strength stands at 41.

In the National Assembly, 177 members from the treasury benches and 41 from opposition totals to 218 members who are available. On the other side, 53 senators in the Senate belong to the treasury benches out of the total of 100 members.

In the National Assembly, 228 members are required for two-third majority and in the Senate of Pakistan, the required two-third number is 67. Total members of the treasury side from both Houses is 230.



The Meteoric Fall

Tracing the spectacle of Imran Khan's fall from power – and grace



By Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain

The ignominious end to PTI's three-and-a-half-year rule in Pakistan and its replacement by Imran Khan's nemesis Mr Shahbaz Sharif as the interim Prime Minister is a development that no one had anticipated. However, if you are willing to look beyond the phenomenon and pay attention to the larger forces that were at work triggering this Tsunami of change.

Just before the 2018 national election that marked the rise of PTI as a mainstream political party, there was a growing realization among the power that be that Pakistani politics had reached a dead end, as the alternating rule by both mainstream political parties, namely, PPP and PML (N) had failed to improve governance, ensure economic renewal, tackle the problem of violent and religious extremism.

A third force, therefore, was needed that could rid the country of all these problems and get the country out of its socioeconomic malaise.

Led by the charismatic and exceedingly popular Imran Khan, PTI offered a ray of hope for the security managers of Pakistan. But the PTI needed the extra push by them to forge ahead of the PML (N) and PPP. The opportunity came during 2018 general elections.

As happenstance would have it, the ruling PML (N) party was tainted by the Panama scandal and many stories of widespread corrupt practices at this juncture. The Establishment decided to marginalize the PML (N) by promoting PTI as the main contender for power at the Centre.

PTI had engaged in dharna politics in Islamabad that added urgency to its desire for a power grab. It had already been ruling Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and therefore presented itself as a credible new force that could put the country on the path to economic development and welfare state.

PTI's accent on "Riasat-e-Madina" (welfare state according to the teachings of Islam) further resonated with the ultraconservative religious circles and the youth of Pakistan that was struggling to find an ideological mooring at a time of global transition occasioned by what Daniel Learner has called the Passing of a Traditional Society. In this era of global change and the political shift to the right, PTI seemed an eminently suitable force to govern Pakistan.

More importantly, PTI's anti-India outlook and its ideological bent towards Islamic Ummah made it particularly relevant for



Pakistan's continuing search for a block of friendly Muslim states with heft and influence.

Imran Khan's personal friendship with Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of the KSA, and his desire to cultivate deeper ties with Gulf countries seemed to add to his political stature as a world leader. And so the PTI was catapulted into power.

For the first three years of PTI's rule, everything ran smoothly. Not only did Khan seem to be on the same page with the security managers of Pakistan, but his political armour also seemed flawless, shining and betrayed no visible chinks.

However, there was one huge problem that lay hidden and surfaced only in the month of October last year. That involved Imran's efforts to promote General Faiz Hameed, DG ISI, as the next COAS both because of the situation in Afghanistan marked by the return of the Taliban coupled with his friendly disposition towards Imran Khan.

Imran Khan's preference for General Faiz Hameed as the next Army Chief was viewed by GHQ not only as an unprecedented interference with Army's well-established tradition of promotions based on seniority and merit but also an intrusion by a civilian leader into the military's sphere.

The delay in the notification of 6 October appointment of new ISI Chief, Lt. General Naveed Ahmed Anjum, in place of General Faiz Hameed who had been sent as Corp Commander Peshawar, only deepened these tensions between Imran Khan and the GHQ.



This background is essential for understanding the chain of events that led to the fall of PTI's regime from power. The removal of General Faiz Hameed from the powerful position of DG ISI was widely interpreted by opponents of PTI as a setback for the PTI and the withdrawal of its support for Imran Khan.

The popular saying in Islamabad was that the Establishment had become "neutral". This so-called posture of neutrality only whetted the appetite of the opposition to get their act together and collectively go for the hunt. But the opposition lacked the requisite number to bring this about. At the same time, there were rumblings from within the PTI ranks and its allies at the Centre like MQM, BAP that they were willing to become part of a "no confidence move" against Imran Khan if they were given assurances of the right kind.

Confident of its numbers (172 at a minimum) and buttressed by public support for calls of "Go Niazi Go", the PTI government retaliated by organizing its own show of public support on 27 March in Islamabad.

At this huge rally Imran Khan made the cardinal mistake of publicly mentioning for the first time the so-called "threat letter" – a diplomatic cable – that was sent to his government by a foreign government, to remove him from power as part of a "foreign conspiracy."



He alleged that this "letter" had been received by Pakistan as early as 7 March and his government had kept quiet about it due to its preoccupation with the OIC conference. Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi who briefly spoke at the rally stated that he was privy to so many state-secrets one of which he was asking PM Imran Khan to share with the public today because it entailed the security of the state.

Meanwhile, the united opposition was canvassing votes and allies to mount a challenge to his power within the parliament to vote him out. On 3 April the National Assembly met to consider the no-confidence move. Realizing that he actually might be voted out of power, Imran Khan, in a desperate attempt, ordered the vote cancelled and dissolved the national assembly in clear violation of the Constitution.

The stunned opposition immediately appealed to the Supreme Court against Imran's decision to dissolve the parliament. Taking suo motto notice of this egregious breach of the Constitution, the Supreme Court constituted a five-member larger bench, which delivered its restoring the national Assembly. Instead of complying with the decision of the apex court, Khan defied it and was forced to leave PM's office.

Imran Khan's fall from power betrays a lack of maturity and a lack of respect for basic norms of democratic order. It also shows his misguided belief that he is above the law and that he is somehow indispensable to the functioning of the country itself.

Democracy moves in strange capers. Khan's popular appeal may pave the way for his return to power in the next election of the next. But whether he would be able to wield that power in a disciplined and democratic fashion is anybody's guess.



PM Sharif's Steep Challenges

The new government has his work cut out for him



By Noor Aftab

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's coalition government has just about one-and-a-half year to live at the most. But over this short period, it must tackle a host of tricky problems to put the country's affairs back on track after years of desolation.

The success of his government, backed by the Pakistan Democratic Front (PDM) coalition, in overcoming these problems will be key not only to bringing relief to the masses struggling under the staggering burden of economic hardship but also to accumulating valuable political capital before heading into the general election.

Here is a look at some of the key challenges that the new PM and his cabinet must tackle before they can be deemed successful.

Stabilising the economy

The Shehbaz-led government has successfully reinitiated talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) through a high-powered economic team, aiming to restart the IMF programme.

Pakistan's current account deficit is projected at around 4 percent of GDP for the fiscal year 2022, while foreign reserves have dropped to USD 11.3 billion on

1st April 2022, compared to USD 16.2 billion less than a month earlier.

The State Bank of Pakistan hiked key interest rate by 250 basis points to 12.25 percent in an emergency decision, the biggest hike in decades, citing deterioration in the outlook for inflation and an increase in risks to external stability, heightened by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as local political uncertainty.

The crippled national economy remains as one of the most difficult challenges for the newly-elected government and IMF programme compliance will require difficult decisions of inflation increase, something that the current government, which is in power for a short period of time, does not want to do.

Civil-military relations

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has vowed to reset fractious relations between the civilian government and the military establishment. After his removal from the office through no-trust motion former Prime Minister Imran Khan is once again trying to bend the arc of politics to his formidable will.

The former prime minister is playing the victim card, inflaming anti-opposition, anti-US, and anti-establishment sentiments

to mobilise his constituency. These inflamed sentiments may lead to further political chaos and violence, forcing the country deeper into political and economic instability.

Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa was quoted as telling his officers "Army draws its strength from people and any effort to create wedge between the Army and the masses would not be tolerated." So the normalization of relations between the civilian government and the military establishment is one of the main challenges for the newly elected government.

Healing the divide

The coalition government has assumed the charge of a deeply divided country due to political polarisation that is being amplified and given inflammatory edge by unbridled social media. The polarised environment and the tone of political discourse have plunged to an unprecedented level.

Bitter polemics, aggressive rhetoric and unceasing efforts by political leaders to demonise their opponents have become the order of the day. A consequence of this unfortunate tendency is the lack of attention given to issues that are of concern to the public at large, and that affect the country's future.



It is responsibility of the incumbent government to heal the divide, especially because it is difficult to expect any such move from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan who believes in confrontation to serve his political ends.

This kind of situation can definitely affect the performance of the government as it cannot even think about any economic uplift without political stability in the country. So if it intends to achieve its targets, it has to defuse the confrontational politics of opponent parties.

Diplomatic isolation

The policies adopted by the PTI government have largely pushed the country towards international isolation where even friendly countries seem to be avoiding serious diplomatic engagement with Pakistan.

Even China – an all-weather friend that has gone out of its way to protect Pakistan from international criticism, humiliation, isolation and even punishment – was not happy over the go-slow policy of the Imran-led government with regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The new government has a difficult task at hand to improve ties with the United States and other important countries. US support in particular is crucial at the IMF, Financial Action Task Force (FATF), diplomatic balancing, and defence equipment purchases.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is planning a visit to Saudi Arabia in the final days of Ramadan. If handled with requisite acuity, this visit should help the government secure vital economic concessions as well as improving diplomatic credentials of Pakistan in the comity of nations.

Ties with India

Within hours after Shehbaz Sharif took over as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, speculation began about the revival of Pakistan-India diplomatic relations. Cooperation between the nuclear neighbours can enable them both to get rid of the menace of terrorism and defeat radicalism.

There is also the larger strategic scenario that confronts both countries. Until now, it

has been a zero-sum game between them. They have both found themselves on opposite sides of the strategic confrontation between great powers.

But if they intend to work together, their negotiating position will increase vastly and they can resist being buffeted by the pulls and pressures of great power politics. However, the question remains how far Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, representing a coalition government, can go to revive and improve bilateral relations with India, given the peculiar political scenario in the country.



Ties with Afghanistan

Afghanistan and Pakistan have a long history of tense relations defined by five recurring drivers: Sovereignty concerns, security interests, geopolitical dynamics, cross-border ties, and trade connectivity. Together, these dynamics will shape future prospects for stability in Afghanistan and the broader region.

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have been largely characterised by mutual mistrust and devised through a narrow security prism. While it will require considerable effort to end deep-seated animosity, both countries share close ethnic, linguistic, religious, and economic ties.

By acknowledging and working to address one another's security and sovereignty concerns patiently through dialogue, Pakistan and Afghanistan stand the best chance of building on their cross-border ties for the benefit of regional stability and the well-being of their citizens.

Tackling terrorism

Pakistan's decision to join the global war on terror was the result of geostrategic imperatives and the international community's call. Although the international community has always calculated Pakistan's counter-terrorism role through the Afghanistan angle, they have failed to recognize the negative impacts of war on terror over Pakistan's internal security and economic conditions.

Little do Pakistan's international partners realise that the country has sacrificed more

than any country in the war against terror, becoming the biggest victim of terrorism.

Pakistan has lost thousands of precious civilian and military lives and financially lost over a hundred billion dollars in this war — which is not even our war. Millions of people in districts bordering Afghanistan have been displaced.

Pakistan has taken action against several terrorist organisations especially the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, the militant Islamic State group, and Al Qaeda. But Pakistan is not receiving the cooperation it needs for border management and control. The terrorists who usually come from a neighbouring country launch attacks on our people.

So the government should highlight Pakistan's contributions in the war on terror and urge the international community, particularly the United States, to acknowledge this fact and give due recognition to the contributions made by it towards fighting terrorism in the region.



Will He be Back?

Imran Khan's popularity is on the upswing, but will it translate into votes?



By Naveed Miraj

Just a couple of months back, when Imran Khan was holding the office of Prime Minister, there was a perceptible drop in his popularity, mainly because of soaring prices of essential commodities. Though the price hike was and is still an international phenomenon, triggered mainly because of unprecedented increase in the prices of crude oil and other factors such as supply cuts due to Covid-19 pandemic, yet the people were not ready to buy and accept the clarifications by the then PTI government.

This decline in Imran Khan's popularity was also reflected in several surveys and even those who voted for him in the 2018 general elections appeared to be disappointed with his performance, asserting they will not vote in favor of the PTI again.

This whole scenario, however, completely changed after the tabling of no-confidence motion by the opposition parties and especially when in the public gathering of 27 March in the federal capital, Imran Khan waved a letter, alleging that a

conspiracy has been hatched against his government by a foreign regime with the collusion of some elements in the opposition parties.

The success of no-confidence resolution in the National Assembly only proved to be a blessing in disguise for him as the declining popularity graph took a reverse course and at present he is riding wave of popularity never seen before, even prior to the last general elections.

His narrative of 'foreign conspiracy' and that all 'the corrupt politicians' got together against him whilst no institution supported him, is now resonating with the urban middle and upper class especially the youth. This is the reason that he is pulling more crowds in the public gatherings and in recent days, one has seen unmatched gatherings addressed by him in Peshawar, Karachi and most recently in Lahore.

This is regardless of the fact that most of the television channels are not giving him the coverage that they used to give him earlier especially before the 2018 election. The

political polarization that is currently being seen both in people and the media is also unparalleled, the one never seen before.

Simultaneously, Khan is also breaking record of popularity on social media platforms. 'Imported Hakumat Namanzor' (Imported Government Not Acceptable) is trending top over the last many days with millions of tweets. Just a day before Lahore gathering, Imran Khan also hosted record-breaking Twitter rally where nearly half a million users from around the world joined him via Twitter Spaces, a live audio-conferencing feature on Twitter. The average number of users listening at a time was 165,000. The address was also live-streamed on other platforms with thousands watching such as Facebook and Instagram.

It will not be wrong to say that the political parties, who are now in a coalition government, have provided a new political life to the PTI Chairman by ousting him from power, and the day is not far when they will start cursing their decision.



Khan is now trying to fully cash in on this opportunity. A smear campaign is going on against Army on the social media, but Imran Khan is not directly attacking the institution. Rather, his words that the army is far more important for this country than Imran Khan would be a music to many, if not all, ears in the quarters concerned. He undoubtedly is playing smart to keep his chances alive.

The PTI now appears to be gearing up for massive protest demonstrations after Eid ul Fitr and as also indicated in Lahore gathering, the former Prime Minister can also give a call to his supporters and workers to march on Islamabad to pressurize the incumbent government as well as the powers that be to call fresh elections at the earliest.

The million-dollar question now is that whether the PTI leadership can turn the large support base into votes. The recently held by election in Hangu where the PTI's candidate won the seat and the JUI (F) stood second, would definitely have given much needed impetus and confidence to the party.

The upcoming local bodies election to be held in seventeen districts of Punjab province on 9 June will be the first major test to gauge the party's popularity. For the local bodies elections, the main competi-

tion definitely will be between the PML-N and the PTI.

Punjab always plays a decisive factor in forming government in the centre, and whichever party performs better in local bodies elections will have the upper hand going into the next general election. The districts where local bodies elections will be held in the first phase include Attock, Jhelum, Mandi Bahauddin, Hafizabad, Sialkot, Khushab, Chiniot, Toba Tek Singh, Sahiwal, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Khanewal, Vehari, Bahawalpur, Rajanpur, Pakpattan, and Dera Ghazi Khan.

The PTI is quite strong in South Punjab whilst in other districts such as Jhelum and Attock, it had performed better in the 2018 general elections. But in districts such as Sialkot where the PML-N has a huge following, it will be seen in the local government elections how far the narrative of the PTI has permeated in the masses.

As regards early general elections, these may not suit the PPP but any delay in them will only affect the popularity of the PML-N given the economic challenges faced by the country especially the price hike. This is why senior PML-N leaders such as Khawaja Asif are also giving statements in favour of seeking a fresh mandate soonest.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has demanded the government to reverse the relief package announced by the PTI government. Under the package, the prices of petroleum products were not only reduced by PKR 10 per litre but these were also capped up till the end of June. Given the dwindling foreign exchange reserves, the government has no other option but to increase the prices of petroleum products.

However, doing so will only trigger yet another wave of inflation in the country – something which will not augur well for the ruling party. This will only provide more space to the PTI to criticize the government's economic policy and their leaders will start drawing comparison in prices that were in its era and now under the coalition government. Feeling the pinch of price hike, the people will also start considering the PTI better than the incumbents.

The PTI despite all odds appears to be faring better in the next elections, no matter when they take place. But will it be able to secure sufficient seats to form the next government is a question that cannot be answered with certainty as in our country it takes little time to change the whole scene. The way Khan made a comeback is its most recent and classic example.





The Political Tug of War in Punjab

What do you do when a provincial governor refuses to swear in an elected chief minister?

By Ahmad Waleed

The pivotal Punjab province of Pakistan found itself in the eye of a political storm immediately after the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly brought by the multi-party opposition alliance against former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Realising too late he was outflanked, Khan agreed to have his crony Usman Buzdar vacate the slot of Punjab Chief Minister in favour of Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi in a deal he hurriedly struck with Pakistan Muslim League – Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q).

Khan has since been ousted but the storm in Punjab continues to rage. Interestingly, Elahi, who had been offered the same position by the opposition coalition, fell for Khan, staking not only the immediate payday but also the political credibility of his party. He looks set to lose out on both counts.

The opposition managed to garner support from two powerful dissident groups from within Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) – led by Jahangir Tareen and Aleem Khan. Caught unawares, the Chaudhry from Gujrat emerged as a big loser as his own family refused to get along and a group led by Chaudhry Shujaat joined the opposition coalition.

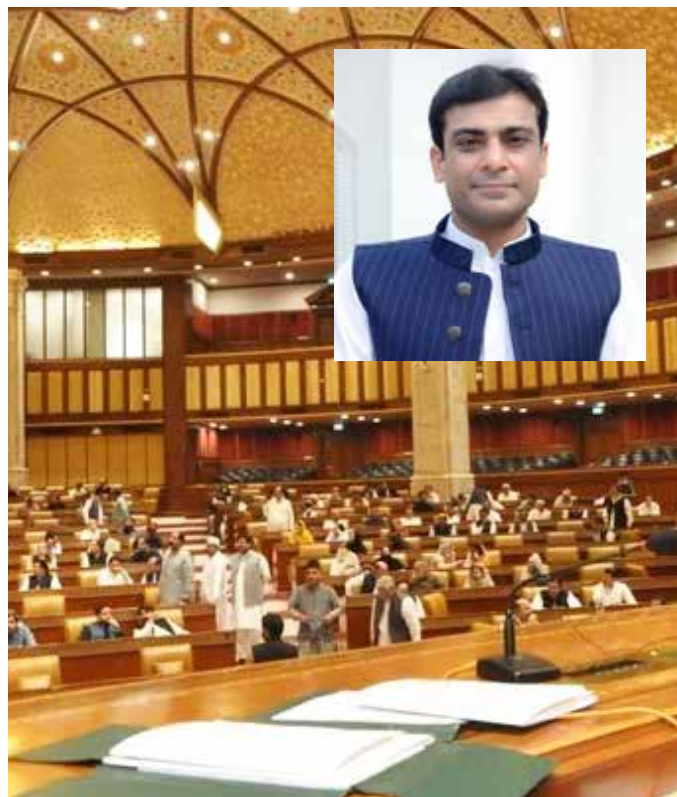
The battle for Punjab was fought in the Punjab Assembly where the Lahore High Court ordered to hold the voting for the new chief minister rejecting all the objections of PTI and PML-Q. The voting day was marred by an unprecedented and ugly situation when the deputy speaker was attacked by PML-Q and PTI lawmakers to halt the voting.

Later, the voting was done and PDM-backed candidate Hamza Shahbaz Sharif was elected the new leader of the house. However, the strife did not end there. The new governor of Punjab, Umar Sarfraz Cheema, has since stubbornly refused to administer the oath of office to the elected chief minister citing 'legal reasons' ignoring a warning by his principal secretary that the governor cannot refuse to swear in the chief minister.

His team of legal advisers told the Governor that the election process of Hamza Shahbaz does not merit the legal obligations. The Prime Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, sent a summary to the President for removal of the governor for his refusal. But, the President did not agree and 'directed the governor to continue to perform the duties of the governor' as the prime minister has no authority to sack a governor. Things got worse.

PML-N again moved court against the very decision by the governor. On Friday, Lahore High Court passed a short order directing the President to appoint a representative for oath taking of Punjab Chief Minister Hamza Shahbaz Sharif.

The Chief Justice, Muhammad Ameer Bhatti, passed the short order on a petition, filed by Hamza Shahbaz. Advocate General Punjab Ahmad Owais had submitted that he met the Punjab governor as per court orders who said he wanted to put his objections



before the court. However, the Chief Justice was askance if the governor had given any reason for refusal to administer the oath.

A while later, the AGP told the court that the governor had said that the election of the chief minister was not held as per law, which was his reason for not administering the oath. The chief justice ruled the governor had no authority to refuse to administer the oath. It asked the President to appoint a representative to swear in the elected chief minister as there was no government in Punjab for the past 21 days.

Now the newly-elected Chief Minister Hamza Shahbaz will have to wait for the President to appoint a representative if he does not find another legal excuse. From all appearances, the deadlock is not going away any time soon.

The governor is also focussing on former chief minister Usman Buzdar's resignation issue which was directly sent to the former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, on a typed paper. The requirement is that he should have submitted his resignation to the governor on a hand-written paper. It seems that the controversy is unlikely to be solved even after the orders of the Lahore High Court.

Both the government and the governor have locked horns of the oath issue creating an uncertain situation in the largest province of Pakistan. The government functions have come to a halt and there is no authority to run the government affairs.



The Severest Blow Yet to Parliamentary Democracy

If this is how our politicians play the game, all bets for the success of democracy are off



By Umer Farooq

All seems to have settled down: A new government has assumed power in Islamabad after a constitutional crisis looming large over the horizon evaporated in thin air; but the events of Sunday, 3rd April 2022 have left deep scars on the face of Pakistan's democracy.

The Supreme Court had declared Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri's ruling unconstitutional, but the debate lingers on in the power corridors whether a public officeholder should be more loyal to his political boss or the Constitution.

Imran Khan, the Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the former ruling party, was not willing to play the game by the rules laid down in the 1973 Constitution, and his minions put loyalty to his person above the Constitution.

He was eventually forced into compliance by a combination of court orders, threats of more court orders, and behind-the-scenes pressure from the military – but not before his stubborn resolve to play by the rulebook brought the system on the verge of constitutional breakdown.

The then opposition parties, now in government, accused the Prime Minister, President, and Speaker of the National

Assembly of being in open revolt against the rules set in the Constitution. They were blocking a constitutional process, ignoring the simple dictates of the constitution and a clear-cut verdict of the Supreme Court.

By not allowing the voting on no-confidence to take place in the National Assembly, they were in open revolt against the constitution. In the end, it was not a smooth political and constitutional process that ended the crisis.

It was the threat of judicial intervention and military commanders' late night visit to Prime Minister House that ended that crisis. As non-representative state functionaries stepped in to save the day, loss of face fell to the lot of the political leadership of the country.

The events of that fateful day will go down in Pakistan's constitutional history as another attempt by forces from within the system to block a constitutional process, using the dated idea of national interests' violation as a pretext.

Events happened in quick succession. The then Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Qasim Suri, rejected the no-confidence motion against PM Imran Khan on the pretext that the motion was the result of

a foreign conspiracy. Within minutes, Khan appeared on national television to announce that he had dissolved the National Assembly.

April 3 was the day of voting on the motion, and the opposition had garnered the support of 197 parliamentarians, whereas only 172 votes were required to dislodge the Prime Minister.

While addressing his party leaders in the afternoon, the former PM said, "When the highest national security body has declared that there was a foreign conspiracy, the numbers in the Parliament become irrelevant".

Khan's message was clear: The National Security Committee has supra-constitutional powers over the parliament does not matter. He would have us believe the Parliament is subservient to the National Security Committee – because its members include the military chiefs and military spymasters.

The worst part is that such baseless views are gaining normality. Violations of law and the Constitution have ceased to outrage the society, to stir the society into action.

On the contrary, we see the Deputy Speaker



celebrating his ruling in public meetings; and we see the former Prime Minister openly challenging the Supreme Court and launching a frontal attack against the judges who delivered this verdict.

Sadly, his confrontational course of action was not unprecedented in our political history. Only recently another former prime minister had criticized the judiciary and blamed it for his conviction by lower courts in financial corruption cases. Lawlessness and celebration of this lawlessness has become a norm in our society.

In a 2017 power struggle, Nawaz Sharif attacked the judiciary and especially the Supreme Court after his disqualification in the Panama scandal through a court verdict. The attack was debilitating for the political system as it came from the head of the ruling party, who is considered to be one of the most popular leaders of the country.

Not surprisingly, General Bajwa jumped into the fray and was reported to have told a group of journalists in an off-the-record briefing that the army would side with the judiciary if things came to a head. His assertion was, however, widely reported.

The then Chief Justice was not in any conciliatory mood at all. He denied Nawaz Sharif, who was playing victim, all roles in the country's politics.

In this environment of open defiance of courts, law, and the Constitution, it is not at

all surprising to see a Deputy Speaker blocking a constitutional process, a provincial Governor refusing to administer the oath of office to an elected Chief Minister, and a President, presiding over this lawlessness and open defiance of courts and the Constitution.

There is absolutely no one who talks about and ensures the implementation and enforcement of law. Everybody has their own rules, which suits them alone and when they do not, they would not obey these rules.

If as a prime minister you are facing a no-confidence motion, make the speaker of your party block the constitutional process. When the courts ask you not to block the process laid down in the Constitution, you go after the judges with all the power of social media at your disposal.

Have you been convicted by a special court in financial corruption cases and ousted as the prime minister of the country by the apex court of the country? No matter; go public with your grievances and launch a frontal attack on the Court. This is the new normal in our society.

Where are we heading? The Constitution, law and courts play a foundational role in preventing a society from landing into the grip of anarchy and chaos. There is no democracy in the world functioning without the political elite of the country agreeing to certain rules of game—in fact agreeing to such basic questions as to how

the rulers will be elected and how they will be ousted from power? Which institution will act as mediator and arbitrator in the political arena? How to address the grievances of an aggrieved party in a political contest?

The basic problem with our political system is that our political elite does not agree upon any rules of the game. The rules that facilitate their politics are respected and the rules that do not are trampled upon by the political leaders and their followers – even if they are part of the constitution.

Unfortunately we have reached a situation where our political elite doesn't even agree on sustaining the parliamentary form of government, a question settled by the 1973 Constitution for good.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan at the height of political crisis seemed to have told his followers that the decision of the parliament does not matter if a supra body like National Security Committee have decided that the no-confidence motion against him was a foreign conspiracy.

This exactly was the plan of military rulers of Pakistan—that a higher decision-making body should lord over parliamentary democracy in the country. Each of them failed due to persistent pressure from democratic forces, but Imran Khan has succeeded in delivering the severest blow yet to parliamentary democracy in the country – because he is a politician not a general.





Undermining the Constitution is Attacking Democracy

Surging political polarisation has implications for Pakistani state and society



By Aimen Bukhari

“Every few years, a new crop of politicians emerges promising to put country over party, to govern on behalf of the people rather than the powerful, to listen to the better angels of our nature rather than the howling of our factions. And then the clock ticks forward, the insurgents become the establishment, public disillusionment sets in, the electorate swings a bit to the other side, and we start again. This cycle is a tributary feeding into the country’s political rage—it is maddening to keep trying to fix a problem that only seems to get worse.”

- Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized*

Pakistan is going through a political crisis never experienced before in its history. Political polarisation is rising, and has reached a stage where there seems almost no scope for compromise through dialogue.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan has adopted a confrontational style of politics that has nothing to do with normal parlia-

mentary democracy. Because of repeatedly and unabashedly displaying a personal hatred towards his opposition, he has produced a profoundly split society, and this fact has expectedly started to hit home.

A rally outside former PM Imran Khan’s ex-wife’s London house targeting her children was organised by the PML-N. Her house address was posted on web adverts, which is very condemnable and harmful.

But similar rallies and demonstrations have been routinely observed outside Mian Nawaz Sharif’s London residence through the years. Planned and led by the UK branch of Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, such demonstrations have at times escalated to violent confrontations.

Unfortunately, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has decided to adopt the PTI playbook so that at the

moment, both these parties are instigating political polarisation.

Abid Sher Ali planned the demonstration against ex-PM Imran Khan’s ex-wife and children and has been in self-exile in London for over two years. He was the subject of vulgar abuse by a PTI worker at a restaurant last year when the former was present with his family.

Little do these political operators realise that this strategy of theirs can hurt the other side more. Narratives are competing in public spaces, to show that the other side is the most corrupt and evil. It has volatily polarized the public, which is sandwiched between the dirty politics of PTI and Sharifs.

April was a month of intense political activity across Pakistan, from the capital to the provinces of Punjab and Balochistan. Pakistan’s National Assembly started



formal proceedings on a no-confidence motion against (now former) Prime Minister Imran Khan. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar resigned and the government offered the top provincial position to its ally, the PML-Q.

The PML-Q's decision to accept the offer for the top provincial office – a pound of flesh it had been wanting since the opposition launched its attempts against the prime minister – brought the party back into limelight after weeks of uncertain quiet. But even that did not help PTI's case, and PM Imran Khan was ousted regardless.

The rising polarisation is also because the Imran Khan administration failed to stabilise democratic institutions and tackle significant governance issues in the provinces. It even restricted PTI's party members, leading to disunity within the party. PM Imran Khan paid little attention to Parliament. His government relied on ordinances instead of legislation. This further undermined democracy in the country.

The trouble with discussing political opposites is that it's impossible to avoid

making them into absolutes, all the more so when we are dealing with constantly changing movements and definitions. The decisions of political parties have a significant influence on a nation and its destiny. Therefore, these decisions and their polarising effect cannot be avoided.

Right now for instance, there are those celebrating IK's ouster because it is constitutionally correct, and then there are those citing all the previous examples of the constitution being manipulated. Clearly, there will be no let-up in occurrences of nasty, insulting, and at times violent demonstrations of hate against political opponents in the near future.

The situation will not mend until both sides agree to define red lines that neither side crosses. Unfortunately, such a calm, rational and mature ending is quite improbable since politics in Pakistan has, over the past 5-odd years, boiled down to which side can stoop lowest. Targeting families of opponent was nothing but a logical corollary of this situation.

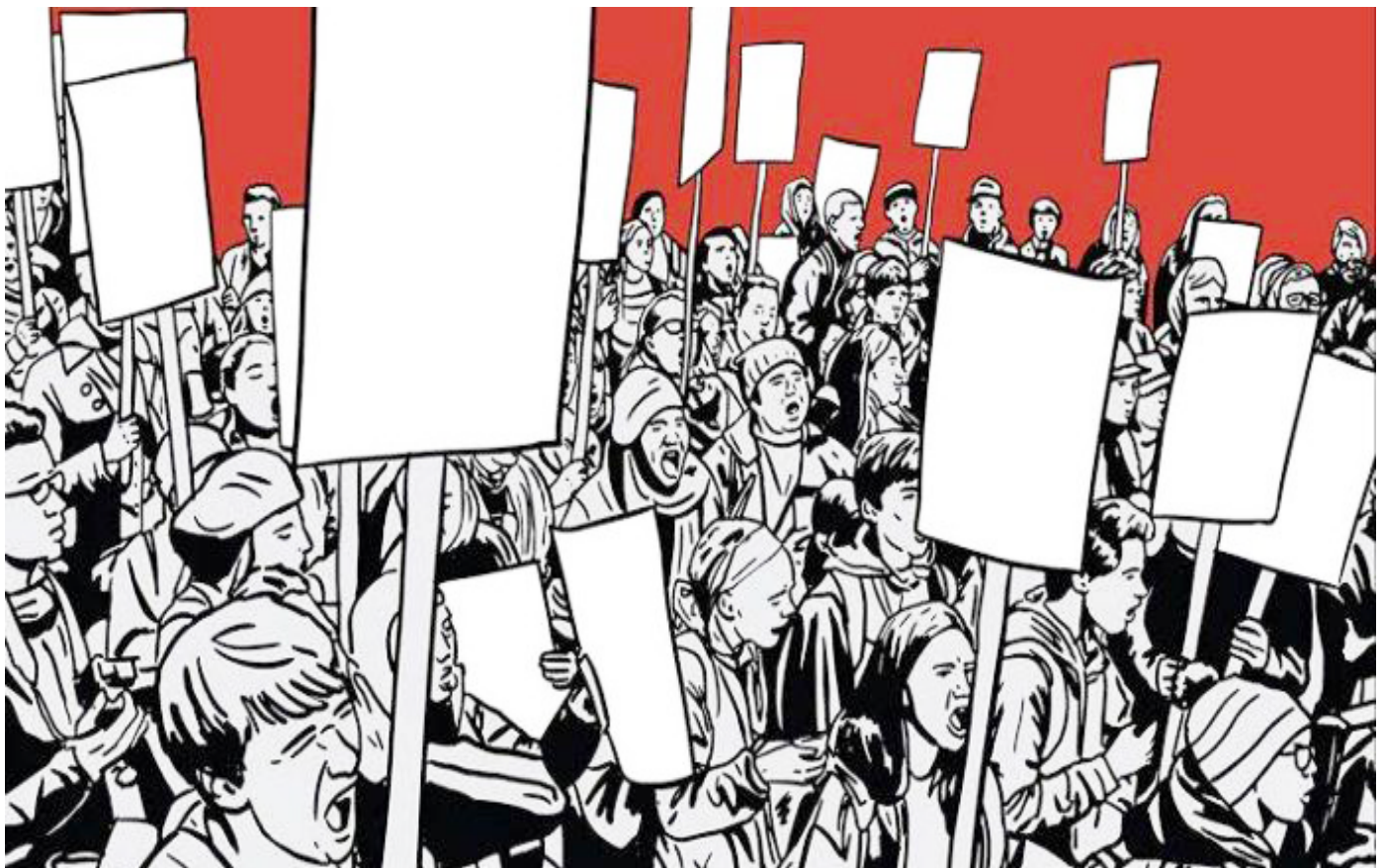
The terrible truth is that whichever side blinks first, calling off its protests and social

media trolls, will be the loser. This is the new reality of conversation in a country where politeness and fundamental decency have no place.

At this moment, ex-PM Imran Khan is trying to pressurise the government by flexing his street muscle, whereas PML-N is publicly criticising Khan and his governance practices. It is a hotpot that can boil over unless the parties turn away from politics of polarisation.

The constitution must be the guiding principle in setting the rules of the game to address the rising political polarisation and improve democratic governance in Pakistan. But after Khan's ouster, PTI supporters seem intent on undermining the credibility of the constitution and decisions made under its mandate previously.

Surely, the constitution is just a piece of paper, but it is the piece of paper that guides how the country's administration works. Undermining the constitution, therefore, is tantamount to attacking democracy in Pakistan.





A Brief History of US-Led Regime Change Ops

100 years of US meddling in other countries' affairs, from Iran to Nicaragua to Hawaii to Cuba



By Shahmir Niazi

Regime change is the talk of the town these days, but most Pakistanis are acting as if regime change as a foreign policy tactic is something rare or unheard of. The reality is quite the opposite.

In an interview telecast on Democracy Now, Stephen Kinzer, former New York Times foreign correspondent looked at Washington's record of meddling in elections across the globe.

Kinzer's take is important because he is the author of a number of books, including *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*; *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup*; and *the Roots of Middle East Terror*.

The hosts Amy Goodman and Laura Ingraham estimated that "by one count, the United States has interfered in more than 80 foreign elections between 1946 and 2000." It's even more surprising to note that the figure doesn't count US-backed coups and invasions.

Former CIA Director James Woolsey recently joked about the US record of meddling overseas, during an interview with Laura Ingraham on Fox News where

he confessed that the US meddles in other countries' elections, "but for the good of the system, in order to avoid the communists from taking over."

Asked if the US still practices this policy of interfering in other people's elections, he chuckled and said, "Only for a good cause." The host Juan González offered a long list of countries where the US has interfered.

"In 1893, the US helped overthrow the kingdom of Hawaii. Five years later, in 1898, the US invaded and occupied Cuba and Puerto Rico. A year later, it was the Philippines. Early 20th century interventions included Nicaragua, Haiti, [and] the Dominican Republic, all in the 1910s."

Similarly, the co-host Amy offered another list of US instigated regime changes. "In 1953, the US helped overthrow the Iranian government. A year later, in 1954, US-backed coup in Guatemala, overthrowing the democratically elected leader of Guatemala, Jacobo Árbenz. Then, in the '60s, the list grew to include, once again, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia and the Congo."

Kinzer explained how the US overthrew the democratically elected government of Iran's Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. He said that after a very difficult struggle, democracy emerged in Iran. It was the only period of real democracy that we've seen in Iran over the last hundred years.

But a problem arose, says Stephen, when the Iranians chose the wrong leader. "They did something that the United States never likes: Choosing a leader who wanted to put the interests of his own country ahead of the interests of the United States."

While commenting on the rationale behind the coup, he said: "Mosaddegh's first move was to nationalize Iranian oil which the US thought would be a terrible example for the rest of the world. It didn't want to start this process going in other countries. So, in order to set an example, the United States decided we would work with the British to overthrow the elected democratic government of Iran."

The operation was assigned to a senior CIA officer, who worked in the basement of the American Embassy in Iran organizing the coup. The coup finally succeeded in the



summer of 1953. Mosaddegh was overthrown. And, more important, the democratic system in Iran was destroyed forever.

The host highlighted the US's policy of using suitcases full of money to kick-start the regime change operation there. Kermit Roosevelt, the man who handled the suitcases responded in the affirmative when asked whether he had a million dollars in cash to run the coup.

At this point, the host turned to another regime change, this time in Nicaragua where José Santos Zelaya emerged as the most formidable leader the country ever had. He was a modernizer, reformer and progressive.

However, he had one characteristic that annoyed the US: He wanted Nicaragua to have an independent foreign policy and diversify its international relations. Eventually in 1909, the US overthrew him, installing a puppet leader. "That was the beginning of a century of American interference in Nicaragua," Kinzer said.

Then the host turned to the American invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 by Lyndon Johnson where the cause is perceived to be the foolish mistake of the Dominican people of electing a leader who was unpalatable to the United States.

"Juan Bosch didn't want the Dominican Republic to be under the thumb of the United States. He wanted it to be an independent country."

"In Honduras in 2009 where a president who was very much in this line, trying to

pull Honduras away from subservience to the United States, was overthrown in a coup by the military, dragged out of his house in the middle of the night in his pajamas, sent into exile," said Stephen Kinzer.

"This was a fascinating period", Kinzer said when asked to give a brief overview of regime change operations from the overthrow of Hawaii, the Spanish-American War, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines – all before the turn of the 20th century.

"And it really was the moment when the United States went from being what you could call a continental empire – that is, inside North America – to being an overseas empire, a crucial moment of decision for the United States."

While detailing how the Hawaiian regime change unfolded, Kinzer said, "In 1893, at the behest of sugar growers in Hawaii, the United States promoted the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy.

"The idea was that Hawaii would then immediately become part of the United States. That didn't happen, because there was a change of presidency in Washington, and the new president, Grover Cleveland, hated that intervention and didn't want to take Hawaii.

"Then, five years later, in 1898, when Grover Cleveland was gone, the Spanish-American War broke out. The United States became interested in the Pacific, because we destroyed the Spanish fleet in the Philippines. Then we decided

we should take the Philippines for ourselves".

Kinzer says the US practices an imperialistic policy of conducting business that is highly disadvantageous to the interests of foreign markets. While exploring the Chinese market, he recalled how the American press was full of stories about how many nails it could sell in China, if it could get the Chinese to use nails; how much cotton it could sell there; how much beef it could sell there, if it could get the Chinese to eat beef.

"So, the US decided it needed stepping stones to China. And that was the moment when it decided to take Hawaii as it had taken the Philippines," he said. It happened at the same time the United States was consolidating its rule over Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Stephen Kinzer said, "In Cuba, the US staged a presidential election, after having consolidated its power. It found a candidate that it liked, in upstate New York who spoke good English, which is always essential for the people that the US promotes.

"We brought him back to Cuba. As soon as it became clear that the campaign was rigged, the other candidate dropped out. He became president of Cuba".

Stephen Kinzer describes the entire practice of regime change as an idea that has reverberated through out the US history, i.e., have your elections, but you must elect someone we like; otherwise, we're going to go to Plan B.



Washington's Neglected Child



By Malik Zahoor Ahmad

There is a saying that when America sneezes the rest of the world catches cold. The origin of the quote is attributed to famous Austrian foreign minister Klemens Von Metternich who once said when France sneezes Europe gets cold. Things have changed as America assumed world's military and economic leadership. But history has mysterious ways of turning and twisting ground realities. Now wheezing in Shanghai can muddy waters on the Wall Street.

While the perception about American influence may have a tinge of exaggeration, the global financial integration has an obvious contagion potential. The military prowess and technological edge, on the other hand, can resultantly augment its "soft power" which conveniently bends the will of God's lesser children. In this context its worthwhile to review where Pakistan stands on the American chessboard.

Admittedly Islamabad is no Shanghai but it appears that being out of sight no longer means out of mind in Washington.

A recent report, developed by one with

highly influential credentials, could not stay away from the freakish fire and fury that pummeled Imran Khan has asked the US Government not to leave its old non-NATO ally to the devices of those, who according to the author, are chiefly responsible for Pakistan's pathetic state of affairs.

The report, though termed "Secret but Non-Classified", sounds supportive of Imran Khan and is highly critical of the media and the Opposition coalition who have unleashed a blizzard of snake-oil sellers. It also criticizes Imran's ability to pick his team and an army of ministers who miserably failed to stave off the fireworks that hit the airwaves every evening.

The report emphasizes that Pakistanis are kind-hearted, well meaning people. They don't hate America but are annoyed because of "our total tilt towards India". They in our view deserve at least a "small piece of the pie".

Washington has been asked in the report to extend a helping hand towards Pakistan and save it from sinking deeper into the quagmire it created itself.

The report though calls Imran Khan a political novice currently wading through gruelingly uncharted waters of Pakistani politics. He made a breakthrough to stardom when he won a world cup in cricket. A man of simplistic approach towards diplomatic intricacies, Khan can easily be "drawn into conspiratorial waters; but then, most of the Pakistanis, even in high places, accept conspiracy theories as a favorite pastime."

Importantly, the report considers Imran Khan more acceptable if he sheds his "camouflage of presenting himself as an Islamic Pope" when compared to the coalition of parties led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

"Shutting our eyes and abandoning Pakistan to the devices of clerics would tantamount to Talibanizing a generally moderate country but armed with nuclear weapons," it says.

Touching slightly on his history the report mentions his "playboyish escapades" but insists that people in general believe that he is a man of "unscathed financial integrity".

Shifting gears to the ongoing political theatrics the analysis divides Pakistanis in different categories such as diehard supporters of PTI, PML-N and Islamists; but a much larger group still supports PTI. They are younger and vibrant. Another group of educated people hates the Nawaz-Zardari-Maulana troika but is also disappointed with Imran Khan but this group will still gravitate towards Khan in general elections having no other better option.

Those who dislike Khan are also justified according to the comments. They see him getting intoxicated by the political power he reportedly “captured with the support of the ‘Deep State’”. People see growing arrogance in his non-challant attitude when they compare him with Nawaz Sharif’s mild demeanor, mannerism, and humility. Those who voted for him are seen venting exasperation with un-ending name calling finger-pointing and a marathon of grilling the previous government instead of showing his own performance.

The most scathing criticism in the report is reserved for the Pakistani media. The analysts’ views and news coverage is one-sided and the media is rumoured to be on the payrolls of Opposition parties, business tycoons who bankroll both sides of the political spectrum --- a Pakistani version of the Oligarchs. It initially pushed and pulled Imran Khan into the glare of spotlight on bidding of these oligarchs. The

same media is stepping over each other’s toes to oust Khan now. The airwaves have a run of every talk show encouraging shouting matches and heated exchanges in a rave for more ratings. Khan stopped the decades-old practice of dishing out money from secret funds to placate the media. This obviously created animosity.

The picture painted by the media about acute poverty and price hike is not as bad as portrayed. Economy is gradually picking up. The rural economy is robust. Urban areas have more jobs and their financial boats are gradually lifting as well. Khan’s overall performance in governance disappointed many. Nevertheless, it gave fillip to PML-N to resurrect.

His nemeses, on the other hand, kept their eyes on the ball. They built up a meticulously smart media narrative that was supported by huge cash flows. Khan’s own authoritarian behavior splashed water over the development projects which deserved accolades. His media handlers undercut his positive image. The shrewd strategy of the Opposition, particularly the Nawaz Group, worked and sprinkled its criticism all over. It hammered home a very simple message:

You are all talk and no action. What have you done all these years?

The report, however, seeks leniency and stresses to reset reasonably good relationship with Pakistan. It hopes that he swims through the current “mess and mysteries”

besetting Pakistan’s democracy. He needs to stand tall and gyrating back and forth on stated priorities will hurt him further. He must also learn to be prepared to face defeat, accept to sit on the Opposition benches and cross the bridge between his behavior and the ground realities of political dispensation.

The report particularly notes that because of Khan’s independent streaks the country’s Deep State’s grip over the affairs of the State has suffered a few notches, which, by the way, augurs well for democracy. A cabal of inept elements has governed in most parts of Pakistan’s history.

Khan also surrounded himself by both corrupt and an inefficient cabal. Elections will simply peel away one group to be replaced by another group carrying heavier baggage unless structural electoral reforms are introduced along with strengthening civilian institutions.

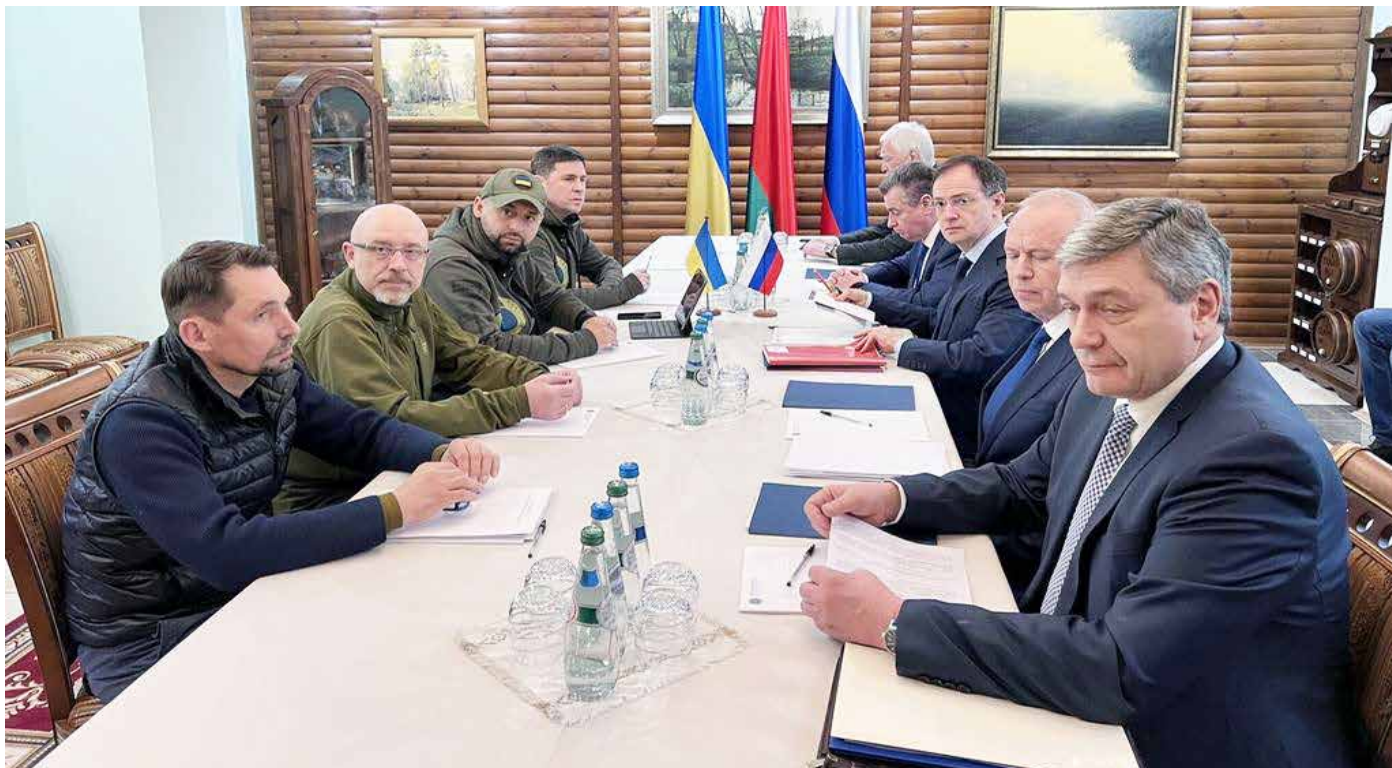
If Imran Khan loses, it should not be construed as a knock-out punch. He can conveniently stage a comeback as that multi-faceted coalition of parties can hardly run a country covered by a variety of shades, colors and agendas.

Even his enemies admit that despite his hugely lackluster performance, exasperating repertoire there is certain mystique surrounding his personality that attracts people. He simply needs to build bridges, not walls.



Can Talks Beat Bombs to Peace in Ukraine?

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



By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

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

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

On the 22 March 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said everything would be on the table in negotiations with Vladimir Putin's administration, but that any compact with Moscow would be subject to a subsequent referendum in Kiev.

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

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

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

The negotiating teams headed by Russian presidential adviser Vladimir Medinsky and Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov have witnessed lingering sticking

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

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

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

As per international law, neutrality entails that a sovereign state is obliged to not interfere in military conflicts of third states.

Russia has claimed that Ukraine must remain neutral and not partake in NATO force buildups along the border with Russia, a request rejected outright by the Biden administration.

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

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

There is evidence that the Azov Brigade, part of the National Guard of Ukraine, is guilty of war crimes against the Russian speaking population of Ukraine. Yet justifying an all-out attack against Ukraine over this is bizarre.

From 2014 onwards, volunteers fighting back against Russian rebels have extreme far right, anti-Semitic and white supremacist views. Yet Zelensky claims that Russia has been promoting racist ideologies

through 'Pan-Russian' objectives as part of the military operation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The Fallout of Russia-Ukraine War

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

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

In my last article I took stock of the aims and goals of the West as it was not clear what the West wanted to achieve from this war. A question I wrote was, “The question is what the West wants to achieve from this war.”

The answer to that question came last week. After meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine US Defence Secretary Mr Lloyd Austin told reporters in Poland that the US wanted to see “Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine”. He believes that Ukraine can still win the war with “the right equipment” and the “right support”.

This is a very big strategic aim to achieve. How long will it take to achieve this goal and at what cost? Who will pay the cost and bear the brunt of war? All this is likely to result in a protracted bloody war with unknown consequences.

The refusal of NATO and the US to participate in the war means that it is the Ukrainians who would be fighting to achieve this great strategic goal and will bear the consequences of the war. It is likely to be a long and bloody war on the Ukrainian soil with no end in sight. The loss of lives and infrastructure will be colossal. How much?

To achieve the stated goals, the US and its allies will provide all that is necessary to damage Russian army. Faced with increased resistance and slow progress, the Russians can up the ante and use even more lethal weapons and force to get the results.

To be sure, the Russians have their own strategic goals. They went to war to secure them and they will use all that it takes to secure their strategic goals.

The two superpowers are testing each other to achieve their strategic goals in a war fought in the fields and streets of a third country. Again, the question is how long will it take for each superpower to achieve its goals? And at what cost?

If the Ukraine keeps on putting up a kind of fight and resistance they have demonstrated



so far, the Russians can suffer slow bleeding and weakening of its power. However, what will happen if Russians, sensing even a remote chance of defeat through conventional war, resort to the use of strategic weapons?

The kind of image depicted in Western press of Vladimir Putin lends this scenario some credence. Who will stop Russia from using such a destructive power? Will the US and NATO jump in the war? Or is everyone hoping that, somehow, better sense will prevail in Moscow not to use such force? So far it seems better sense has gone on leave for all parties concerned.

The countries that are and would be affected directly or indirectly by the war include almost all European countries in addition to the warring nations of Russia and Ukraine. The end of the war could present a doomsday scenario for Europe.

There could be another scenario in which Russia is able to achieve its goal of dismembering eastern and southern parts of Ukraine after a long and bloody war destroying rest of the country using its firepower. What will Ukraine do or gain?

This war is bad for Ukraine all round. It has become a scene of human tragedy wherein human life and dignity have lost sanctity.

The chances are that the situation will continue to worsen in the light of stated strategic goals of two superpowers. In any scenario the brunt of the war will be borne by Ukrainians followed by Russia and then rest of the European countries.

Already this conflict is the worst since World War II in terms of scale of destruction and loss of lives. More than five million people have been displaced and pushed into neighbouring countries so far. The killing fields and streets of Ukraine are red with human blood. Human tragedy after tragedy is coming to fore having no effect on collective human conscious.

No one is working to close this tragic chapter in human history. All are counting the strategic gains they can achieve by killing or letting people killed. The world has seen it all happened before in recent history. It is still going on in various part of the world but unnoticed for obvious reasons. At least Ukraine is getting attention, but the attention here is proving more lethal.

The strangest thing is that not even Ukraine is suing for peace. Instead, they are asking for more weapons. It is mind-boggling.

Has our world gone mad?

(To be continued)

Uptick in Violence in Afghanistan as Taliban Struggle with Security

Pak-Afghan ties at the lowest ebb following alleged cross-border airstrikes and rocket attacks



By Haq Nawaz Khan

The relative calm in Afghanistan is giving way to a fresh spate of violence, while there is no end in sight for the economic hardship suffered by the common folk on account of a ruined economy crippled by international sanctions.

Multiple explosions rocked Kabul the other week when a high school was targeted. Reports say six people were killed and dozens others injured in the triple bombings in Kabul. Families of the victims and people of Afghanistan have strongly reacted to the bombings.

No militant group claimed responsibility of the attack on the Abdur Rahim Shaheed High School in the west of Kabul, known as Hazrgai area. The only militant group that has been challenging the writ of the Taliban in Afghanistan is said to be Daesh or the Islamic State in Khorasan.

The bombings were condemned at international level, asking the Taliban to ensure security of the schools in Afghanistan. According to the Afghan media, the Taliban say they are committed to bringing perpetrators of the attacks to justice.

Inamullah Samangani, deputy spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said that the Islamic Emirate was committed to punishing the perpetrators and preventing the repeat of such attacks in the future.

Pakistan has condemned the attack, as have the UN secretary general, the US department of State, EU, OIC and other international organizations and countries. The international community expressed condolences to the families of the victims and asked the Taliban to increase security of the civilians and educational institutions.

Unfortunately, educational institutions have been targeted with such attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province in the last two decades.

In other news, the Taliban have not allowed the girls from sixth grade and above to attend schools. The girls' schools have remained closed since the Taliban rose to power. It was announced to reopen schools for girls of all grades in March, but the decision was reversed without giving a new deadline.

The Afghan Taliban have pledged the international community to ensure security to the people of Afghanistan, who have suffered badly in the last 4 decades.

The international community has been closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan. There are serious concerns at the regional and international levels that some militant outfits have been using the Afghan soil against other countries, which the Taliban have been denying.

Pakistan has been asking Kabul to stop alleged infiltrations along the Afghan border. Pakistani outlawed militant organization – Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan – is said to be operating from the Afghan side of the border from the eastern provinces of Kunar and Khost.

Pakistan was expecting to control the militant attacks on the security forces when the Afghan Taliban took over Kabul in mid-August last year. However, there has been an increase in the attacks in the last 8 month. The Afghan Taliban have initiated peace talks between the Pakistani government and the banned TTP, but that seems unsuccessful.

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'Leaving Imprints of my Soul on Once Empty Canvas'

Artist, author, poet, and television host Shabnam Riaz, on her art journey



By Shabnam Riaz

Ever since the first caveman drawings were found on Stone Age walls, art has imprinted itself in hearts and minds. It speaks a language that is unique and its echo lasts lifetimes.

As is the case with many of us, my fascination with art started as a child who is unaffected by the perception of others. That's why children are such great artists. They enjoy the abandon and freedom of self-expression without devoting a thought to what others will say. Their lopsided proportions, colouring outside the lines and disregard for 'should be', lead them to a delightful journey of self-discovery.

As adults, we tend to lose our inner artist by letting reality get in the way. Without a healthy dose of imagination and idiosyncrasies how can we capture the unadulterated soul of expression?

Even though I had never painted other than the art activities in our school years, the idolisation of artists and their work remained an essential part of me. As I spent more than two decades working as a full time News Anchor and TV Host I didn't really get the time to connect with the artist inside and maybe she had been screaming all along for me to hear her voice.

A chance meeting with a guest on one of my shows, Shireen Gheba, who was a talented artist (and is now a very dear friend) led the way to my journey. While visiting her studio I used to lose myself in her beautiful art pieces and she offered to give me lessons, which I took for a short period of time.

I was blessed with a teacher who gave me the confidence to believe in myself and the rest they say is history. My second painting was shared on her Instagram account and an overseas buyer was interested. I remember Shireen's excitement matched mine as we couldn't believe I was making a customer so quickly.

Anyway the deal was finalised and needless to say it proved to keep up my motivation. After that I started training on my own by watching various videos, trying out different techniques (more failures than successes!) and basically never giving up on myself.

The journey is as emotional as it is physical. Every painting takes a piece out of the artist, almost like little children adding to a family and the joy of someone buying your work is an unmatched feeling altogether.

One of biggest milestones was when I

recently participated in a few exhibitions and the first was by a wonderful organisation called 'Let's Grow Together' which focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs.

The feedback was amazing. I sold heaps of paintings and couldn't believe how people had responded. The most joyous part for me was seeing families and people walk past my stall and then immediately stop as they grew transfixed by a particular painting. The expressions on their transfixed faces were priceless and I loved being part of that.

My journey is ongoing. I hope to grow further and keep sharing my art with the world. Art is therapeutic and as I paint, I know I am leaving imprints of my soul on once empty canvas.

The colours, shapes, stories that flow from a brush or knife are sometimes subdued, sometimes violent. They all voice something even though they don't say a word.

I would recommend to everyone to reconnect with their soul with the world of art. You will never know what you will find.



In mid-April, Pakistani Taliban claimed to carry out an attack on Pakistani security forces in the North Waziristan district near the border where seven soldiers were killed and many others wounded. Security forces claimed killing of the four attackers in the armed clash. Security officials blamed that the attackers had crossed into Pakistan from the Afghan side of the border.

Pakistan Air Force fighter jets have allegedly carried airstrikes in the Khost province of Afghanistan, where dozens of people were killed and wounded. Afghan Taliban alleged that civilians were killed in the aerial bombings. Pakistan has neither confirmed nor denied the strikes.

On the same day, some rockets were reportedly fired from the Pakistani side targeting some hideouts of the TTP in Afghanistan eastern province of Kunar.

The cross-border operations have enraged the Afghans and the Taliban senior officials have strongly reacted to the bombings. Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan was summoned by the Afghan ministry of foreign affairs, which is the first such protest by the Taliban against Pakistan at the highest level.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a key spokesman of the Afghan Taliban and acting deputy information minister, has condemned the attack, calling it a violation of Afghan sovereignty. "Afghans should not be

tested," said a strongly worded message released to the media by Mujahid.

Hundreds of Afghans have come out to the streets to protest against the bombings. It was alleged that civilian Pakistani refugees were targeted. Reports say nearly 40 people were killed in the airstrikes in Espera district of Khost and five others killed in Kunar.

It was the first diplomatic tiff between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. It is generally believed that Pakistan has been enjoying friendly relations with the Taliban. But the latest incidents reflect a difficult time ahead.

The Afghan Taliban have been criticized by the people for their failure to stop cross-border operations from Pakistan. The misunderstandings between the two neighborly countries may cause serious security implications for the region. But the Taliban also announced to resolve the issue through political and diplomatic means.

This mistrust may also add to the worries of the newly formed government in Pakistan. Only time will tell how the new Islamabad administration takes up the issue with the Taliban to normalise relations.

The bitterness between the two sides may affect peace negotiations between the Pakistani government and the TTP. The Pakistani Taliban have been pressing to

take the talks forward through the Afghan Taliban as the mediator and guarantor. Pakistani authorities have been trying to involve the local tribal elders in the talks, but the TTP is sticking to its stance.

The cross-border attacks are a demonstration of Islamabad's frustration as militant attacks from the Afghan side of the border have been continuing. The TTP has been targeting Pakistan army, police, paramilitary forces, and intelligence officials in the north-western districts on an almost daily basis. The statistics, shared by the TTP and private organizations, revealed that more than 40 attacks a month have been carried out.

Besides TTP attacks, ISK has also been posing a serious threat to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Taliban are unlikely to overcome this challenge alone without regional and international support. The International community has been offering support to the Taliban led Afghanistan to fight ISK, but Taliban officials have been turning down the offers saying they can do it on their own.

A deadly terrorist attack was carried out by ISK recently in Peshawar that was also seen as having traces to Afghanistan. The Taliban will have to allow the regional support, if not the international, to wipe out the menace of terrorism, because they cannot deal with it alone.



Economy in the Hands of the Managers of the Last Resort

The IMF nod allows Pakistan access to foreign multilateral and commercial financing



By Mehtab Haider

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to back the broad roadmap for economic stabilisation and reform drawn up for Pakistan by the country's new government headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, according to reports coming out of Washington DC.

Almost immediately after they were sworn into office, Sharif's economic wizards led by Minister for Finance Miftah Ismail dashed to Washington DC to negotiate with IMF, the lender of the last resort, the revival of the stalled USD 6 billion EFF program without any further delay.

They have since held talks with IMF staff, and found common ground for continuation of the program – but not before fielding IMF protestations about the previous government's deviations from the agreed course of action, resulting in yawning budget and current account deficits.

Pakistan requested a nine-month extension in the program period of the

Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and a USD-2-billion increase in the size of the program, jacking it up from USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion.

The IMF has agreed to hold the technical level at the initial stage for exchanging data and then kick-start parleys in mid-May for completion of the pending 7th review and pave the way for the release of the next tranche worth USD 960 million.

The IMF's review mission will undertake number crunching on the internal and external front of the economy and then recommend Islamabad to take corrective measures to put the economy back on the right track.

The two sides agreed that Pakistan needed to take a staggered approach to withdrawing the unfunded and untar-geted fuel subsidy that has broken Pakistan's budget for decades. This along with rationalisation of electricity tariff for cost recovery to unencumber the exchequer will now be prior actions for the completion of 7th review.

As well, the Fund staff will determine the magnitude of revenue bled because of the deviations from the agreed course of action under the watch of the previous government – and recommend measures to recoup the loss in the next budget.

These twin deficits – budget deficit and current account deficit – have haunted Pakistan's economy for decades now, emerging whenever the economy takes a growth trajectory.

This clearly means there are structural bottlenecks because of which the country cannot generate the investment and savings required to fuel economic growth. This results in increased reliance on dollar inflows to fuel growth.

This boom and bust cycle continue unabated in last 75 years and is likely to persist unless the structural issues are addressed. Experts say Pakistan cannot achieve sustained long-term growth without increasing investment and savings rate.

Finally, the newly incumbent regime managed to convince the IMF in principle to get extension in tenure of existing Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The size of the EFF would be jacked up to USD 8 billion by adding USD 2 billion into existing USD 6 billion facility.

However, exact modalities of the revived program will be finalized during the upcoming number crunching exercise undertaken through upcoming technical and review level talks between the two sides.

Nathan Porter, IMF's Mission Chief for Pakistan stated that prompt action was needed to reverse the "unfunded subsidies" which had slowed discussions for the 7th review.

Based on the constructive discussions with Pakistani authorities in Washington, the IMF expects to field a mission to Pakistan in May to resume discussions over policies for completing the 7th EFF review, by which time the two sides must rework all macroeconomic numbers.

The Fund staff will make its assessment about exact size of widening of twin deficits and then recommend the required steps to

rectify the arising out challenges. Any further action prescribed through fiscal and monetary tightening will then be placed as structural and indicative benchmarks for reviving the EFF program.

The backing of IMF program will open avenues for the government to manage dollar inflows from all other multilateral and bilateral creditors. According to the IMF's assessment, Pakistan's gross external financing requirement stood at USD 30 and USD 34 billion in current and next fiscal year respectively.

Minister for Finance Miftah Ismail hoped that the government would leave his office with a much better growth trajectory and a reduced rate of inflation. Sharif inherited a GDP growth rate forecast of around 4 percent for the current fiscal year and inflation raging at the highest level of 12.7 percent.

The stabilization of economy is an essential pre-requisite to avoiding a balance of payments crisis. The foreign exchange reserves have depleted by over USD 5.5 billion just in last six weeks, forcing Islamabad to seek major injections of dollar inflows of USD 9 to USD 12 billion in shape

of rollover and fresh debt to avoid further depletion of foreign currency reserves.

Without a comprehensive economic program with the IMF or without the IMF program, the economic crisis is going nowhere so there is a need to put in place a set of reforms for five to ten years to pull out of the boom and bust cycle for good.

In the final analysis, our economy is being buffeted by the headwinds of political uncertainty coupled with macroeconomic instability. The only way to steer the economy out of this crisis is to devise and execute short-, medium- and long-term economic reforms in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

This leads us to the development of a common 'charter of economy' as proposed by former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar proposed in 2017: A national political consensus on economic issues and policies that remains in place irrespective of the political party in power.

Another former Finance Minister and eminent economist Dr Hafiz A Pasha says a charter of economy is indispensable, especially in the times of runaway political polarisation.



Cleaning the Augean Stables of Pakistan's Economy

Will a short-term government find the courage to tackle long-term problems?



By Javed Mahmood

About a-year-and-a-half is the most Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's can stay in office, but the problems his government is pitted against are herculean by all accounts, and none as urgent as putting the nation's economy on an even keel. Why will his short-term government then grapple with the longstanding issues not even full-term governments have been able to manage?

This is the question taxing the minds of analysts and observers alike, and the answers they are coming with are far from uniform. In any case, there is no agreement over the diagnosis: Our economy is in deep doldrums and we need to take immediate measures to put it back on the rails.

The latest data of the State Bank of Pakistan indicates the country stacked up a whopping USD 37.18 billion in trade deficit from July 2021 to March 2022. This represents a surge of USD 12.57 billion over the same period last year.

Notably, before facing the no-confidence vote, PM Imran Khan made it sure that if he loses, the new government faces the music of reviving the national economy. For example, the foreign exchange reserves of the central bank declined by more than USD 5 billion in the months of March-April 2022 because of repayment of foreign loans and current account deficit.

Similarly, the energy sector debt too expanded to beyond PKR 1.5 trillion while the PTI government did not bother to line-up LNG imports to keep power plants spinning, leading to today's power outages and closure of hundreds of manufacturing units.

These days, the country is experiencing the worst load-shedding in urban and rural areas even in the month of fasting. The stock market and rupee value are also demonstrating vulnerability in the prevailing economic mess.

Thus, in first few months, the new government would have to manage the economic mess created by the PTI government and at a certain cost because reversing the subsidies would irk the masses in the country.

On 25 April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) statement about the resumption of technical level talks and conduct the seventh review made the Pakistan Stock Exchange bullish and it gained more than 600 points in the morning.

Also, the dollar-rupee exchange rate plummeted below 186 rupees (185.50), from above 187 rupees a day earlier. In other words, the beginning of talks with IMF in a positive manner has started strengthening the capital markets in Pakistan.

In Washington, the IMF officials and economic team of Pakistan have agreed to revive the programme which was stalled

after the subsidy programme announced by then PM Imran Khan.

As the IMF chief of Pakistan Nathan Porter has announced that the Fund's team would visit Pakistan in May to hold technical level talks and conduct seventh review of the economy, stock market analysts and economists are optimistic of disbursement of IMF loan in May 2022.

Finance Minister Miftah Ismail says the IMF has agreed to enhance loan amount to USD 8 billion from the earlier figure of USD 6 billion. The markets have endorsed this change as well.

The new government appears upbeat about the revival of IMF programme. For the masses, however, it may mean more pain in the shape of fresh wave of price hike in the country.

Some analysts say Sharif is likely to pursue a short-term policy to obtain more loans and to just keep the country afloat until the next general election, irrespective of the long-term consequences of new borrowings for the economy.

A few days ago, the IMF announced that the Pakistan government has sought its help to overcome the current account imbalance. This is one of the major problems that Pakistan has been facing for many months. For example, in nine months of the ongoing fiscal year, July 2021 to March 2022, the country has stacked up more than USD 13 billion in current account deficit.

The quantum of the CAD has doubled in the month of March 2022, to USD 1 billion from half a billion dollar in February this year. In nine months of this fiscal year, the total current account deficit amounted to USD 13.42 billion as against only USD 0.5 billion in the corresponding period last fiscal. Containing the current account deficit is therefore a major challenge for the new government.

Trade deficit is another area of concern for policymakers as it is the root cause of rapid erosion in the foreign exchange reserves and value of rupee against major currencies.

Latest data from the State Bank of Pakistan

indicates that the country has sustained trade deficit to the tune of USD 37.18 billion from July 2021 to March 2022. In comparison with the comparative period of the previous fiscal, the trade imbalance has expanded by USD 12.57 billion.

A couple of weeks ago, a Chinese diplomat urged the Pakistan government to reduce imports and boost exports. China's Consul-General in Karachi Li Bijian frankly stated, "You import more and export less, even though my government in collaboration with your government in trying to narrow down the trade deficit. We want to see a balanced trade."

According to State bank's data, almost one-fourth of the total import bill of Pakistan in 2020-21 originated from China, whereas Pakistan's exports to China were less than 8 percent during this period.

Li said that the trade situation was not developing as desired despite the two nations' free trade agreement that allows Pakistan to export more than 300 items to China without tariff.



A consensus on the economy



By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Endorsing the previous government's relief package by turning down the summary of the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) for an increase in prices, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has decided to keep oil prices unchanged till May 1. It was an easy decision for him, as the formal engagement between his government and the IMF for the resumption of the ongoing programme is yet to start.

Political uncertainty is one of the reasons that led to an impasse with the IMF. The unpleasant events in Punjab last week have added to that uncertainty, which seems far from being over and will likely impact talks with the IMF.

No one knows whether the alliance government will complete its remaining tenure till August 2023 or call (or be compelled to call) early elections. Clarity on its remaining term would determine the keenness of Shehbaz Sharif's government on the resumption of the IMF programme. If the government wants to stay in power for the next 15 months, it will aim to keep the IMF's support on its side. However, if it is planning for (or is compelled to call) early

elections, the focus would be on increasing popularity through populist measures, leaving the tough decisions to be taken after the next elections. In any case, whoever forms the government after the next elections should be ready for tough negotiations with international creditors, including the IMF.

In a highly polarized political environment where the polity is divided across all possible fissures, political parties must be careful not to politicize the economy. What goes around comes around. Once in government, the ruling parties end up taking the same measures (on almost every front, but especially on the economic front) that they have been opposing vehemently while sitting on the opposition benches.

Pakistan's three major political parties went to the IMF while in power and availed the last three IMF packages – the PPP (2008-prematurely concluded in 2010), the PML-N (Sep 2013 to Sep 2016), and the PTI (ongoing since 2019).

A glance at the loan requests and corrective measures agreed upon (letter of intent) for

the last three programmes written by PTI finance adviser Hafeez Sheikh and Governor State Bank (GSB) Reza Baqir in June 2019, the PML-N's finance minister Ishaq Dar and GSB Yasin Ansari in 2013, and the PPP's finance adviser Shaukat Tarin and GSB Shamshad Akhtar in 2008 respectively have a lot in common.

Their diagnosis of Pakistan's economic ailment remained almost the same – lack of implementation of much-needed structural reforms, not trying new avenues for domestic resource mobilization, non-resolution of the inefficiencies and losses in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), fiscal operations by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), and the issue of energy circular debt.

The prior actions taken by them to show their seriousness about reforms are also quite similar. The PPP government increased the discount rate by two percent, the electricity tariffs by 18 percent, and agreed to issue only a pre-negotiated volume of treasury bills. The PML-N government gave a plan for phasing out Tariff Differential Subsidies (TDS), purchased \$125 million in the foreign

exchange spot market, undertook fiscal adjustment measures in the 2013 federal budget, and issued 10,000 notices to potential tax evaders.

Likewise, the PTI government's prior actions included quarterly automatic tariff adjustment in the electricity sector and prompt adoption of the fiscal year 2020 gas tariffs; switching to a flexible, market-determined exchange rate; and undertaking fiscal measures in the 2020 federal budget. To get the last tranche released, it withdrew GST exemptions through a mini-budget and gave the SBP autonomy by amending the concerned law.



To address the common root causes of economic challenges, the end goals (structural benchmarks) agreed upon in the three programmes are similar.

To achieve macroeconomic stability, the PPP government had committed to bringing tax reforms and general sales tax harmonization. It agreed to manage inter-corporate circular debt, increase electricity tariffs to eliminate TDS, and end the SBP provision for buying furnace oil. For fiscal discipline, it agreed to move to a single treasury account. And to insulate the public from the inflationary impacts of structural reforms, it had committed to strengthening the social safety nets.

The PPP government could neither fulfill its commitments nor complete the IMF programme – partly due to strong resistance from the PMLN, especially on GST harmonization and hike in electricity tariff, and partly due to the devastating floods of 2010-2011.

The PMLN, despite its opposition to the PPP-led structural reforms, committed to

similar reforms under its IMF programme. It pledged to enhance revenue administration, introduce a rationalization plan for gas prices, give autonomy to the SBP, reduce SOEs losses, sort out the energy circular debt after a technical and financial audit, eliminate exemptions and concessions granted through SROs, chase tax evaders, and initiate revenue-based loadshedding in the remaining electricity distribution companies.

The PML-N had to face strong resistance from the PPP and the PTI for its structural reforms. However, it successfully concluded its IMF programme in

September 2016, albeit with a dozen waivers. The waivers were exemptions it had to seek from the IMF for not fulfilling its commitments. In the run-up to the 2018 general elections, the PML-N government resorted to populist measures and a spending spree. It was clear that the winner of the polls had to go to the IMF once again.

The PTI government wasted its first year avoiding going to the IMF and tried to tackle the current account deficit with the help of friendly countries. However, one-off deposits from friends are not a substitute for the structural reforms necessary to stop economic hemorrhage. The economic woes became worse and the PTI government had to go to the IMF in 2019 with the commitment of not giving further tax amnesties, improving anti-money laundering/counter-terrorism financing laws, providing autonomy to the SBP, coming up with triage for SOEs, and strengthening social safety nets.

The PTI's IMF programme had just started when Covid-19 halted its implementation. It resumed implementation last year but

faced severe criticism from the PML-N and PPP, especially on increasing energy prices, withdrawing GST exemptions, and giving autonomy to the SBP.

With a change of guards on the treasury benches, the PMLN-led and PPP-backed government will be trying to resurrect the 'PTI's IMF programme' – amidst criticism from the PTI. The three major political parties are well aware of Pakistan's economy's chronic issues. Each one of them has tried to address these issues while in power and has opposed the same corrective measures while in opposition.

Any one among the three could lead the government after the next elections and be expected to address Pakistan's economic challenges. It will make their life easier tomorrow if they forged a consensus today on the 'economic way forward'. This can be done by constituting an 'Economic Security Council' in parliament (members from the Senate and National Assembly). This council may comprise an equal number of parliamentarians from major political parties with economic/energy management experience.

For instance, the council may include Shaukat Tarin and Shibli Faraz from the PTI, Saleem Mandviwalla and Naveed Qamar from the PPP, Ayesha Ghuas, and anyone among Musadik Malik, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Khawaja Asif, Khurram Dastgir or Ahsan Iqbal from the PML-N. The minister/adviser for finance could be an ex-officio member.

The council should deliberate upon economic challenges and take collective ownership of the much-needed policy and structural reforms – with or without an IMF programme. It should also forge a consensus on possible relief measures to insulate the people of the country from the ripple effects of such reforms and suggest measures to strengthen the existing social safety nets.

Such a forum or any other triparty forum on the economy in parliament would provide much-needed certainty to the development partners and people of Pakistan amidst the ongoing political uncertainty.

A Billionaire's Importunity

Parsing Elon Musk's hostile Twitter takeover bid



By Alamgeer Abbas

Elton Musk loves to be in the spotlight. It is well known how he has damaged the value of his firm through his Twitter antics. He has used the microblogging platform to make cannabis jokes, market flamethrowers, and challenge Russian President Vladimir Putin to “single combat”.

That would all be harmless and negligible if his actions did not have seismic ramifications for the world economy – and possibly for how the public communicates. That, however, is not the case – as evident from his attempted aggressive takeover bid on Twitter.

There have been questions over whether he possesses the USD 43 billion in liquidity necessary to acquire the company. Even if Mr. Musk is bluffing, he is still using his influence and authority as the world's wealthiest person to coerce a major social media platform into implementing the changes he personally desires and believes are necessary for the “future of civilization.”

That is a significant call. However, is it his decision to make?

Elon's disproportionate influence

This is not a novel query. Since the 2008 financial meltdown, discussions about excessive wealth disparity, corporate greed, and failing policy mechanisms for redistribution have dominated public conversation. However, as billionaires' wealth and influence have expanded in recent years, assessing their social and political power has become increasingly critical.

According to a 2017 estimate by the charity Oxfam, the world's eight wealthiest billionaires, led at the time by Microsoft founder Bill Gates, were worth more than half of all individuals on the planet. Only a few years later, another Oxfam analysis revealed that several of these men nearly doubled their incomes during the pandemic's first two years.

Between March 2020 and the middle of October 2021, the combined wealth of America's billionaires increased by 70 percent. And ProPublica, a non-profit investigative news organization, uncovered tax records indicating that several individuals, like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, paid no

federal income taxes on their wealth in some years.

This is a state of affairs that many find repulsive. The progressive left has developed a moral case against billionaires, with Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez being particularly adamant about taxing the superrich. While Americans' attitudes toward billionaires have deteriorated, a majority still believe millionaires are neither helpful nor bad for the country.

This is probably because the genuine power of American millionaires is disguised, according to three political scientists at Northwestern University. They say that the majority engage in “stealth politics,” or actively labour behind the scenes to influence government policy in their favour.

However, Mr. Musk's attempted takeover this week is far from covert. It's a bold endeavour to acquire and reimagine the modern public square in his image — a substantial break from the typical standards of prudence and obfuscation in influence-peddling observed by billionaires.

The capitalist in the conventional sense

Rather than arguing over Musk's acquisition of Twitter, we should use the uproar over his USD 43 billion cash offer to examine how someone with that kind of wealth might fail to pay their fair part of taxes.

That has to change. We need a required tax on the ultra-rich that prevents them from evading taxes, in the same manner, the rest of us do. Otherwise, we are on the verge of devolving into an oligarchy. This is a critical problem, especially as Americans prepare to file their tax returns by the 18 April deadline.

While unemployment surged and Americans with fewer resources risked their lives working to put food on the table, Musk continued to amass wealth. Tesla owner's wealth is expected to climb by almost USD 118 billion in 2021. This equates to an increase of more than USD 300 million every day.

However, as documented by ProPublica last year, while Musk's wealth increased by roughly USD 14 billion between 2014 and 2018, he paid little in taxes during that time period.

For instance, he reportedly paid merely USD 65,000 in 2017, and no income taxes in 2018. This means that if you paid one dollar in income taxes in 2018, you paid more than the billionaire. Does that seem reasonable to you?

Additionally, as ProPublica highlighted, the median American household – which earned approximately USD 70,000 per year – paid 14 percent in federal taxes. What was Musk's effective tax rate from 2014 to 2018? According to ProPublica, it's just a hair over 3 percent!

Musk responded to the report's publication by attacking opponents and claiming he will pay billions in taxes in 2021. However, he was forced to pay the tax since he exercised stock options that resulted in billions of dollars in gains last year.

Still, Musk's Tesla earned USD 5.5 billion in net income but would owe no taxes in the United States, according to a CNN report – most likely due to taxation loopholes that allow businesses to claim earnings earned in overseas regions.

To be honest, Musk is not the only member of today's billionaire elite to have benefited financially from the pandemic. Since Covid-19 struck, the combined wealth of US billionaires has increased by more than 70 percent to more than USD 5 trillion, according to a report by Americans for Tax Fairness and the Institute for Policy Studies Program on Inequality, based on Forbes statistics.

And the world's wealthiest ten men – with Musk at the top – saw their combined fortunes more than double, increasing by USD 1.3 billion each day.



What makes this moment unique?

For the better part of the previous century, America's super-wealthy felt obligated to seem generous, recognizing a Gospel of Wealth-inspired needs to disperse their fortunes for the common good.

The concept of the "public good" has always been a subjective one (John D. Rockefeller championed public health, Andrew Carnegie supported the arts, and Bill Gates invested in global development). However, historically, these charitable contributions have been routed through foundations, where they were subject to some level of control and accountability.

Today's billionaires increasingly consider business ownership as a means of advancing the common good. Due to the ubiquity of platform firms, decisions regarding democracy, misinformation, and free speech are being made at the whims of a few with little supervision, extraordinary

access to cash, and, at times, more influence than whole nations.

"For the first time in history, a tiny group of private individuals can meaningfully affect global development on a scale hitherto reserved for governments," said Homi Kharas, a senior scholar at Brookings. And the inconsistencies are evident when one looks around.

Laurence D. Fink, the world's greatest asset manager, has demonstrated his commitment to stakeholder capitalism and social justice while pressuring poor countries to

repay unsustainable debts in the midst of a pandemic.

Jeff Bezos had acquired sufficient cash from his e-commerce empire to revolutionize commercial space flight, as the remaining employees on Earth spend the initial months of the outbreak slaving and dying in Amazon warehouses without adequate protective gear.

Mr. Musk is squandering billions on a personal crusade to change a social media platform on which he enjoys making jokes – but which also serves as a vital route for public information and discussion.

Mr. Musk is now aiming to impact the public good through stakeholder capitalism, rather than charity contributions, in order to promote the "future of civilization" and strengthen "free expression." In a country shaped by those same billionaires, there is nothing in any law that prevents him from acquiring such a powerful corporation – even if it's only to correct his errors.

Blame NAB for Pakistan's Acute Energy Shortage

Why the blackouts when we have installed capacity well in excess of peak demand?



By Azeem Waqas

Summer has scarcely arrived but Pakistan is already flailing in the grip of acute energy shortage leading to intermittent blackouts across the country. This while Pakistan has installed power generation capacity well in excess of peak demand. How did this turn of events come to pass?

Dereliction of duty and incompetence of key government officials charged with the responsibility for running the country's power sector are the usual suspects and have been confirmed by experts and officials. But there may be another, less obvious culprit at play: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Officials and observers told The Truth International (TTI) in background interviews the concerned department could not decide to buy LNG on time due to the fear of NAB inquiries. The upshot is that several LNG-fired power plants have ground to halt, leading to heavy load shedding across the nation.

Officials say electricity shortfall has increased to 7105 megawatts, out of which 3500 megawatts shortfall is due

to fuel shortages and 3505 megawatts shortage is due to technical faults. Twenty-seven power plants are out of service owing to fuel shortages or technical problems.

"The PTI government failed to pay PKR 500 billion in receivables of the power sector including PKR 300 billion of Chinese IPPs. This forced several plants to shut down", an official of Energy ministry told TTI.

"Coal power plants have been asking for payment for the last three months but the PTI government paid no heed to their demands. To restart their operations, these plants require PKR 100 billion immediately".

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Dr Musaddik Malik concurs: "Power Plants are facing liquidity crisis. They do not have funds to import fuel because of the mismanagement of the PTI government".

Pakistan has 35,000 MWs installed power generation capacity but load shedding is rampant in different parts of the country due to the closure of several power plants.

Finance Minister Miftah Ismail is on the record saying the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government failed to buy cheaper LNG on-time and could not conduct maintenance work on power plants in winter due to complete inefficiency, mismanagement, and lack of funds.

Currently in addition to shortfall from hydel generation 5,300 MW capacity is under forced maintenance including 2500 MW nuclear and 1320 MW coal power plants. Another 2,000 MW generation is not available due to fuel shortage.

Former Energy Minister Hammad Azhar has denied Miftah Ismail's claim saying that most of the private sector power plants are shut down while PTI government could not purchase LNG due to PMLN default contracts.

At present RLNG allocation is only 550 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) against power sector demand of 690 mmcf for the month of April 2022, resulting in greater dependence on the more expensive Residual Furnace Fuel Oil (RFO).



According to an official at the Energy Ministry, “Pakistan’s energy challenge has escalated manifold due to unprecedented fuel prices and a high temperature surge in months of March and April. The second week of April observed a 35 percent more demand of electricity compared to the same period last year”.

Officials say another aspect to note is very high fuel prices. Since around 50 percent of Pakistan’s generation is dependent on RLNG and coal so recent price hike of both these commodities has major impact on generation cost.

An official of Power Division says that Pakistan’s energy system is under undue stress, due to years of negligence resulting into closure and operational problems at 18 power plants. Around 2000-3000 MW outage is due to RLNG shortage. At current prices, cost of power generated from RLNG will rise past PKR 30/unit.

According to sources receivables of PSO from the power sector entities have reached at alarming high level of PKR 167,300

million and they are posing serious threat to the supply chain of petroleum products including RLNG (Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas) and furnace oil (FO).

Officials says that LNG and coal are too expensive right now for Pakistan. About 20 percent of the power generation capacity is now offline due to fuel shortages or technical problems.

Both Port Qasim & Sahiwal plants were facing liquidity issues 4-6 months ago. At that time they failed to replenish their fuel inventory. Their liquidity position has since improved but fuel stocks had to be replenished at higher prices.

Meanwhile, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has expressed concerns about power outages across Pakistan due to technical glitches and unavailability of fuel and has ordered concerned power plants to resolve the situation.

As well as being the bane of households, this acute power shortage is hurting the

economy. Electricity deficits have compelled scores of factories, including those in the export-oriented textiles sector, to shut down.

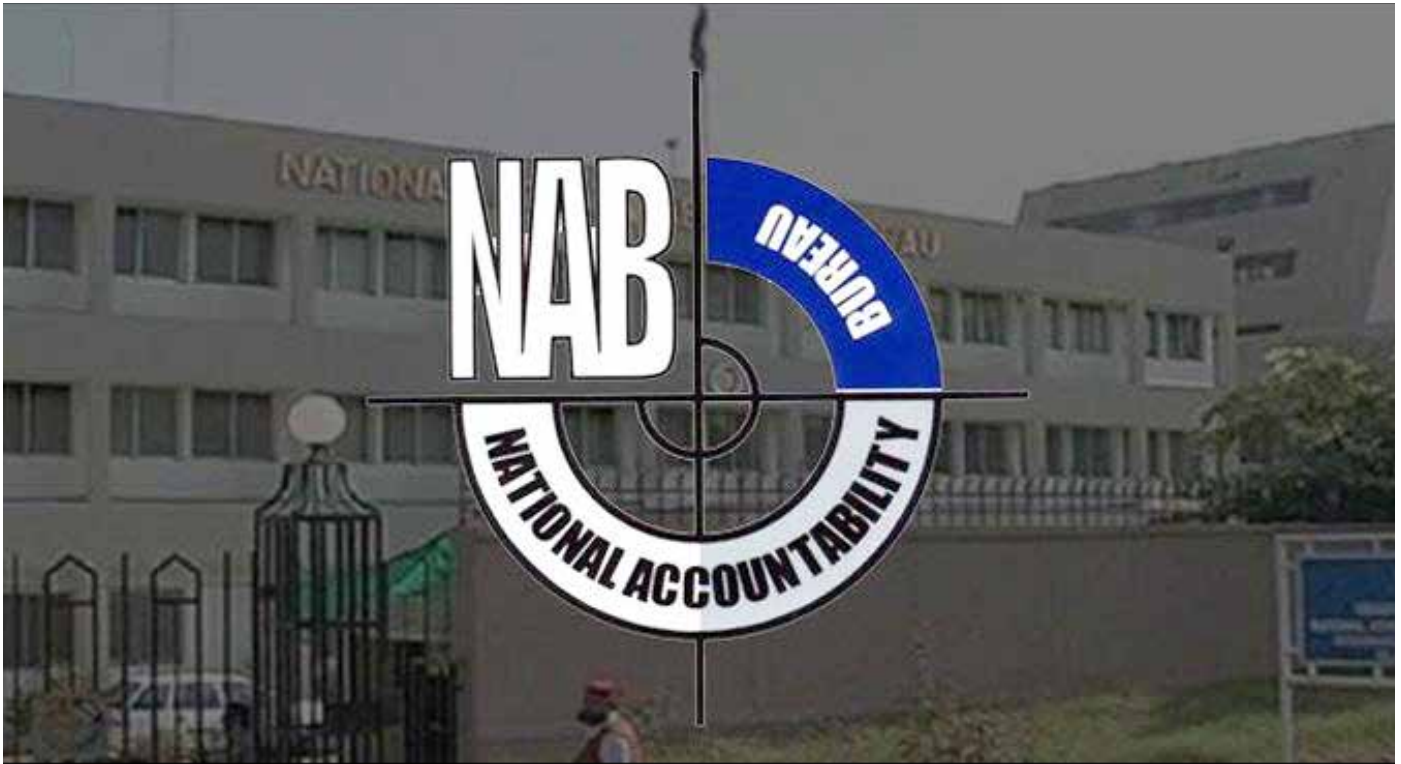
Former member energy Planning Commission, Shahid Sattar disclosed that export industry is facing 50 percent gas load-shedding. The situation is no more different in Karachi where the industries are facing 12-hour bouts of load shedding.

As the country’s average power generation is hovering around 16,000 MW, PMLN new government has booked LNG at higher prices to meet fuel shortages of power plants but there are massive challenges moving forward in summer.

World Bank analysis shows that Pakistan’s power sector suffers from inefficiencies that cost the economy USD 18 billion or 6.5 percent of GDP in fiscal year 2015. This clearly means sectoral reforms could save Pakistan’s economy USD 8.4 billion in business losses and could increase total household incomes by at least USD 4.5 billion a year.

Prime Minister's Sharif's Legislative Agenda

The government plans to reform a bunch of laws before general election



By Asadullah Khan

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's new coalition government in the centre has a maximum life expectancy of about one-and-a-half year, but it has set itself a bunch of legislative challenges that it must negotiate successfully before bowing out to make way for the next general election.

Fresh legislation to amend electoral laws governing eVoting, iVoting, and voting rights for overseas Pakistanis is part of the package, but probably the lion's share of the government's attention will go to defanging the notorious National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

The provisions of electoral laws expected to face the axe were introduced by the ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan's government by unilaterally bulldozing legislation. The now ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition believes the object of this exercise was to enable large-scale rigging.

The NAB, on the other hand, predates Khan government but has since come under criticism from both Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan

Peoples Party (PPP) as well as from the business community and bureaucracy for being a tool of political victimization.

The PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif was convicted by an accountability court. His daughter Maryam Nawaz Sharif and her husband Capt. (R) Safdar Awan were also jailed and disqualified to contest election. PPP co-chair Asif Ali Zardari is facing over two dozen NAB inquiries, investigations, and references.

On the other hand, the NAB is still struggling to justify the conviction of Maryam Nawaz Sharif as apparently, the bureau has failed to give any plausible reason to justify the case against Ms Nawaz.

Several judgements of the superior courts have ruled the purported anti-graft body has been used as a tool of political engineering. The top leadership of both PML-N and PPP have been booked in dozens of NAB cases.

Islamabad High Court (IHC) in the cases like LNG Terminal reference accused NAB

of high handedness. Similar observations were passed in the cases related to Faryal Talpur and Asif Ali Zardari.

The PTI had also considered the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) as bad law, and promulgated successive ordinances to exclude bureaucracy, businessmen, and even the federal cabinet from its ambit. The ruling alliance plans to further shrink the jurisdiction of NAB by excluding the politicians from its ambit.

The PTI government also redefined the offence misuse of authority by making the pecuniary gain as prerequisite for the offence misuse of authority. The then opposition accused PTI of letting its own functionaries off the hook in the guise of reform.

The Supreme Court granting post arrest bail to PML-N's stalwart Khawaja Saad Rafique accused observed that the bureau appeared to be used as a tool of political engineering.

Responding to a demand from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for early elections,

Federal Minister for Railways Khawja Saeed Rafique recently advised the latter to be patient since the elections would be held after making certain reforms.

Against this backdrop, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has also pointed out that NAB has failed to recover looted money from the politicians. The PAC in a recent meeting has pointed out that the bureau has fabricated cases against politicians just to stigmatize them.

In support of this point of view, the committee pointed out that the bureau could not retrieve even a fraction of the amount from the public office holders out of over PKR 800 billion recovered by NAB since its inception in 1999.

As per NAB's statistics, it recovered the said amount mostly from housing societies, fraud investments schemes, corrupt government officials, and businessmen.

Insiders suggest that this is the groundwork for excluding politicians from the ambit of NAB.

Aware of possible legislation and drastic cut in his authority, the chairman NAB retired Justice Javed Iqbal has openly requested the lawmakers for not tying his hands when he appeared in the PAC after the no confidence motion was approved.

The sources said that since the NAB could not make sizable recovery from the politicians and the references were being used for mudslinging and political victim-

ization therefore, the ruling alliance can easily justify the amendment of bringing politicians out from the NAO.

PPP's legal wizard Farooq H Naek has already worked out the possible changes in NAB's law, the insiders said adding that Mr Naek, a former chairman Senate and former law minister, is fighting for Asif Ali Zardari in accountability courts for about two decades and the NAB law is on his fingertips.

He, being chairman of the Senate committee on legal reforms, has already proposed certain changes to neutralize NAB and make it an anti-graft body like Federal Investigation Agency and Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) of the provincial governments.

As far as the issue of electronic voting is concerned, the PPP and PML-N have principally agreed to repeal the decision of PTI to conduct next elections through EVMs.

The issue of EVMs was discussed during the recent meeting of PPP's chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari with PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif.

The introduction of EVM was part of PTI's manifesto and it got the bill on EVMs passed in Nov last year.

During a joint sitting of both the houses of the Parliament, the then PTI government bulldozed amendments to the Elections Act, 2017 allowing the use of electronic

voting machines and granting voting rights to overseas Pakistanis.

PTI still believes that the general elections should be held on EVMs and the party expects to win the election through the EVMs voting. However, the ruling coalition plans to reverse the process initiated for electronic voting.

Another concern of the ruling alliance is to get rid of the no fly list as the majority of the cabinet members and prominent politicians are on the Exit Control List (ECL). This was the reason that the government removed the names of several thousand people from the list and introduced an auto deletion mechanism.

The Interior Minister in a press conference stated that if a person's name has been on the exit list for more than 120 days then their name would be automatically removed from the ECL. "...a total of 4,863 are in the list, and with this intervention, around 3,000 people's names have been removed."

However, the relaxation in the ECL Rules will not benefit those facing charges of terrorism, people considered a threat to national security, those added to ECL by a court, and people involved large-scale public cheating.

Interestingly, the politicians are not facing cases under these categories as they are facing cases for owning assets beyond means and misuse of authority.



Christian Eschatology and Its Impact on World Affairs

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



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Postmillennialism and Amillennialism hold the view that the human civilization will improve and achieve the Golden Age either through the agency of Church (Catholic version) or through godly men (Reformist version). They have an optimistic view of the human civilization, and view the predicted golden age as either present reality or one in developing stage. Setbacks, tragedies or temporary triumph of evil may occur, but in general, things are getting better.

Pre-millennialism sees evil to be alive and well, on the rise and will culminate in Tribulation. Poverty, disease and pollution will always be there. Ultimately, humankind and the Church will fail to redeem the world, and the world that Christ returns to will be a mess.

This prophecy insists that only the Messiah's episodic return will truly and permanently solve the problems of humankind and usher in the golden age of peace, tranquility, and prosperity.

Although the Bill of Rights of American constitution guarantees United States not to be a Christian nation, yet much of the American culture has Judeo-Christian roots. Its policies are affected by both pre- and post-millennial trends of prophecy.

Post-millennial trends in American policies

Policy under this influence seeks beneficial goals for all humankind. Its pacifist impulses see Christ as a humble peacemaker. Christ commissioned the Christians to bring the light of his Gospel to the world. Governmental aid to the

poor draws justification from the words of Jesus Christ, Peter, John and Paul. Ideals of Christianity are reflected in the ideals of USA. American Idealists seek to bring democracy, human rights, economic prosperity, and peace to the world.

Post-millennialists expect to see Gospel in the curing of poverty, crime, pollution and war, resulting in a better world. With these ideals, the young Republic grew in economic, military and political strength, became a superpower and still desires to move to newer heights, a role similar to biblical ideals.

They are optimistic and focused, open to praying and working with other religions and races. They are not dogmatic, rather seek to practice Christianity in action by helping others and demonstrate Christ's love of humanity. They are politically correct.

US presidents under post-millennial influence

Global ideals and extension of helping hand to the world, President Woodrow Wilson jumped into WWI against imperial Germany to save humanity and eradicate evil forces. America became an active founding member of the League of Nations for world peace in 1920.

Jimmy Carter's post-millennial foreign policy raised issues of human rights with Russia and imperial Iran. This led to the acceleration of revolution, and later on he raised human rights issue with revolutionary Iran. He lost his re-election due to lack of his pragmatic policies.

Obama's election was a popular reaction to George W Bush's pre-millennial policies. Foreign policy was at the top of grievances of American public. The Liberal demand was to regain American prestige by re-joining the international community. Obama believed Christianity was about peace, love, and beneficence and not a violent crusade against evil.

Obama believed genuine Christian faith demanded tolerance of others and an active international effort to solve common global problems. He saw things in post-millennial terms, but the urgency of Islamic issues forced him away from becoming a champion of Christianity and he wanted people of all faith to cooperate. His foreign policy can be characterized as Amillennial.

Presidents under Pre-millennial influence

Only George W Bush will be discussed as a representative of this group. He was an evangelist and his fundamentalist eschatology, much of which is based on pre-millennialism, was inherently suspicious of internationalism and international organizations. Pre-millennialists distrust goodness in human race and hence are suspicious of internationalism.

One of the main themes of prophecy concerning Tribulation in the book of Revelation has to do with the Beast, and his rise to head of an international confederation, hence the suspicions of United Nations and other international organizations.

The Bush's administration retreated from Kyoto Protocol for Climate Change and the International Criminal Court. When the UN dragged its feet on Iraq, Bush and his fundamentalist allies ignored international sentiments and went to war on their own.

Pre-millennialists consider the evolution-to-golden-age concept as misguided, futile and even dangerous. Instead, nations must go to war to defend their self-interests, since only Christ will be able to permanently eradicate war. Till that time, one must be on the lookout to destroy evil.

Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive strikes was an outgrowth of pre-millennialism. According to them nation's enemies are to be demonised. Bush did precisely that – and he saw his own nation on a divine mission.

Since pre-millennialism is an unfriendly attitude to the world, American policy under its influence has often been disguised in post-millennial costumes.

Christian eschatological attitudes towards Jews

Up until the 19th century, Jews were persecuted by Christians due to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ by their ancestors, who declared him to be an imposter. But after the 19th century, improvement of relations tilted in favour of Jews, the reasons being:

- a) Financial influence of rich Jewish bankers in Christian Europe
- b) Christians of conscience felt the guilt of centuries' old Jewish persecution that must be compensated. Lord Balfour of Britain

provided that by giving the Jews the right to settle in the Palestine or the Holy Land.

- c) Emergence of dispensational pre-millennialist belief that Jews (and Israel) are still in God's program and thus worthy of support.

The desire to restore Jews wronged in history led to a new class of modern Christians, i.e., Christian Zionist. It is a belief that Christians should support the Jews for a homeland in Palestine due to:

- a) Restoration of respect to the people from whom Christ came.
- b) Due to eschatological implication of dispensational pre-millennialism, they argue that:
 - I. Restoration of Jews to Palestine is a pre-requisite for End Time events.
 - II. Revelation 11 indicates that there should be a functional temple in Jerusalem during Tribulation period.
 - III. During final years leading to the return of Christ, many Jews will convert to Christianity,
 - IV. One of the main tasks of the Christ would be to gather Jews in Diaspora to Palestine, and divide them into believers and non-believers. The believers will share Christ's earthly kingdom and the rejected ones will be sent to hellfire.

Israeli citizens appreciate Christians who favour restoration of Jewish kingdom, but the former's desire for conversion to Christianity enrages them.

Roman Catholic amillennial views hold that age of Church has replaced Jewish role of End Times, whereas, reformed Christian post-millennial view holds that there would be mass conversion of Jews prior to Christ's return. In their view, role of state of Israel is not significant.

During the age of Church, Israel would experience discipline and when Christ returns, they would accept him and Christ will restore the nation to prominence. All End Times views hold that Jews who reject the Christ after his second coming will be lost and condemned to hellfire.

US Attitude towards the state of Israel

American foreign policy towards Israel is in the grip of a dramatic dialectic pulled in one direction by replacement theology (Catholics and Reformists) and in another direction by dispensational pre-millennialism.

Within the pre-millennialists, some insist that Greater Israel is a pre-requisite to Christ's return. Others believe Israel of Tribulation will have far less territory than the great kingdom of Israel. This impacts directly the plans and support for Israeli expansionism.

American politicians must wrestle with these two opposing lines of Christian eschatological interpretations in deriving an Israeli policy that will garner the requisite domestic and international support.

Climate-proofing the treaty



By Ali Tauqeer Sheikh

Climatic change has created many new issues for India-Pakistan water relations, and they go beyond the scope of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). These issues reflect an epochal shift in the economic, social and ecological health of the Indus basin.

Since Pakistan gets almost all of its surface water from its neighbours, it is important to explore policy options and determine implementation mechanisms for the future water security of the federation and all federating units to ensure that the shared water resources are climate-proofed to serve as a source of cooperation.

The IWT is now exposed to several climate change-induced stresses. It poses a wide range of threats to freshwater resources — the country's lifeline — by threatening water quantity, quality and system operations as well as creating new governance complications. The challenge is how to integrate information on future hydro-climatological conditions into the politically complex system of a transboundary water agreement. The treaty presently lacks important tools

for dealing with the changing social, economic and climate conditions, but, mercifully, Article 7 of the treaty has provisions to deal with the issues that have emerged in recent years.

India and Pakistan are not the only states to share transboundary water resources with their neighbours. Nearly half the global population is believed to rely on transboundary waters. Political borders and boundaries are rarely defined by water bodies; innumerable rivers, lakes and groundwater aquifers are shared by two or more nations.

A UN assessment mapped 214 such shared basins. A registry, prepared by Prof Aaron Wolf in 2003, identified over 260 major transboundary river basins shared by not less than 145 countries. In this otherwise conflict-ridden world, well-managed water agreements are the anchors of stability — an estimated 300 agreements govern multi-state transboundary water rights. Some riparian countries have begun to revisit their accords in order to find mutually beneficial responses to climate-induced challenges. Are there any lessons for the IWT signatories?

The Indus Waters Treaty between Pakistan and India is exposed to many climate-induced stresses.

Globally, most water agreements and treaties are extremely diverse in their approaches and solutions. Unlike IWT that has divided rivers between India and Pakistan, almost all water agreements share waters based on fixed or flexible volumetric allocations.

Some accords have also covered groundwater or aquatic resources while others, like the IWT, have not. Many transboundary agreements have provisions for floods, some for droughts, and fewer for both. The Ganges Water Treaty between Bangladesh and India, for example, has provisions to share water during drought periods. The Joint Water Commission supports their bilateral treaty with studies and reports on sharing of waters, irrigation and flood and cyclone control. Likewise, the Permanent Joint Technical Commission on the Nile basin can make recommendations for new water allocations in response to drought. In other words, the need is to gear up for managing the

anticipated scarcity rather than just dividing water that is presently available.

Extreme weather events (EWEs) have become increasingly frequent and fierce, overly exposing countries like Pakistan to high risks and damage. Instead of signing new agreements, the experts have favoured building upon the existing instruments to respond to EWEs, hoping that this would, over time, improve the scope of existing water agreements and make them climate-smart. At the heart of such endeavours is the desire to cope with changing climatic conditions by crafting flexible water-management strategies.

For India and Pakistan, climate-induced hydrological and hydro-climatological variabilities are upsetting historical trends. As climate change alters the monsoon system, past climate conditions are a less reliable predictor of the future. But the IWT is based on the assumption that future water supply and quality will not change. Adapting to climate change will require changes in the institutions and policies that have been put in place since the signing of the treaty. It has become a matter of common knowledge that where change exceeds the institutional capacity to absorb it, the situation is rife for conflict.

Experts recommend many mechanisms

that can be incorporated into existing systems to allow for flexibility in the face of climatic changes. Four main global trends merit a closer review: i) devising response strategies for EWEs — floods, drought, tropical storms or cloudbursts, ii) reviewing water-quality standards to arrest water degradation that has become particularly detrimental for the existing and future infrastructure, iii) exploring changes in monitoring and review procedures to jointly deliberate over shared climate concerns to enhance the effectiveness of the IWT, and iv) strengthening joint management institutions, particularly the India-Pakistan Permanent Indus Commission. The commission barely meets twice a year, and then primarily to exchange Pakistani objections and Indian rebuttals on the proposed infrastructural projects. This zero-sum approach cannot keep the treaty alive.

It is important for both India and Pakistan to view the IWT in its historical context and take a leap forward towards the contemporary context. This was a post-partition gift and an opportunity to make the new country a viable entity for an agrarian economy. There was no time, scientific knowledge or expertise available to discuss the importance of e-flows for sustainable ecosystems, watershed protection, or

groundwater and aquifer management. We know now that cheaper solar and wind energy has diminished the need for India to construct a chain of dams to allow the free flow of the Indus. In fact, if the two countries cooperate, the existing upstream reservoirs in India can serve as water banks for drought periods in Pakistan.

Policymakers in Pakistan are generally apprehensive and dismiss climate change as a dangerous distraction rather than see it as an opportunity that can add to the life and vitality of the IWT. It is in our interest to ensure that the Permanent Indus Commission meets more frequently than the minimum required in the treaty; it should constitute ad hoc expert groups and sub-committees to table climate-smart options. An otherwise robust water treaty should not become hostage to weak institutions and an unimaginative treaty implementation strategy by either side. Both countries need to consider a ministerial-level commission to revitalise the IWT by formulating a refreshed bilateral water agenda. The present period of poor relations is probably the best time for such an initiative.

The writer is an expert on climate change and development.



Is Facebook Morally Responsible?

By Mishaal Ashraf

Facebook, one of the largest social media platforms, has once again caught itself in a scandal. In the past, Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, publicly announced that Facebook Inc. allows more than 3 billion users to voice their views on an equal footing with the social elites. Facebook claims to provide an equal opportunity for all, but that is not the case.

In September 2021, The Wall Street Journal reviewed some of the company's documents and deduced that Facebook has built an internal system that allows the social elite to escape accountability. The initial intent behind the program "XCheck" was to take quality-control measures for actions taken against high-profile accounts including journalists, politicians, and celebrities. The program protects millions of society's elites to get away from the company's regular enforcement process. Facebook has categorized some users as "whitelisted" which renders them immune from the enforcement actions, while others are allowed to post material that violates the company's policies.

The documents revealed that XCheck has protected VIPs' posts that clearly violated Facebook's policies, which would normally lead to penalties for ordinary users. In 2019, Facebook allowed the international football star, Neymar, to post compromised images of a woman who had accused the football star of sexual harassment. In 2019, Facebook's internal review concluded that the company favored some users over others. The confidential review said, "We are not actually doing what we say publicly". The report revealed that the company's actions are a "breach of trust" and added: "Unlike the rest of our community, these people can violate our standards without any consequences."

Later, Facebook spokesperson Andy Stone said, "the system was designed for an important reason: to create an additional step so we can accurately enforce policies on content that could require more understanding."

Turning toward Facebook's actions during the genocide of 24,000 people in Myanmar, the country's court had ordered Facebook to disclose internal documents and private user data. US Magistrate Zia Faruqi said that the tech giant must release private records from its private investigation into its role in the systematic mass executions of the people of Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority.

Faruqi wrote, "Locking away the requested content would be throwing away the opportunity to understand how disinformation begat genocide of the Rohingya".

However, Facebook countered that releasing users' private data would violate federal law under the US Stored Communications Act (SCA). The tech giant further argued that completing the court's order would create "grave human rights concerns of its own".

Facebook's Director of South and Southeast Asia Policy, Rafael Frankel issued a statement, "We support international



efforts to bring accountability for atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingya people. We've made voluntary, lawful disclosures to the UN's Investigative Mechanism for more than a year, and we commit to disclosing information to The Gambia to complement that effort. We also support modernizing the SCA and reforms that allow a broader range of disclosures for significant investigations like this, while avoiding a precedent that risks the privacy and human rights of billions of people."

In 2016, the Myanmar military conducted a series of "clearance operations" against the ethnic group that included various forms of sexual and physical harassment, as well as mass executions. Hate campaigns on Facebook against Rohingya led to "communal violence and mob justice", as claimed by The Republic of the Gambia in international court filings. The organized groups used "multiple fake accounts and news pages to spread hate speech, fake news, and misinformation for political gain".

The tech giant confessed that it was "too slow to respond to the concerns raised" regarding the situation in Rohingya and said it will cooperate with Faruqi to release public information on "hundreds of accounts, groups, and pages removed from its platform."

Facebook called Faruqi's order "sweeping and unprecedented". It further stated, "internet users' private content was unprotected and thereby susceptible to disclosure — at a provider's whim — to private litigants, foreign governments, law enforcement, or anyone else."

Frances Haugen and Sophie Zhang, former Facebook employees and whistleblowers also raised concerns over Facebook's international security issues.

"Facebook's consistent understaffing of the counterespionage, information operations, and counterterrorism teams is a national security issue...I have strong national security concerns about how Facebook operates today", Haugen said in a testimony.

Stimulating Space Awareness among Pakistanis



By: NUST Rocket Team

Nature has been fascinating mankind for quite a long time. What we observe around is all part of nature. It contains an unexplainable substance that we call 'life'; an unimaginable realization that we belong to the most beautiful planet in the entire universe. Nature has always been the driving force that lets people look towards the future and lets them have something to ponder about positively.

Nature is divided into many branches, of which all are equally captivating. Take, for example, Earth, a blue sphere of life that is home to millions and millions of species, is one of many others functioning naturally inside a humongous cocoon that we call the universe. The mechanism that pedals this ultimate system is simply wonderful and beyond human perception. This 'imperceptibility' ignited a spasm of energy among humans and they started exploring the vast expanse of space by employing their own technical ways.

When the desire to go outside the 'restrictions' spread across the world, a sense of competition sparked among different nations; each aiming to be the table-topper.

Pakistan was one of those nations; eagerly trying to prove its mettle amidst the tough yet striving contest. But due to some external unwanted factors, it was unable to and hence lagged behind in the race. While others swiftly upgraded their minds and ways, they were able to soar to tremendous heights in technology in a comparatively shorter period.

Gradually, the people of Pakistan lost interest in the subject and the industry inaugurated for this purpose slowly deteriorated. Consequently, people (mainly students) who had an undeniable passion for space, reverted their decisions and consoled their minds towards some other 'less fascinating' options. The mass reversal of minds almost detached Pakistan from the dream it was sharing with the world. As a result, it not only affected the country's economy but it also caused the devastation of the minds that were purely and solely built for space.

It does sound like crazy talk. After the decline toll of the related industries approached a number to be reckoned with, there emerged a team consisting of passion-

ate individuals who combined their energies in order to step forward for the cause. They named themselves NUST Rocket Team (NRT), which originated in 2019 in NUST, PNEC, one of the most prominent universities in Karachi, Pakistan.

NRT is a group of undergraduate students working together to bring about a healthier space culture within Pakistan. The team conducts various STEM activities and ensures an efficient learning environment for the engaged members. The benchmark NRT has placed before it has elevated their hopes to higher heights. That's what normally happens when one wishes for a cause. Sometimes all we need is a push.

NRT boasts the accolade of being the first team from Pakistan to participate in Spaceport America Cup; an international rocketry competition attracting rocketeers from around the globe. However, the competition is only a small start, the main goal is to uplift Pakistan's name in the global space sector which it was once trying to attain.

Apart from the construction of the rocket,

NRT also attends various exhibitions of Science and technology in order to promote cosmic enthusiasm. Weekly posters linked to space knowledge are displayed on different social media platforms to fish keen minds out of a huge shoal. This social media campaign will not only extend NRT's reach to places unknown, but will also prove as an efficient team-builder. NRT grows with its supporters, and so far, the support we have received has gifted NRT a pillar of boost to stand on; to deepen its roots and to hold its head high.

In order to let Pakistan register for a list sharing a common dream, NRT will try its level best to keep on contributing for the aforementioned noble cause; whether the impact is major or minor. It will not let the future generations be deprived further of the frontiers of space. The lacuna in the prosperity of space since its decline will be bridged to a different road; the end of which is both fruitful and prosperous for the country, and NRT hopes to lift the leading lanterns on the said path narrowing to a cosmic victory.



A Record-Breaking County Championship

By Ali Abdullah

The English County Championship holds a special place in cricket. The fact that England is the cradle of cricket is at the core of this; playing domestic cricket in England, whether for a county or a small club, surely goes beyond sharpening cricketing talents. It's a journey into a deeper nostalgia.

For decades, it has been the most hospitable of contests for foreigners, attracting some of the best talents from across the world to improve their abilities and application under unique playing circumstances.

The English domestic season drew players from Pakistan, as well as the rest of the Test-playing world. The salaries were fantastic, and if you liked cricket, England was the only country where you could play throughout the summer. It was also an educational experience, as players clashed and competed with one another, some of whom were legendary in their own rights, such as West Indians and South Africans. There was also the allure of Englishness, which elevated county cricket and its broader context to fantasy for many.

Playing overseas also taught the players discipline and provided them with the opportunity to live in a new culture, which is all the more crucial considering England's potential to host most international series at home.

County cricket aided in the development of Pakistan's golden generation, which was successful both at home and abroad. Javed Miandad argues that the charismatic Imran Khan would not have become the cricketer that he is today if it weren't for England, and Imran himself admits the importance. County cricket has benefitted both the Pakistani players and other players playing alongside them. Pakistani players passed on skills to the younger players in the county sides and this helped England in the long run; they've had no difficulties finding talented and skilled players.

The County season in England has kicked off and it will come to an end soon. Since the T20 match between Pakistan and Australia, there's a huge gap till June when the Shaheens are to host West Indies for 3 ODIs. Thus, a lot of Pakistani players have signed up for the County Championship including Azhar Ali, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Mohammed Abbas, Mohammed Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood, and Zafar Gohar.

The most-awaited batting partnership was between Muhammad Rizwan from Pakistan and Cheteshwar Pujara from India. Both are playing for the same team. Muhammad Rizwan is not in the best batting form in tests but Cheteshwar Pujara made batting look very easy.

Cheteshwar Pujara scored a double century on his county debut as he led the remarkable fightback of Sussex alongside his captain Tom Haines, after being forced into follow-on by Derbyshire after a collapse in the first innings, leading to a draw on the final day of the LV=Insurance County Championship match at Derbyshire.



The match began with Derbyshire winning the toss and electing to bat first, and compiling a huge total of 505/8 dec. The Pakistani opener Shan Masood continuing his tremendous form with the bat scored 239 runs, the highest individual score by a Pakistani batter in county cricket. In response, Sussex was bundled out for only 174 runs in just 56.3 overs with no significant partnerships. Captain Tom Haines was the highest scorer with 41 runs. Sam Connors and Nick potts were the highest wicket-takers from Derbyshire picking up 3 wickets each.

With 2 days of play still left, Derbyshire appeared favorites and enforced the follow-on with Sussex being forced to bat again. Even though they had the tough task of saving the match ahead of them, Sussex batters performed tremendously, eventually saving the match after batting for 176.1 overs, scoring 513 runs for the loss of 3 wickets. The match was drawn. The resistance was led yet again by the opener and captain of Sussex, Tom Haines, who batted for just short of 11 hours completing the first double century of his career and scoring 243 runs. He was well supported by the debutant Indian batter Cheteshwar Pujara who also scored a double hundred being unbeaten on 201 from 387 balls, as Sussex closed in on 515 for 3, leading by 180 runs after following-on from 331 runs behind.

The pair batted together for 119 overs, scoring 351 runs, creating the record for the highest Sussex partnership stand for any wicket against Derbyshire. This was only the third occasion on any ground in Britain where 3 double centuries had been scored in one match. After the completion of this match, Sussex still stands at the bottom of the County Championship Division 2 with 13 points whereas Derbyshire is placed 4th with 27 points.

Pakistan's Bowling Talent Under ICC 's Intense Scrutiny



Pakistan is known as a land of fast bowlers. It is also a known fact that the International Cricket Council (ICC) has frequently banned Pakistani bowlers whenever they start performing well. The reason offered is that their bowling action is illegal.

ICC reported Saeed Ajmal's bowling action when he was the number one spinner. It banned Muhammad Hafeez multiple times when he was the number one all-rounder worldwide. Their most recent target was the emerging star Muhammad Husnain. He recently impressed international stars during the Big Bash League. As soon as he reached Pakistan for the Pakistan Super League, ICC reported his action and banned him from bowling. Recently, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) contacted the ICC that his bowling action is now as per its requirements.

Mohammad Hasnain's bowling action was ruled illegal by umpires in Australia's Big Bash League (BBL) on February 4. On January 21, he took a test at the ICC's accredited testing center in Lahore. As per the report, his elbow extension for his good length delivery, full-length delivery, slow bouncer, and bouncer exceeded the 15-degree limits.

After rigorous efforts, Mohammad Hasnain's bowling action has been modified, and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will soon contact the International Cricket Council (ICC) for a reassessment.

A local laboratory also discovered that his elbow was within the legal range of 15 degrees. The PCB will now formally request a review from the ICC once it has received complete satisfaction. Hasnain will be tested at a recognized laboratory by the world's governing body. If clearance is obtained, he will be allowed to play international cricket.

Another exciting news for Muhammad Amir's fans is that he just got signed in to a county team. The surprising part is that in 2019 Muhammad Amir announced his retirement from test cricket because he said his body is not fit enough for test cricket, and now, he will only focus on white-ball cricket.

It's a rather surprising development that a tainted Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir is all set to play County Championship 2022 for Gloucestershire. Mohammad Amir is a retired Pakistani fast bowler who received severe criticism from the fans over his early retirement from the Test Format

and then a controversial retirement from the other formats as well.

There is no doubt about Mohammad Amir's immense talent, even though he reportedly stated that his body had given up, and hence he cannot play the red-ball format anymore. However, now he is all set to return to red-ball action for Gloucestershire in the County Championship 2022. Mohammad Amir will be replacing his Pakistani counterpart, Naseem Shah, who played one match for Gloucestershire in this year's County Championship. Amir has played 36 Tests in his career, picking up 119 wickets for Pakistan. He played his last Test in 2019, and ever since, he encountered fitness issues. Recently, he couldn't participate in the PSL due to his fitness problems.

Previously, when many believed that Amir wanted to play Leagues and cricket in other countries to earn more money, the left-arm pacer rubbished all such reports. After seeing him sign-up for County Championship 2022, the fans will be furious, and Amir might receive some backlash too.

By Ali Abdullah

The Eid of Cinephiles

Pakistani cinema screens are finally set to light up this Eid with five new films

By **Kaukab Jahan**

The Eid is here and with it, the festivities reserved for this the happiest of all festivals on the Pakistani calendar. This year, however, the cinephiles among us have an additional reason to be excited. The pall cast over the movie industry by the Covid-19 pandemic is finally lifting after a hiatus of two years, and we have five brand-new movies set for release this Eid-ul-Fitr.

Pakistani cinemas, like many other industries, remained almost completely shut during the years 2020 and 2021 owing to the global pandemic that kept the world almost at a standstill throughout this period.

During this difficult time, many cinema owners had to wind up their cinemas and take to other avenues. According to the latest statistics, there remain only 57 cinema houses with 139 screens all over Pakistan, down from 165 screens before the pandemic.

The scheduled release of these films is therefore especially welcome because it gives cinema owners fresh hope opening up and probably recouping some losses they have stacked up during the two years of closure.

Of the flicks coming your way, four are Urdu-language and one Punjabi-language film. They star household names like Saba Qamar, Neelam Muneer, and Ahsan Khan as well as fresh talent like Amar Khan, Imran Ashraf, Zahid Ahmed, and Syed Jibran.

All these films have big banners behind them, so it is safe to assume that the competition would be very close. Here is a brief summary of each film releasing this Eid, in alphabetical order.

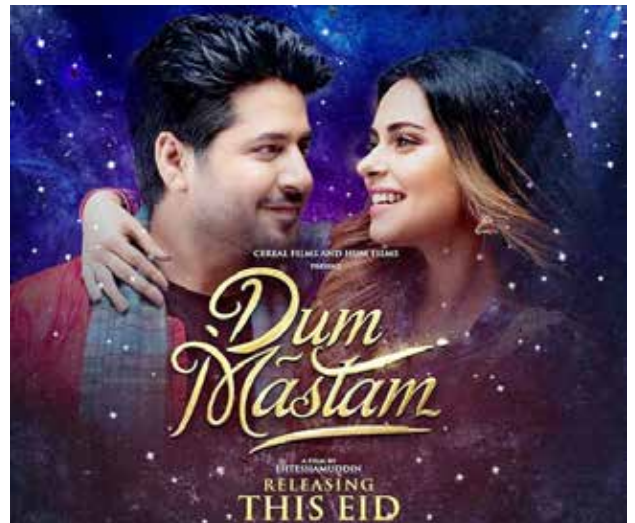
Chakkar

Produced and directed by the husband-wife duo Nida Yasir and Yasir Nawaz, Chakkar is a mystery thriller with a very judicious sprinkling of comic relief. Yasir Nawaz wrote the screenplay for the story by Zafar Imran.

The USP of this film is the double role of Neelam Muneer as identical twins. Ahsan Khan is the male lead in the film while Yasir Nawaz appears in a supporting role as a police inspector. This is Muneer's second film with Yasir Nawaz, Wrong No. 2 being the first and altogether the third film, Chupan Chupai (2017) being the first.

A double role is always a challenge for an actor and director as well but here it is more on Neelam as Yasir has introduced a double role (done by Danish Taimoor) in his debut film Wrong No 1.

Other cast of the film includes veterans Jawed Sheikh and Mehmood Aslam; Danish Nawaz, Naveed Raza, and Ahmed Hassan. The Javed Sheikh and Mahmood Aslam chemistry worked very well in Nawaz's last film.



As Yasir Nawaz has a string of successful films behind him that includes Wrong No 1 (2015) Mehrunnisa We Lub You (2017), and Wrong No 2 (2019). One can hope for something interesting and surprising from this film as well.

Nida Yasir on the other hand has always been the producer of Nawaz's films and the chemistry of the couple works the best together behind the screen.

The music of Chakkar is composed by Naveed Naushad. The film only has three songs, which according to the director, blend well into the overall narrative in order to move forward the plot.

Nevertheless, a perky song, Churiya filmed on Neelam Muneer, seems very attractive and may exert a strong pull on the audiences.

Dum Mastam

The trailer of Dum Mastam is impressive and reminds one of the golden era of romantic and musical films of Pakistani film industry.

Amar Khan and Imran Ashraf are playing the leading couple of the film. Both are established television actors but this will be their big screen debut. Other cast members include Sohail Ahmed, Saleem Meraj, Saife Hassan, Momin Saqib, and Adnan Shah Tipu.

Khan has also written the story of Dum Mastam, coming into the film with two hats. The film is directed by Muhammad Ehteshamuddin, who has to his credit the hit film Superstar (2019) starring Mahira Khan as lead and many successful television plays including Sadqay Tumhare, Udaari, and Aangan.

After a successful career in acting and television production spanning almost three decades and straddling both Bollywood and Hollywood, the veteran Adnan Siddiqui is trying his luck as a film producer in Dum Mastam with only a cameo role on screen.

Going by what little the trailer reveals, the story of *Dum Mastam* revolves around a young boy (Bao) and a girl (Aliya) from the old walled city of Lahore. Aliya has a passion to be an actress while Bao is an aspiring singer looking for a break. Ashraf's character of Bao has a glimpse of Bhola but it might be because of the Punjabi background of the film.

In terms of music, *Dum Mastam* has 11 songs altogether composed by musicians like Shiraz Uppal, Shani Arshad, Naveed Nashad, Bilal Saeed, and Azaan Sami Khan.

Three songs from the film besides the title song have been released: *Larki Achari*, *Beqarar Dil*, and *Ik Vari Sun Le*. Amar Khan has proved her dancing skills in *Larki Achari* with some brilliant choreography of Nigah Jee.

Ghabrana Nahin Hai

Ghabrana Nahin Hai is a famous line from an address of former Prime Minister Imran Khan but the film has nothing to do with politics. GNH is a comedy film starring the ace star of Pakistan Saba Qamar as lead.

Saba is returning to the big screen after five years. Her last film was the Bollywood flick *Hindi Medium* (2017) with the late lamented Irrfan Khan. Her last Pakistani film was *Lahore Se Aagey* (2016).

Zahid Ahmed and Syed Jibran are two male leads in the film, both making their film debuts. Ahmed is playing a police inspector while Syed Jibran is a young and fun loving boy. The film also stars Sohail Ahmed, Nayyar Ejaz, Afzal Khan aka John Rambo, and Saleem Meraj – all veterans of their craft.

John Rambo is returning to the big screen in an important role after a hiatus of 11 years.

Ghabrana Nahin Hai is written by Mohsin Ali and directed by the debutant Saqib Khan. The film is a co-production of Hasan Zia and Jameel Baig. Hasan Zia has produced films like *Wrong No 1* and *2* and *Mehrunnisa We Lub You*. Both were box office successes.

The title song of the film is sung by the internationally famed Ali Zafar under the composition of Shuja Haider while the dance number *Jhanjarya* portraying all the three leads is also getting popularity among masses. Nigah Jee has yet again proved his skills that him among the frontline choreographers of Pakistan.

From the trailer, the scenario of the film seems to be set in Punjab, which may help on the box office because Punjab is where most cinema screens are.

Overall, GNH is a good entertainer for Eid. There are hopes the star attraction of Saba Qamar with her superb acting skills would draw viewers to the theatres. If it clicks, the industry will score a hit film and two new film faces: Syed Jibran and Zahid Ahmed.

Parde Mein Rehne Do

In Pakistan, if a couple cannot conceive a child, all blame goes to the woman and she is regarded as infertile, with so many societal stigmas attached to her. Director Wajahat Rauf has approached

this issue very intelligently and in a comic way in his upcoming film *Parde Mein Rehne Do*.

The film revolves around a couple who is unable to bear a child even after a long time of marriage. In the middle of this debate, which even goes to the second marriage of the husband, the issue of his infertility arises.

This is indeed a good effort by Rauf to correct the misconception that only the woman is to blame for a couple's childlessness. The trailer of the film is interesting with Hania Aamir and Ali Rehman Khan in lead roles.

Hania is not new to the big screen. She has done significant roles as lead in super hits like *Na Maloom Afraad 2* (2017) and *Parwaaz Hai Junoon* (2018).

Ali Rehman also has successful films like *Janaan* (2016), *Parchi* (2018) and *Heer Maan Ja* (2019) to his credit. How the chemistry of the two works on screen as lead remains to be seen. The duo have already appeared together in *Janaan* as second leads.

Aamir also has a huge following on social media and it is expected that her fans would come to cinemas to watch their favourite star on the big screen. The cast also includes Jawed Sheikh, Munazzah Arif, Noor ul Hassan, and Saife Hassan.

Although PMRD is a comedy film, it tackles a very serious problem in our society. Because of its subject, the film will be released under PG13 rating.

The film is produced by Shazia Wajahat, the better half of Wajahat Rauf. The husband and wife duo has previously produced and directed box office hits like *Karachi Se Lahore* (2015), *Lahore Se Aagey* (2016) and *Chhalawa* (2019).

As the bulk of the film's action is devoted to a serious social issue, there are only three songs in the film, composed and sung by Aashir Wajahat and Hasan Ali while introducing two female vocalists Nehaal Naseem and Nirmal Roy.

The video of the song *Peela Rung* is making the rounds on the internet because of its colourful exhibition of dance and fun by the leads.

According to the producer, the film has a duration of only 90 minutes, which gives it a better chance to get screens easily in the Eid season, packed with five films.

Tere Bajre Di Rakhi

A Punjabi-language film directed by the veteran Syed Noor, TBDR features a lot of actors from the era of 1990s including Saima Noor, Babar Ali, and Mustafa Qureshi. From the trailer, the story and overall feel of the film remind one of that era as well.

The film also has the top TikTok star of Pakistan Jannat Mirza, who has almost 17.5 million followers on the app. If her fans decide to turn up to see their favourite star on the big screen, this film can spring a box-office surprise.

Shehzad Sheikh and Alizeh Shah starcasted for Eid-ul-Fitr Telefilm



By Amna Shoaib

Renowned actor Shehzad Sheikh, and the very popular Alizeh Shah, are all set to star as an onscreen couple for the first time in an upcoming Eid ul Fitr telefilm in the leading roles.

The telefilm, Chand Raat Aur Chandni is about social romance in a neighborhood with a dash of humor starring promising actors such as Ismail Tara, Ayaz Samoo, and Hina Rizvi in supporting roles.

The romantic comedy sets around a love story of a young impulsive man popular as 'Shami' played by Shehzad Sheikh who kidnaps the love of his life that happens to be his next-door neighbor Chandni, played by Alizeh Shah.

Shehzad Sheikh, son of one of the biggest names in the film industry, Javed Sheikh, following his father's footsteps, has made his mark in the industry as a phenomenal actor giving his best performances in several films and drama serials inclusive of Phans, Raaz-e-Ulfat, Qurban, Deewar-e-Shab, Anaa, Alif Allah Aur Insan while Alizeh Shah has not just outdone herself as a compelling actress but also amazed her fans as a singer starring next to Sahir Ali Bagga in her song Badnamiyan and as a fashion model.

Behind the Scene pictures and sneak peeks on social media has their fans excited for their on-screen chemistry as a couple.

‘Joyland’- First Pakistani film to feature at Cannes Film Festival



Pakistani director Saim Sadiq's debut film, *Joyland*, becomes the first-ever film in the history of Lollywood to feature in the Cannes Film Festival. Produced by Sarmad Sultan Khoosat and Lauren Mann in association with Diversity Hire, One Two Twenty Entertainment, Blood Moon Creative, Film Manufacturers Inc., Astrakan AB, and Noruz Films, *Joyland* will be presented during the famous annual film festival's 75th anniversary.

The film pivots on a patriarchal family continuing their family line in the hope of an heir, a baby boy, whereas their youngest son secretly becomes a part of an erotic dance theatre wherein he falls deeply in love with an ambitious and aspiring transgender starlet. Their love story, which seems impossible to have a happy ending, sparks a sexual revolution in the entire family.

"Saim has weaved a tender and sensual modern-day family tale,

wrestling with the weight of manufactured gender roles," said Fabien Westerhoff, CEO of Film Constellation. "It radiates the shared desire to live and love without compromise."

The enticing film features famous names in the film industry renowned for their versatility. Sania Saeed, Ali Junejo, Alina Khan, Rasti Farooq, Sarwat Gilani, Sohail Sameer, and Salman Peerzada were casted.

"My amazing cast has given the characters of *Joyland* a kind of empathy and humanity that a filmmaker can only hope for," says Saim Sadiq.

The feature film category only screens 14 movies at the Cannes Film Festival, therefore, it's a proud moment that a Pakistani film has been included in the prestigious list.

By Amna Shoaib



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